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# The Homeless Person First

EMERGENCY SERVICES and REHABILITATION SUPPORT

Promoting accessibility - improving equality - strengthening networks



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European Economic and Social Committee

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## Current Situation of Homelessness, Good Practices, Challenges and Proposals – the Latvian Prospective



With the support of the  
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# Shortly about EAPN-Latvia



- EAPN-Latvia itself is an umbrella advocacy organization **in social inclusion** and fight against poverty
- EAPN-Latvia consists of 28 full member organizations and 9 associated members
- Part of the member organizations are advocacy NGOs, other are service providers, and some are a mixture of both
- EAPN-Latvia member organizations majorly work in the **areas of social inclusion and education of the most vulnerable groups** such as persons with special needs, organizations of seniors, youth organizations, ex-prisoners (eg. “Aicinājums Tev”, RASA, People’s Aid Fund, Latvia’s Children Forum, St. Luke Support Association, and many many others)
- One of the most important programs implemented in the area of social inclusion with the support of EAPN-Europe is the annual PeP (People Experiencing Poverty) program, which provides direct link between vulnerable social groups and decision makers both at national and European levels
- **Homeless people are one of the focus groups of EAPN-Latvia advocacy work**

# General profile of service users

- According to the information of Red Cross Latvia
- Major part – men over 50, well educated
- Health issues, after hospitalization, substance abuse, gambling addiction
- Low motivation
- After imprisonment
- Long term use of shelter service
- Lonely, excluded of their families
- Rough sleepers
- Some come from other cities, no money to get back home
- Former childrens homes inhabitants

# General problems identified I

- homelessness is predominantly among men over 50
- homeless people have health problems, alcohol or gambling addiction, prison experience, debt and other financial problems, disabilities and mental disorders, including young people
- limited capacity of shelter/day centre staff to detect substance abuse - homeless people lack social skills, have low motivation, lack knowledge of the national language, are not respected and legally protected because of their ethnicity
- homeless people lack their own home, even if temporary; lack of a permanent place to live, lack of documents

# General problems identified II

- homelessness is difficult to control as they move between locations and there are hidden homeless people living in tents, tunnels, abandoned houses, train stations, with relatives, etc.; people are unable to repay their debt to the bank, which creates new homeless crowds
- often no leisure activities are available on site in shelters
- most of the country has night shelters which homeless people have to leave during the day
- there is a lack of low-cost housing options on the rental market, sometimes even in social rented accommodation

## General problems identified III

- there are no lobby organisations in the country working on the problem of affordable housing and adequate social benefits
- low remuneration of shelter/day centre staff, lack of adequate professionals in shelters/day centres, burn-out
- NGOs do not have access to sufficient financial resources to engage experts on homelessness.

# Good practices I

- shelters provide homeless people, including people with disabilities and without legal status, with a place to spend the day, receive meals, social assistance, hygiene services, psychological support, and engage in cultural and social activities
- female clients can cook meals and participate in workshops and activities, receive psycho-emotional support and attend self-help groups
- women clients can receive additional services and gifts on special occasions

# Good practices II

- male clients receive help with employment, medical care and social benefits
- Riga's night shelters are open 24 hours a day in cold weather. (Riga municipal shelters)
- In addition to the men's shelter, there is a computer room, a laundry room and a health room where you can get tested for HIV and hepatitis B and C, and get methadone. (Shelter of Latvian Red Cross)
- The shelter, which operates under the auspices of religious organisations, aims to meet the spiritual needs of the client and to spread the Christian faith



## Good practices III

- the shelter is inter-confessional and accepts non-believers as long as they agree to its rules; it is run entirely by its clients, who are mostly men with addiction or prison experience. (Blue Cross Shelter)
- building an inclusive civil society, supporting ex-prisoners and their families through a range of activities, including social inclusion through art, theatre and music, psychological and pastoral support and practical help - training, cultural events and specialist counselling, a year-long rehabilitation programme. (St Luke's Group)

## Good practices IV

- Homeless people receive help with paperwork, finding a job, medical and legal advice - support is provided to get clients on the waiting list for social benefits
- the shelter's social committee assesses the clients' situation and extends their accommodation beyond the maximum six-month limit set by the municipality. (V.E.L.G. shelter)
- The strengths of Riga's shelters/day centres are that there are no queues, the services are free, the premises are clean, and the clients have the opportunity to work or otherwise occupy themselves.

# Recommendations to promote changes in Latvian homelessness policies I

- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have access to public and municipal funding for service provision and development
- services are appropriately targeted to clients' needs
- Affordable housing advice

# Recommendations to promote changes in Latvian homelessness policies II

- clients are treated with respect and dignified attitude as human beings, regardless of their social situation, they are not blamed for their situation
- high involvement of clients as volunteers in various activities
- peer work, or services provided by staff who have lived through similar experiences, is very important
- significant investment in social housing is important

# Some pictures for illustration

- Latvian Red Cross Food pack delivery point



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# Some pictures for illustration

- Emergency shelter of Latvian Red Cross



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# Some pictures for illustration

- Riga Municipal Men's Shelter



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# Some pictures for illustration

- Riga Municipal Women's Shelter



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# Some pictures for illustration

- Riga Municipal Shelter: Day Care Centre



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# Some pictures for illustration

- Riga Private Shelter V.E.L.G.



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- Thank you very much for your attention!
- Space for questions and discussion
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