

# Social Pillar

*By Preben Brandt and Gitte*

## **Why this pillar**

The fundament for any analysis and discussion about homelessness and a social pillar must begin with awareness of the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' and particular these 3 articles:

Article 2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 22. Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 25. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

(add Jacopo p. 1)

## **Highlights and difficulties:**

### *Users right*

In all Europe have there over the last decade been a shift in attitudes to institutions and institutionalization. Sociologists (e.g. Baumann) point to an increased individualization. The citizen is not, and does not want to be subject to the authorities and institutions. Also homeless people want to have the power to choose and have the right to have influence on own lives both on an individual way and on a more general way by going together in user-associations.

This has led to a growing accept that homeless people individual is listen to concerning what their opinion is about their life, which kind of intervention they would accept and what they want for the future in there individual contact with social workers and the social institutions.

At the same time user associations for homeless, created by the homeless themselves, has shown up in most European countries. See: 'Participation of service users: giving a voice to the experts', FEANTSA, Homeless in Europe, Autumn 2006

[https://www.feantsa.org/download/autumn\\_2006\\_feantsa\\_magazine\\_participation-18509503799833009384.pdf](https://www.feantsa.org/download/autumn_2006_feantsa_magazine_participation-18509503799833009384.pdf)

I find it appropriate to distinguish between three levels of user involvement or user influence. The three levels can be summarized briefly as:

- The central political level or state governance: involving legislative, political decision making, policy development or overall prioritization. This may include take place through ordinary political democracy, consultation of interest organizations and via user participation in central councils.
- The political-administrative or systemic level: here it is on the development of guidelines and standardization of quality requirements, on quality monitoring and organization of the individual-oriented efforts at the level of supply. This can be done through various councils and forums, such as regional dialogue forums, where users, relatives and volunteer interest and user organizations can cooperate with the social and health sector.
- Offer and single level or front-employee and user level: Here is the administrative practice, the professional tools such as action plans, cooperation and treatment, and the central dialogue. The framework is the meeting and dialogue between user and professional, user councils and house meetings in the individual social offers, as well as the cooperation between the parties involved

The barriers to user influence may be present at all levels, eg political, administrative, staff and professional as well as with users.

Barriers to staff often have both knowledge, ethical, administrative and personal dimensions. Like barriers to users, both can be personal and relate to users' social living conditions

There may be different motives for introducing user influence:

- Efficiency: We get more value because services and handling are better adapted to what users need.
- Democracy: users should be involved in decisions that affect their own lives and the public must comply with legal certainty, legislation and human rights
- Emancipation: The user must have increased opportunities to benefit from case management and services, as well as achieve personal development and liberation.
- Knowledge: The users know most about what is experienced as good case management and can thus help to develop the quality of social and treatment offerings as well as to develop user influence as a method of social work.

(add Jacopo p 2: 'Rights and individual will, ...')

### *Gender*

It is estimated that around 80% of people who are roofless or houseless are men. Women are a minority and are often '*hidden homeless*': they keep a roof over their heads (sofa surfing) through remaining in a relationships with a men; they may be physically and sexually abused but are unable to walk away due to lack of alternative housing options.

It seems that the female part of the homeless equalizes with that part of the male homeless who are the most affected by complex problems (Brandt: Yngre hjemløse i København/young homeless in Copenhagen). Women with the same degree of problems as the less affected homeless men are likely to be near-to-homeless, as they manage to keep a roof over their heads. Observations suggest that it takes very severe problems for a woman to end up in the streets. Thus those women who are roofless most likely experience severe mental illnesses, have very complex needs and will therefore require very specific support.

An actual reflection about the situation for homeless women is very clear in this Interview carried out with Rina Beers, senior policy officer at Federatie Opvang, a Dutch branch organization that provides shelter and assistance to homeless individuals, among others.

Beers: "I think there is a neglect of gender issues like specific needs for safety, hygiene and privacy. There is a lack of awareness about what it means to be a woman and homeless. In all cases of homelessness a person is vulnerable, but homeless women are even more vulnerable than other groups, young women especially." And "Homelessness is a stigma in itself. There's always the stigma that you have done something wrong, because otherwise you wouldn't be homeless. Wrong financial decisions, a bad relationship - there's always a stigma. 'You must have done something wrong, it must be your own fault.' And for women, that stigma indeed increases. There's also self-stigmatization. People consider themselves losers, bad mothers and the like. 'Good mothers wouldn't have to go to a shelter.' There's a moral judgement about homelessness, and when you are caring for a child that judgment gets harsher."

<https://www.areweeurope.com/homeless-content/homeless-women-in-a-mens-world>

(add Jacopo p 4 before 'Undocumented people')

#### *Poverty*

It is the impression that poverty, in European contexts, primarily relative poverty, in terms of prices for both rented and owner-occupied housing, plays an often overlooked role in understanding the homelessness and thus in the effort, both the prevention component and the social part, are overlooked. Or maybe it is pushed in the background because poverty and housing prices are social conditions that are wrapped up in an irreversible set of political and traditional rules.

There is some research concerning this e.g.

"Data demonstrate that, while that a range of health and support needs and behavioural issues, particularly in the teenage years, do significantly contribute to the risks of homelessness in young adulthood, their explanatory power is less than that of poverty."

And further: "However, again, it should be noted that the relationship between these 'social support' factors and homelessness is generally weaker than that with material poverty and economic status." (Glen Bramley & Suzanne Fitzpatrick, 2018)

(add Jacobo p 3 before 'Pressure to intervention ....')

#### *Different countries - different social legislation*

When comparing social work across the countries of Europe, it is often forgotten that traditions and legislation are different and hence the conditions for social work with homeless people are also different and not immediately comparable. For example, it may be the level of social benefits, the right of homeless people to receive social benefits and the national legislation on the right to hostels.

For example, I have experienced misunderstandings of the Danish level of social benefits because the amount of paper is significantly higher than in many other countries, but in reality at the same level, as taxes are paid on social assistance in Denmark.

(add Jacopo p 6 'after 'Relationship')

Add to Jacopo, Key Words:

Poverty

User-organizations

User rights

Gender