

FEANTSA
OBSERVATORY ON HOMELESSNESS

Services for the Homeless in Austria

National Report on planning, regulation and funding

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1. Historical Background

Until the 1970s in Austria hostels and asylums have been almost the only provisions for single homeless persons as well as for families in urging housing problems. Most of these asylums were large institutions, sometimes situated like abbeys in the countryside and mostly these institutions constituted somewhat like a whole world behind walls. These provisions for homeless people worked almost without any professionals like social workers (and fit well to the description and analyses of total institutions by E. Goffman).

Asylums like that had very low housing standards as well. There were large sleeping rooms with up to fifty beds, no provision for privacy, intimacy and / or sexuality. Additionally there were only few provisions for female homeless which were separated in special accommodations – with similarly low standards. Few exceptions were provided for families with children but there were almost no provisions for couples to stay together.

These institutions were almost exclusively frequented by elder men with a more or less long career of poverty, alcoholism and homelessness and it was not unusual that they tended to stay for long periods in institutional separation from society.¹

1.1 Traditional attitudes towards poverty and homelessness

The services for the homeless were characterized by attitudes like charity and the christian principle of “doing good”. But this is only one side of the medaillon. At the same time homelessness has been treated as a crime and homeless people could become punished and sentenced to prison if they were experienced as a threat for law, order and / or communal security. So the homeless had more or less just the choice between two strains of treatment:

- to be cared for in institutions like asylums or
- to become sentenced by law to work in a labour house.

¹ When BAWO started a survey on the tenants in the large asylums in the city of Vienna at the end of the 20th century there have been few inhabitants living there already since the end of the second World War.

And there is only one thing clear, one could not be sure which of these alternatives was the better one. So the not very complex structure of means and measures against homelessness consisted of:

- Charity and alms for the ‚good‘ homeless, as there are innocent people which were stricken by misfortune and by the way are thankful for the benefits and / or are well adjusted to the challenges of the system of provisions. Charity for those who are able and willing to undergo the procedures of access into the hostels and asylums.
- Punishment and pressure against those who are figured as a threat for the public order and security, who are somewhat defined as ‚misfits‘ and / or outlaws – for them the society in Austria until the end of the 70ies had the provision of custody in labour houses.

2. Dynamics of Change

In the 70ies the social democratic government started a thorough amendment of the system of the penal statute and one of the effects of this reform was that homelessness lost the status as a crime in 1977. The former labourhouses were shut down or changed into regular prison wards and the homeless persons did not risk any more to become punished for the simple fact that they had no home.

Police as well as some of the politicians in the counties were very upset about these consequences of the amendment because they feared the loss of means to intervene in cases of disturbances in the public space. So in some counties and cities the local / regional authorities organised congresses on security risks as a result from this change of the penal statute. Finally the governments of some cities and counties in Austria implemented new paragraphs in the range of the police statute at county level (as it happened in the county of Salzburg in the year 1978²) – just to enable the police to undertake measures against homeless people eg. to drive them away from public area or to put them into arrest for a couple of days – just in the way of an official mandate, without judge and / or trial.

At the same time, end of the 70s / the beginning of the 80s, social workers and students started to scandalize the official policy against poor people in general and homeless persons in special (par exemple in the context of these new measures of criminalisation of homelessness) as inefficient and at least inhuman.

“Treatment and social work instead of punishment!”

This was one of the slogans of a new discourse. So the inadequate standards of living and the almost absolute absence of any provisions for individual support and care, especially in the lowstandard asylums, came to public attentiveness. As a result of this public debate a far-reaching process of reform and improving standards took place.

² Salzburger Polizeistrafgesetz 1978, § 3: “Vagabondage can be punished with 14 days of arrest”

Some of the former asylums were transformed into supported residual accommodations. In some Austrian cities a series of residential homes were established in addition to the traditionally non-supported accommodations. But it has been a long time project until some of these institutions, like the famous “Meldemannstraße”, where Adolf Hitler lived as a young man during his time in Vienna, were closed down in 2002 and restituted by socially and therapeutically oriented institutions.

This process of deinstitutionalising and improving the standards of services for the homeless, eg. to build up provisions for individual support and to realize reintegration schemes at local / regional level, is not yet completed. At least some of the traditional lowstandard institutions are still working in some county capitals like Klagenfurt and Innsbruck and are still ‘home’ for a large amount of the local homeless. These still existing asylums have not changed essentially and are still to be characterized by inadequate resources for individual support, awful low standards of accommodation and contraproductive effects on the local / regional networks of services for the homeless.

And – last but not least – some of the old patterns of moralistic attitudes towards poverty and homelessness are obviously still intact.

2.1 New patterns of attitudes and motives

The student movement of 1968 in Austria did not have so much success in reaching public attention like in other countries but there has been some effects in the field of social policy and the administration of measures against poverty. This movement was the start of a bottom up process, to build up new facilities and provisions, fighting for the funding and starting with pressure, like scandalizing and public relation, against restrictive attitudes and / or measures which were aimed mainly to fight the poor instead of poverty.

So socialworkers and students started as a lobby for the poor and homeless, initiated the foundation of new services and the implementation of alternative methods how to treat poor and homeless persons. This innovation of the field of social work has started also with a new evidence and conviction that also these poor and homeless people have a right on work, accommodation, social security, individual support and at least a right on equal accesses to their rights.

Innovation in the form of a bottom up process depends eminently if it is possible to fix the funding and / or to fit into the general and already existing system of social security. So in the early beginning of this reform process the ways of development differed between counties and cities – because administration and policy measures against poverty were up to a high degree in the competence of the regional authorities which has realized different models of social funding.

So in the western counties of Austria like Upper Austria, Salzburg, Tyrol and Vorarlberg the process started more or less with the foundation of a new kind of counselling offices which started to give their clients help to access the formal systems of the housing market, to get social benefits and so on. These new services were headed on legal advice and individual support to access the different systems of social security. In this process the development of new measures of social work and individual support was somewhat of secondary importance, following the experience that the traditional means and measures failed to handle poverty sufficiently and / or to treat poor and homeless people according to their needs.

In the other counties of Austria innovation focused on provisions which combined supported work and housing – eg. in Nether Austria, Styria and Carinthia.

The services in Vienna started with new concepts of supported housing but the process of innovation was slowed down in order of a large range of large institutions of the traditional style which were in strict opposition to the challenge of change.

At all: in whole Austria a process of more or less rapid change started and lead to a diversification of services, improving standards according to the quality of housing and the provisions of individual support.

And – last but not least – the social workers learned that the target group of their services was not just as homogenously as it has looked like according to the experiences of the traditional asylums. Now the social workers had to handle with differences of age, gender and needs. Somewhat they had to learn how to provide different services for special target groups, as there are homeless youth, homeless women and / or migrants in severe housing stress.

Any way – also the process of diversification and need orientation in the services is not finished until now. Still we can find services in Austria where it is not a matter of course that homeless women have different expectations and needs than male homeless persons. Gender mainstreaming in the field of their provisions for homeless persons are still not guaranteed all over Austria.

2.2 Improving innovation by new financial conditions

In the start and implementation of these new and innovative services it proved as a helpful impetus that the ministry for social affairs realized a new financial modality. Under the title “experimental labour market policy” the ministry started some actions³ against unemployment which encouraged new initiative groups (grass root initiatives in the field of cultural and social infrastructure) to found new jobs and to get the financial means to build up the necessary facilities and structures.

This model of impulse financing was limited to the first year of a new employment and the initiatives were obliged to continue the employment for the period of one further year. In the range of this first year the initiatives should be able to arrange additional funding on a more regular basis.

At the same time the ministry for social affairs started an initiative against long time unemployment with the focus to build up a row of new projects in the range of the second labour market, targeted for people which had (social and / or mentally health) problems to get a new job after periods of unemployment of more than six months.

³ The formal target of the “action 8.000” was the foundation of 8.000 new jobs all over Austria. Parallel to this initiative there was a special program to improve the chances of academically trained persons at the labour market. So all together these programmes were the basis for the foundation of new jobs in the cities and regions, mainly in the range of social and / or cultural initiatives.

These three strains of financial impetus were the economical basis for the start of a lot of new establishments also in the field of services for poor and homeless persons, many of them realizing a mix of support in labour and housing.

2.3 Trends and perspectives of innovation

In brief the development of the services for homeless persons shows following trends:

- foundation of many small service providers at local / regional level;
- shift from large and universalistic institutions provided by communal authorities or churches to small specialized services by private organisations, funded by communal and / or regional authorities;
- provision of individual support; in the 90ies finally even the traditional asylums have started to improve their standards by employing social workers and / or to decrease the number of sleeping places (for example in Graz, Innsbruck etc.);
- development of services with the goal to prevent eviction – at least in the most cities of Austria; but there is still a lack of services in the rural parts;
- diversification of facilities in the range of supported housing: residential homes instead of asylums (in some Austrian cities the traditional institutions have just been complemented by this); mobile support in shared accommodations instead of or in addition to residential homes; supported housing in dislocated flats for singles or families;
- target-group specific services like residential homes for old homeless persons, for drug addicts, young homeless, for women (with or without children) in housing stress etc.

In general the development of the services for the homeless in Austria is headed to improve the reintegration of homeless persons into the mainstream housing market (like communal housing stocks) and to provide additional individual support – if needed.

It is important to take into account that this development took place at the level of voluntary and charitable organisations in the cities and is not based on legislative acts at a nationwide level. So it is fact that almost each Austrian city has developed

its special system of services for the homeless; in other words: in Austria there are almost as many systems of services for the homeless and / or to reintegrate homeless persons into mainstream housing as there are larger cities.

So at the one hand the purpose of services and provisions in Austria has changed fundamentally from more traditional orientations to store and deposit poor and socially excluded people from the public to more need oriented outlines as there are:

- prevention of homelessness or social exclusion;
- provision of individual support and
- (re)opening pathways and access into the mainstream housing market.

But these changes are not guaranteed by any legal frameworks at the federal level, at any of the nine regional levels and / or at the level of larger cities and local authorities.

Instead of a federal housing act in order to guarantee a right on housing especially for vulnerable people and to ensure (re)integration into mainstream housing there are nine different laws on social benefits (Sozialhilfe), regulating an individual right on social services (also in the case of homelessness) and the frameworks of funding.

But even at this level there is no special framework to provide planning of services, regulating access to services, defining and / or improving the standards of provisions, benefits and services for the homeless.

Instead of a general framework and basic regulation development in the range of provisions and services for the homeless depends mainly on the voluntary sector and especially on the informal networks of non governmental service providers at federal, regional and communal level (as there are: BAWO – federal umbrella organisation for service providers on homelessness – and its regional working groups / networks – like ‘BAWO-knot’ Vienna; ‘Forum of Services for the Homeless’ in Salzburg; ‘Working Group on supported Housing’ in the counties of Tyrol and Vorarlberg; ‘Housing-Association in Styria’; ‘Working Group Residential Homes’ in Nether Austria, ‘Services for the Homeless’ and ‘Housing-Association’ in Upper Austria).

Impulse for and force of development and improvement of services and provisions are therefore eminently connected with the practical experiences of social workers and service providers. But the implementation of innovative means and measures depends on county-specific more or less restrictive regulations in the different administrative frameworks of planning, regulating and funding.

3. The second step in development: exchange and networking

The thoroughly line of a bottom up process was continued in the next step of development when these new facilities started to engage in networking and systematic Austrian wide exchange when the services for the homeless decided to build up a regular structure for a common development of standards and methods. So at the end of the 80ies the Austrian umbrella organisation of services for the Homeless (BAWO) was founded.

The exchange between services and social workers started with a discussion about definition of homelessness and elementary standards of services for the homeless. In the following section I give a short version of the definition outcome of this discussion because it seems quite important to understand the following process of development of the services as well as the changes in regulation and funding.

Definition of homelessness (BAWO, 1990):

Homelessness is not just characterized by the absence of appropriate and affordable lodgings but also by a multitude of individual requirements. Being homeless, therefore, is essentially the result of processes of exclusion and impoverishment.

According to this view homelessness is a special kind of combined and cumulated poverty. The absence of appropriate lodgings is joined by other material and non-material situations of marginalisation and scarcity. Together they constitute a differentiated situation of needs and requirements.

According to this the definition by the BAWO (1998a) suggests to distinguish following strains of homelessness:

- Being acutely homeless means the absence of a flat for oneself, sleeping rough or residing in any kind of emergency accommodation with or without individual support.
- Imminent homelessness means that the loss of lodging may happen in the near future because one's own resources are insufficient to secure ones accommodation or to prevent the loss of it.

- Being potentially homeless means that a person lives under conditions of institutional care or custody (probably in prison, in a psychiatric ward etc.) and is not allowed to be released – may be – into probation because of the fact that there is no accommodation – may be – he or she can not leave the institutional treatment in the hospital without to risk homelessness.

The program of BAWO has been discussed widely, conferences and training sessions for social workers in the services for the homeless were further provisions to generate an Austrian wide discourse on homelessness and services for the homeless.

A lot of models of best practice came out of this discourse which led to a farreaching change of the local / regional systems of the services for the homeless in Austria. In the following list I give a short description of the most important innovations of the last decade:

- supported housing in selfsustained accommodations: it started in the late 80ies and spread out in the counties of Upper Austria, Tyrol, Styria, Vorarlberg and Vienna as an alternative and / or a intermediary measure on the way back into the mainstream housing market;
- communitarian provision of accommodations for homeless persons: this is a special service in the capital of Upper Austria which did not find any imitation on a institutional basis in other counties or cities until now;
- emergency shelters for young people in housing stress: until now these provisions are restricted to the capitals of Salzburg, Styria, Tyrol, Upper Austria;
- counselling office specialized to improve the access of homeless persons to the regular labour market: this service is still restricted to the city of Vienna;
- target group specific supported housing for elder homeless: founded in the late 90ies this is one of the last innovations in the range of residual homes, until now restricted to the city of Vienna;

- provisions for mentally ill homeless persons: until now in Austria there is only one emergency shelter and one supported residual home for mentally ill homeless persons, both facilities are situated in Linz, the capital of Upper Austria, and started to work in the late 90ies;
- prevention of eviction: special services to prevent eviction were started in Salzburg in the beginning 90ies and spread out in Vienna and Vorarlberg but these services are not yet established in other counties and cities in an sufficient way;
- debt regulation for homeless people: this additional provision for homeless persons with high debts is a project, funded by the EQUAL program of the European Commission, and has just started this year in some cities of Austria.

So, with one overview it is quite evident that there are many models of best practice spread out over all of the Austrian counties, but it is to say that these models of best practice do not fit into a coherent system of provisions and services for homeless people. On the contrary each of these innovative provisions is part of different local / regional systems which vary in many respects from each other.

This statement of fundamentally regional differences is also one of the central results of the first (and until now last) survey on homelessness and services for the homeless in Austria which could be undertaken by BAWO in the year 1997⁴. In the following section I try to give a figure about the main results of these times of change – especially according to the main figures of regulation and funding.

⁴ BAWO, Services for the Homeless in Austria, Vienna 1998; Gerhard Eitel, Heinz Schoibl (BAWO), The situation of the homeless in Austria, Vienna 1999

4. Services for the homeless in Austria

The survey was funded by three ministries (social affairs, economy and housing, youth and family); such it was possible to cover a wide range of issues and targets. But it was not possible to engage also the federal authorities or the main cities of Austria in the funding or in the process of research. At least it showed that the regional authorities as well as the politicians of the cities did not show any particular interest in the results and – beside the city of Vienna – the regional authorities did not start to work with the materials and instruments for documentation and evaluation which were produced and tested in the course of the research process.

It was just the city of Vienna which charged BAWO to undertake yearly follow up studies until the city of Vienna constituted an office for social planning and especially the planning of services and provisions for homeless persons. Starting with 2002 this planning office is undertaking the documentation and evaluation now by its own personal resources.

The survey from 1997 consisted of two questionnaires:

- one of them focused on the services and provisions (standards, qualification and number of social workers, number of sleeping places, main figures of provisions like supported housing, counselling, supported employment and so on)
- the second part of this survey was held in the form of statistical sheets for every homeless person these services were working with.

These surveys were headed on the totality of the services and the homeless clients these services have been in a regular contact. The research process showed that this survey was very well accepted by the service providers all over Austria which took part in the questionnaires and sent in a lot of statistical sheets. At the end of this survey we had a whole lot of information – in both respects: about the services on the one hand and about their clientel at the other.

Shortly, the main results are:

In Austria there existed at all 272 services which were working with homeless persons and / or provided special services, most of them (63%) offered supported housing or at least housing space.

The overwhelming part of these insitutions provided a combination of accommodation and individual support (57%); a very prominent part of these services (35%) offered mobile support and guidance without accommodation. Accommodation without any provisions of individual support were fact in 21 services (about 8%).

At all there has been a total number of sleeping places in Austria of more than 7.300 (which has been an aquivalent of almost 1 sleeping place per 1.000 inhabitants of Austria). The largest share of housing and sleeping places existed in Vienna, the capital of Austria with about 1,5 millions inhabitants. At all it comes up to 2,4 beds for 1.000 Viennese, which has been the highest rate of provided sleeping places.

This data from the year 1997 are the most recent facts about homelessness and the services for the homeless in Austria because there has not been any follow up survey since then. Therefore in the following part I concentrate on the results from this survey and report about provisions concerning service providers, standards, terms of funding and means of regulation as it has shown in this survey.

4.1 Uneven distribution of services

The results of this survey show that the distribution of services between cities and rural parts of Austria is very uneven. About three quarters of the services (76%) are situated in the larger cities, especially in the capitals of the counties. In the rural parts of Austria there are only very few services and in many of them there are no provisions against homelessness at all.

Tabel 1: Distribution of services for homeless within the counties

<i>county</i>	<i>services</i>		<i>services in the capital</i>		<i>districts with services</i>	<i>districts without services</i>
	<i>total</i>	<i>in %</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>in %</i>		
Burgenland	6	2,2	4	66,6	1	7
Carinthia	15	5,5	9	60	3	6
Nether Austria	24	8,8	9	37,5	11	13
Upper Austria	33	12,1	21	63,6	6	10
Salzburg	42	15,4	40	95,2	3	3
Styria	20	7,3	16	80,0	4	12
Tyrol	31	11,4	23	74,2	5	3
Vorarlberg	28	10,3	12	42,8	3	0
Vienna	73	26,8	73	100,0	xxxx	xxxx
Total	272	100%	207	76,1%	36	54

There was only one exception of this thoroughly concentration of services in the capitals: In Nether Austria there were only 37% of the services situated in St. Pölten. But also in Nether Austria more than 50% of the districts did not have any provision against homelessness.

On the other side there was only the county of Vorarlberg where the services for the Homeless were distributed quite evenly between the districts. There was just to state a smooth concentration in Bregenz, the capital of Vorarlberg (43%).

An extremely uneven distribution could be found in the county of Salzburg, where 95% of all services for homeless persons were situated in the capital. Only one home for female victims of domestic violence and one residual home for families were placed outside the capital – but both of them still in the range of the central area of the county. The districts inside the Alps were definitely underprivileged.

More than 60% of the rural districts in Austria were without any provisions against homelessness and the inhabitants of the small villages and / or towns had obviously to go to the next larger town or to the capital of the county if they were in urgent housing stress.

This was the situation in 1997 but it is to state that there has been only little progress in regionalisation of services and provisions. As far as I know most of the services are still situated in or at least near the capitals.

4.2 Responsible bodies

Services for homeless in Austria were mainly provided by non governmental organisations (72%) which were sometimes an integrated but autonomous part of Austrian wide active umbrella societies (like the Caritas). In the most cases small organisations operated exclusively in one county respectively in one city. Only a small part of services (13%) were embedded in the public government, e.g. in the administrative corps of a city.

As a result of recent development of the organisational structures of the service providers in some counties, e.g. in the county of Salzburg, there was also an increasing number of services which were organized by non profit corporations (17,5%).

Tabel 2: Responsible bodies in the counties (n=242)

<i>county</i>	<i>NGO</i>		<i>governmental organisation</i>		<i>non profit corporation</i>		<i>other⁵</i>	
	<i>abs.</i>	<i>in %</i>	<i>abs.</i>	<i>in %</i>	<i>abs.</i>	<i>in %</i>	<i>abs.</i>	<i>in %</i>
Burgenland	5	100	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx
Carinthia	11	73,4	3	20,0	1	6,7	xxx	xxx
Nether Austria	22	95,6	1	4,3	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx
Upper Austria	28	87,5	1	3,1	1	3,1	2	6,2
Salzburg	18	45,0	12	30,0	7	17,5	3	7,5
Styria	10	50,0	6	30,0	xxx	xxx	4	20,0
Tyrol	26	86,6	4	13,3	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx
Vorarlberg	22	78,5	xxx	xxx	2	7,4	3	11,1
Vienna	35	70,0	11	22,0	xxx	xxx	4	8,0
<i>total</i>	<i>177</i>	<i>72,3</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>13,5</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>6,5</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>6,6</i>

⁵ Others are: Boarding houses, clerical organisations and abbeys

It is evident that the organisation structure by associations and NGO's was the most important form of responsible body in the range of the service providers for the Homeless. This is very clear in counties like Burgenland (100%). But also the counties of Nether Austria (96%), Upper Austria (87%) and Tyrol had a high portion of these bodies.

There were only few exceptions where also governmental organisations took part in the provision of services for the homeless, as it was the fact in the counties of Styria and Salzburg (in both counties: 30%).

4.3 Terms of funding

Because the services for the homeless have been developed in a strict bottom up process and were not the result of any kind of systematic planing also the systems of funding were quite different and in many respects insufficiently.

So in Austria in the year 1997 there was only a minor part of the services (30%) which represented an elaborated system of funding, developed on the regular basis of long term contracts and guaranteed by the federal law for probation. This was the fact with the services provided by the "Association for probation and social work" or by associated organisations.

The huge part of the service providers (57%) depended on yearly contracts with different partners on federal, regional and local level. This highly insecure funding situation could be found in most of the services in the counties of Carinthia (87%), Upper Austria (69%) and Nether Austria (67%).

On the average the service providers were multiple funded by almost three different sources (average: 2,7). Because the funding of services for the homeless was eminently a matter of the regional laws of social benefit (Sozialhilfe) it was no surprise that in the most cases the counties (69% of all services were at least co-funded by the counties) and the cities (54%) were clearly overrepresented in the funding of the services.

In almost one of three services they had to realize a contribution to the yearly funding by profits (32%) and the same share depended on contributions from charity which were of high importance (31%). Only in 26% of the services the federal government took part in the funding, e.g. in services of the 'association for probation and social work', in 19% the office for labour market affairs gave a contribution to the funding. So – in contrary to the beginnings of the implementation of the new services – the role of the labour market policy in the funding of services for the homeless has been already of a thorough decreasing importance.

The engagement of churches and abbeys or other clerical organisations was very inhomogeneous throughout Austria. In some counties only 4% of the services were profiting by direct funding from churches, in other counties their share was up to 26%.

Beside the effect of a changing role of the labour market policy the situation of multiple funding on a year to year basis has not changed eminently in the last 5 years since this survey was undertaken. Still it means that the services have to manage the funding of the next year in parallel negotiations with different partners. Evidently a year to year basis for funding contracts is a very unsecure basis for long term planning by the services and / or the service providers.

And still it is a fact that in Austria the homeless clients of the services have almost no definitive role in these negotiations – so it is to suppose that their needs and perspectives are in many respects and cases not even heard.⁶

⁶ A thoroughly different funding system has been implemented recently concerning the personal assistance and care services for handicapped persons. So the subsidies from the care insurance funds are paid directly to the persons who have an individual need on care provisions. They can decide about the kind, the quality and the intensity of care they want to have – and they can decide by which service provider they want to 'buy' these services.

4.4 Funding security

Only each third of the services for the homeless (30%) were in the situation of an unlimited funding security and only 20% had longterm contracts to plan with. The huge majority of the services (50%) had a funding situation which meant that the whole funding was only guaranteed for the actual year. These services were this way dependent on year to year negotiations.

Very insecure funding situations of the services for the homeless were a matter of fact in the counties of Tyrol (79%), Carinthia (78%), Upper Austria (69%) and Nether Austria (67%).

In other counties like Salzburg (38%), Vienna (39%) and Styria (44%) the share of insecure funding is evidently much smaller.

4.5 Terms of administration

The situation of the services depends up to a high degree on the terms of administration and charging at the level of the public authority – in the most cases of the regional administration boards. Following modalities could be distinguished:

Tabel 3: terms of charging

	<i>in %</i>
total funding	51,6%
dayly rates	31,5%
basic funding	14,1%
hourly rate	13,6%
monthly rate	12,0%

The terms of administration and charging differ from county to county. So in Carinthia (69%) and Tyrol (65%) a high share of services could build upon a total funding modality. On the other side many services in the counties of Nether Austria (84%) and Burgenland (80%) have funding systems which are based on dayly rates.

An extremely complicated funding modality can be found in the county of Vorarlberg where many services are obliged to charge by hourly rates; this is fact for almost half of the services (46%) in Vorarlberg.

In the last five years the charging and funding modalities did not change in the main figures. But there has been improvements in some of the counties where the reliability of the year to year contracts were slightly improved, as it happened in the counties of Salzburg, Upper Austria and Vienna.

According to the amendment of the law of social benefits in Upper Austria also the precedures of the yearly negotiations and in this way the funding securities of the services were reformed and eminently improved. So it is an important innovation of newly amended law on social benefits in Upper Austria that the service providers have a new role in the process of negotiations – as a partner of the public authority and adjusted with fundamental claims on follow up funding. The only exception would be that the public authority is going to state a break of the contract and take a written notice to withdraw the validity of the contract with arguments and at six months' notice.

So in the regular way the service providers can work with the year to year contracts as if these were in a certain sense unlimited and they can trust that the funding will be continued – at least for the next half year.

5. Services for the Homeless at regional / local level

In the following chapter I try to give a short overview on services in the counties (Bundesländer) of Austria, in order to point out the differences between the regional / local systems of services and provisions.

5.1 Burgenland

Burgenland is a very small county at the eastern border to Hungary with a high share of rural villages. In the context of the Austrian survey on homelessness by BAWO (Eitel / Schoibl, Services for the Homeless in Austria, Vienna 1998) the correspondent of the county of Burgenland pointed out that there was not even one service provided especially for the target group of homeless people. But there were some facilities for special target groups (like battered women with children) which are mainly dealing with other problems of their clients but are also confronted with housing problems and / or homelessness of their clients – therefore they have to develop individual solutions in the range of (supported) housing but don't understand themselves as part of the services for homeless people and don't cooperate in the development of a target group specific system of services and provisions.

Traditionally homeless persons which don't fit into the main frameworks / targets of these services were forced to leave the county and find the needed support or a place to live in the near city of Vienna.

5.2 Carinthia

In the most southern county of Austria there are only few services for homeless persons like a public asylum and a day care center for homeless by a private service provider, both facilities were situated in the capital of Carinthia. These services are characterized by low standards according to individual support as well as accommodation.

Beside these services there was a residential home for battered women and another service provider had established supported (single and shared) housing for youth and young adults in housing stress or homelessness.

Until now in Carinthia it has not been possible to establish a systematic approach to deal with homelessness.

5.3 Nether Austria

Ute Hohlfeld, correspondent for Nether Austria, described in her contribution to the Austrian survey on services for the homeless that there is a tradition of small residential homes for homeless persons – mainly situated in the central parts of Nether Austria / along the valley of Danube; but there are almost no additional services provided like prevention of eviction, counselling and floating support, supported housing in selfsustained accommodations etc. Additional provisions like that are mainly carried out by service providers which are not targeted for the target group of homeless persons in a very strict sense of the traditional definition.

As a matter of fact the main part of the existing services which are confronted with housing problems and / or homelessness of their clients do not consider them as part of the network of services for homeless people which is therefor only of secondary importance in the range of regional social policy.

5.4 Upper Austria

As in almost all counties of Austria in Upper Austria the services for homeless people are dominantly situated in the central area around the capital Linz. In the rural parts of Upper Austria it is still a common experience that homeless persons are sometimes actively sent to the capital by the local authorities.

So in Upper Austria one can find at least two different systems of services:

- a well developed and diversificated system of specialized services – beginning with prevention of eviction, a range of emergency shelters and day centers, target specific residential homes, supported housing and provisions to assure the reintegration in the mainstream housing market;

- and a quite underdeveloped rural area with only few emergency shelters in smaller cities and almost no additional services for the homeless.

Recently the regional law on social benefits has been reformulated and for the first time in Austria there is a logistic framework dealing with acute homelessness. In this the regional and local authorities are obliged to establish 'social counselling centers' and to develop provisions or to cooperate with services for homeless clients.

Meanwhile some of the smaller cities and regions have started to develop target group specific services like floating support in the range of empowerment and case-management. Therefor a completely new system of services in the rural parts has started – and shall be properly analysed in the course of the next two years (when the first experiences and evaluations of these efforts will be available).

5.5 Salzburg

In the county of Salzburg the services for homeless people are provided at a high portion by private and voluntary organisations which have built up a network of services, widely differentiated and adapted to ensure cooperation. There is to mention that there are also some social workers in public institutions like hospitals etc. which are cooperating with the specialized services for homeless persons.

It is a special situation that the services for the homeless are still restricted to the city of Salzburg where a model of a rehabilitation / reintegration chain is realized, which consists of services like:

- prevention of eviction
- easy access services like emergency shelters and day centers
- counselling centers for homeless people
- counselling centers for specific target groups as women and youth in urging housing needs
- residential homes for different target groups – mother and child homes, residential homes for battered women, shared accommodations for mentally ill persons with housing needs
- target group specific provisions of supported housing

- floating individual support after the detachment into self-sustained accommodations.

There are only few services provided in the rural parts of Salzburg, mostly carried out by service providers with the administrative center in the city of Salzburg. Therefore it is no surprise that more than 50% of the homeless clients of the services for the homeless are coming from the disadvantaged rural parts where problem transfer into the central area is still the common strategy by the local authorities in the rural areas – to handle housing problems and / or homelessness in the way of ignoring.

Recently a process of regionalisation of services and provisions has started (especially the service of eviction prevention and debt counselling have built up new provisions in the countryside on the basis of weekly consulting-hours). But this process of regionalisation is still in the very beginning.

5.6 Styria

In Styria the main parts of the services for the homeless are provided by the local authority of the capital Graz and are situated there. The rest of the services are provided by churches and / or clerical organisations which are mainly carried out by voluntary persons. Therefore the situation of the services for homeless people is very specifically.

The Styrian correspondent of the Austrian survey on homelessness and services for the homeless stated that the situation in Styria can be characterized by

- low standards in accommodations
- high share of voluntary workers instead of educated social workers on a regular employment basis
- lack of services in the rural parts
- problems in providing follow up accommodations after the stay in institutional care.

Just recently the county of Styria and the city of Graz have charged BAWO to undertake a county-specific survey on provisions and services for homeless people and to develop measures and strategies to improve this situation. This survey has just started and shall be finished at the end of 2003, so it will be possible to fill in further informations in the following reports on services for the homeless.

5.7 Tyrol

Also in the county of Tyrol most of the services are situated in the capital Innsbruck and most of the homeless persons in Tyrol are living there.

Specific for the situation in Tyrol is the fact that beside a wide range of services by private providers the two large emergency shelters are provided by the communal authority in Innsbruck and can be characterized by very restrictive regulations and low standards – concerning the quality of housing as well as the intensity of individual support.

In this sense it does not surprise that the public – private partnership is loaded with conflicts in terms of concurrence about professional standards and / or restrictions in cooperation.

Most recently the services in Tyrol reported of increasing problems to realize social security and / or adequate housing for young persons with problems concerning addiction and / or polytoxikomane addiction. Therefore a survey on quantitative as well as qualitative aspects of needs and realized provisions have been started and shall be finished in 2/2004; so it will be possible to report the results of this survey in the coming reports of the working group on social services.

5.8 Vorarlberg

The county of Vorarlberg has been the first of the Austrian counties to establish a public – private partnership to provide services and provisions. So in the county of Vorarlberg there is a well established cooperation in realization and developing standards of individual support. In difference to the other counties Vorarlberg is characterized by a well organized regional distribution of services with high standards of accommodation as well as individual support.

But in the county of Vorarlberg there is still a lack of subsidized accommodations for rent and the regulations of the access to subsidized accommodations are very restrictive. So it is very difficult to provide the clients of the services for the homeless with affordable follow up accommodations.

5.9 Vienna

In the last decade the public authority of Vienna – in partnership with private service providers – has started to build up a model of integrated and adapted services for the homeless, called 'staircase-model'. This model consists of

- an elaborated service to prevent eviction, provided by a private organisation;
- services to decrease barriers to access the support system for rough sleepers like day centers and emergency shelters provided mainly by the communal authority; the still existing asylums provided by the communal authority represent the first step of the stair case model – the low barrier access to the system of help;
- a widely differentiated system of targetgroup specific residential homes by nongovernmental as well as public organisations;
- floating individual support in selfsustained accommodation and supported housing – mainly provided by non governmental organisations which are combined in a working group of supported housing and are represented in a board of distribution of communal flats;
- a pool of follow up accommodations strictly reserved for homeless persons and families; the 'Vienna Housing' is administrated by the local authority but the detachment into these follow up accommodations is done in a strict cooperation with the providers of supported housing.

This system of services for the homeless is almost completed by now and recently the communal authority has started to close down the still existing large asylums for single homeless (like 'Meldemannstraße', the shelter where Hitler has lived during his time in Vienna) as well as for homeless families. Actually the numbers of homeless persons in Vienna are decreasing so the city of Vienna can afford to shut down these low standard asylums.

Specific for the situation of the provisions and services for the homeless in the city of Vienna is a systematic approach to collect and analyze data on homelessness (in the last years the data collection and the evaluation of the services on homelessness was carried out by BAWO; just recently it will be done by the communal authority). In addition with the evaluation of the prevention service and the detachment of former homeless clients out of the services which are responsible for supported housing into communal flats there is an empirical base to analyze the effects of provisions and services in the range of homelessness which is unique for Austria.

6. Provisions and recent perspectives for planning

Until to the end of the 90ies social planning in Austria had not comprised the area of housing policy in general and / or the services for the homeless in special. In the most counties there were only few and rather cautious signs of a professional planning of services for the homeless which in many counties has not developed further as to a systematic recording and regional co-ordination of the existing institutions. So in almost all counties a systematic initiative for planning was (and in some counties still is) of no importance for the development of professional skills as well as appropriate standards for different problems and target groups in the field of services for the homeless.

Instead of local and / or regional initiatives for a systematic planning the development of services and provisions obliged eminently the providers of services for the homeless themselves and bottom up processes were the only and dominant form of development. These processes were primarily oriented by the concrete experiences of shortcomings in the own practice and only secondarily by a point of view which was led by a superior level in reference of planning and developing the whole social structure in its regional or local context.

Very slowly the communal and / or regional authorities started to think about the necessity to act by themselves instead of reacting on initiatives and proposals by the service providers. As it is fact in Austria this changing of the role of planning provisions happened at all in completely different ways; the most important innovations shall be referred in the following sections.

6.1 Labour market policy – from “bottom up” to “top down”

In the 90ies the ministry of social affairs started with a thoroughly change of the funding strategies. So they stopped the funding of a job foundation by small initiatives and implemented new basic rules. Funding became an instrument for planning and regulation especially in the field of labour market relevant issues. So new projects of the second labour market were realized, target group specific provisions were developed to improve the (re-)integration of problem groups of the unemployed into the main stream labour market.

The traditional system of additional funding in the range of cultural and / or social facilities in order to establish single jobs for single unemployed persons was deleted in a very short time of changing the funding directives. Funding like that became dependent of the fact that these measures fitted into larger schemes of political goals. The conditions to get fundings changed from unspecific to very strict basic requirements – concerning the target group, age, period of unemployment, provisions of reintegration and vocational training, standards of assessment and detachment etc.

The consequences of these changes were that many service providers had to change not only their funding strategies and / or to negotiate for additional funding from welfare administrations of counties and cities. Some of them had to change also the target groups and the main figures of services because of this loss of funding when specific target groups were not accepted any more as relevant in the sense of labour market policy (and changes like that happened sometimes from year to year).

Some of the services in counties with very restrictive funding structures just had to shut down because they could not realize a new funding scheme (this happened with services for unemployed youth with huge problems in the range of intermediary assessment, but also some counselling offices for homeless people did not survive this change of funding strategies).

6.2 A restrictive model of planning – in the county of Salzburg

A similar concept of changing the role of the regional authority in the range of the development of services for the Homeless can be reported from the county of Salzburg when the administrative body of the welfare regime started at the end of the 90ies to build up very inflexible funding schemes in the whole range of the social services and infrastructure. As one consequence all services for the Homeless were registered in a planning process which was more of a controlling process than headed on development and / or improvement of standards.

This registration of services finally lead to a strict definition of targets, target groups and basic standards like qualification of the professionals as well as how these services were to provide. Limits and basic standards according to periods of stay, the standards of success and – last but not least – the documentation of the results of social work became a fix part in the funding contracts which were still on a year to year basis.

Any reform in the services and each development of means and measures were dependant from an allowance by the regional authority to change the basic parts of the contract – otherwise the funding of the service was in danger.

Up to now the system of social administration and planning in the county of Salzburg is in the first line an instrument of control, headed to prevent changes and development which are lead by bottom up processes. Changes in the general direction of development depend now from administrative and / or political decisions. The actual role of services and social workers in the process of social planning is very limited. They are somewhat degraded from active partners in a process of development to instruments to fulfill the directives as fixed in the yearly contracts.

The recent situation of the services for the homeless in the county of Salzburg can be characterized by following marks:

- a) Services for homeless are working on a strict contract framework;
- b) in these contracts the conditions like standards concerning the stay in supported housing and / or in mobile individual support are fixed in a very strict form; for example: a prolongation of the stay in a supported accommodation is only possible in the context of an administrative procedure, eg. on the basis of a social psychiatric finding;
- c) the services are obliged to realize a fixed share of successful detachment according to the number of sleeping places and the duration in individual support; they have to report about the number of accesses to follow up accommodations as one central condition for further funding;

- d) if a former client of the service comes again into treatment because there is a new need for individual support the service is not allowed to take these client into a supported housing contract by themselves, except the fact this is commissioned by the administrative body and / or the social psychiatrist gives a formal ok;
- e) the services are not allowed to combine different services of individual support – with the exception that this combination is somewhat suggested by a social psychiatrist report as well.

6.3 The “social fund” – a proportional approach of regulation in Vorarlberg

Social planning and regulation of services in the county of Vorarlberg is unique in Austria. There is a very specific framework provided which consists mainly in the implementation of an administrative board, dealing with the “social fund”.

The monetary provisions for the funding of social services are gathered in a pool where the contributions of the county and the communal authorities are administrated in a specific way.

The administrative body of this social fund consists of representatives of the regional authority, furtheron there are representatives of the local governments (cities and villages) and – and that is absolutely new and absolutely innovative for Austrian conditions – there are representatives of the service providers, including services for the homeless, each of them legitimated by a votum of the existing services. So the administrative board represents the three relevant partners of social policy and administration: the public authority of the county, the cities and villages which spend a high share of the money into the fund, the private organisations which are responsible to carry out the social services. The principle of the constitution of the administrative board can be described as equally proportioned.

In common sessions this administrative body of the social fund is charged to discuss recent developments in the range of poverty, rising needs for services and / or for individual support, problems or opportunities concerning standards of services and so on. In this way the services for the homeless are an integrated part in a democratic procedure of fact finding and decision making about services, provisions and standards.

6.4 A participative model of planning – Upper Austria

In the last years the county of Upper Austria started a process of amendment of the system of social benefits and in this context also quite important changes of the legal framework for funding of social services took place. In this process the providers of social services including the services for the homeless were integrated partner in a participative project and were therefore invited to fill in their expectations and needs.

This project of amendment is finished now and there is a new basis for the role of NGO service providers in the process of systematic exchange, discourse about changes of needs and frameworks for social services.

Until now this model of participative planning had no consequences in other counties and I don't know if and as far this example is already realized and / or got observed and discussed by other public authorities.

6.5 Systematic planning and regulation – the exemple of Vienna

Recently the communal authority of the city / county of Vienna finished the implementation of the socalled 'stair case model' as the basic structure to fight homelessness and to handle the needs of homeless persons.

At last the implementation of a social planning body were done where all the projects and directives of development are gathered and lead together in an adjusted and planful way. One of the most important aspects of this planning initiative by the city of Vienna is the fact that the social planning office has now got the responsibility to undertake the yearly evaluation of the services for the homeless.

An other very important aspect concerns the future of the large asylums which dominated the situation of the services for the homeless in Vienna for so many years and decades. It was one of the prominent issues of the social planning office during the last years to realize the definitive change from the traditional and problematic institutions (like the Meldemannstraße) which were still working at low standards, just as usual, to the modern system which were built up during the last decade. Recently these unsupported institutions were shut down and systematically replaced by social therapeutical wards and by target specific residual homes.

As a matter of fact the social planning in Vienna is integrated in a network of the existing services which are provided by NGO's and therefore is intermediary partner in the development of services, standards and methods – and in some ways also competent for the detachment of communal flats.

7. Recent developments and changing frameworks

The recent developments in the range of social planning and developing new frameworks of funding and regulation show a divergent situation in Austria. There are some counties which are very innovative in implementing strategies and methods of regulation and some others which are still bound in traditional ways of providing services for the Homeless.

As a matter of fact the models of social planning in Vorarlberg and Upper Austria as well as the Viennese model are not observed or discussed within the other counties which are still in a very reluctant position concerning social planning and improving standards. This has consequences not only for the services in these counties where the administrative frameworks of funding and regulation are still very rudimentary but also for the homeless persons which are not as lucky as others – depending of the fact where they are looking for services and individual support.

Any way the progress in eminent respects of exchange, improving standards, social planning and regulation in some counties has led to a situation where the differences between the Austrian counties are increasing rapidly. The consequences of a thorough lack on Austrian wide frameworks and standards are more evident than ever because this situation means that homeless persons have no right on adequate treatment in wide parts of Austria.

Equality chances according to social risks as well as to social opportunities in the situation of individual needs of poor and / or homeless persons are therefore only a myth without any evidence and / or empirical basis.

But in the recent social policy discourse on the level of the federal government of Austria there are no signs and evidence that the representatives know about or are conscient that there is an enormous need for standardizing and regulation on a national level. The recent NAPincl and the lack of conscience about the situation of the services for the homeless in Austria is just the most recent example.

PS: The following short evaluation of the NAPincl of the Austrian government is cited from my policy review for Austria (2003).

8. National Policy against Homelessness

In general homelessness is no issue in the political discourse in Austria at a national level. The national action plan against poverty / for social inclusion (NAPincl) is a good example that there is not only limited interest in homelessness, that there is no theoretical awareness about reasons for homelessness and / or no (only little) empirical knowledge about means and measures against homelessness. The NAPincl is in any way very poor in terms of measures and strategies against homelessness and refers exclusively on measures, legal instruments and services at the level of counties and towns.

That has been fact already with the NAP of 2001 and there seems to be a strategy to handle the issue of homelessness and social exclusion at a very low level. Any way this strategy is continued also within the recently produced draft of the NAP 2003. Beside that homelessness is inflicted with some of the revisions of different housing laws, but these measures are not essentially discussed, esp. if they have a probable influence on the development of homelessness, if these are likely to prevent homelessness or to improve the working conditions of the services for the homeless. These developments don't constitute a discourse about reasons of homelessness, living conditions of homeless and / or potentials and strategies to fight homelessness but give evidence that the lobby of the landlords still plays an important role in the housing policy in Austria.

8.1 National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPincl)

As it has been already routine with the first NAP against social exclusion many governmental and non governmental bodies were invited to make proposals for a national action plan for social inclusion. Recently a first draft of this NAP was officially presented – but as it has been a widely criticized fact with the first NAP also the NAPincl is characterized by a lot of far reaching deficiencies. Anyway it keeps intransparent why the authors of the NAPincl took some of the proposals into the NAPincl and ignored other parts.

Any way the Austrian NAPincl is like an introduction into the Austrian system of social security – written with the purpose to hide any critical aspects and or deficiencies. Evidently it will not be able to find any sociopolitical reality on poverty and / or social exclusion in this paper.

The main argument in the NAPincl characterizes the Austrian system of social policy as a social transfer system which is described as a very efficient strategy to prevent poverty and social exclusion. The NAPincl lays its focus mainly on monetary measures to strengthen social security and to improve equality in the range of gender and nationality. So the NAPincl states that the Austrian system of social insurances provides most of the potential poor people with enough financial resources to stay out of the range of poverty.

I think that this argument is quite correct up to a certain extent because it doesn't show the fact that there are structural effects and risks within this system which are responsible for the difficulties specific target groups have to maintain a sufficient level of living standards. Social security provided by a social insurance system is per definition okay for those parts of the population who are able to fill in the necessary years of labour time and the amounts of lifetime-wages. For a quite large part of the population there is the risk that they are not able out of different reasons to master the barriers and hurdles against a take up of a sufficient amount of social transfers – in the range of higher age or in times of unemployment, illness or invalidity.

But the NAPincl doesn't show these risks and / or the livingconditions of these parts of the Austrian population, as there are women, unskilled workers, migrants, handicapped people and / or homeless persons. The fact that certain parts of the inhabitants are excluded from welfarre and social security and that poverty is a structural phenomenon of the Austrian system of social security has no place in the NAP-comments on social strategies to improve social inclusion.

In the following parts I try to work out some of the essential deficiencies of social security and especially of affordable and adequate housing which are hidden so well in this NAPincl.

Comments of the Austrian Conference on Poverty and social Exclusion (NGO)

The nationale Conference on Poverty comments critically that the NAPincl is only describing the given system of social security and is very defensive according to plans and measures in the next years. Therefore the NAPincl is in no way an actionplan in the sense of the word because there is no adequate strategical position and / or any obligingness how to realise any goals. There are no

- quantifiable goals
- proofable indicators
- transparent timetable for action
- detailed dates on costs and how to finance them
- goals, measures and strategies according to prevent poverty and social exclusion.

In other words the Austrian Conference on Poverty states that the NAPincl is in fact no improvement according to the first NAP from 2001.

Comments of the bawo (umbrella organisation of services for the homeless in Austria)

The bawo has made a differentiated proposal according to the recent discussions and strategies to handle the problems of homelessness in Austria. Especially bawo tried to inform the ministry about the importance of correct terms and conditions of the services for the Homeless. With disappointment bawo states now that the NAPincl is still using the inappropriate terms of rooflessness when talking about the clientel of the services for the homeless. Anyway it sounds very accidentally what the NAPincl is citing out of the proposal of the bawo.

Therefore the NAPincl is not able to give concepts and strategies how the fact of homelessness is handled at the different levels of national and / or regional policies and / or administration. Furthermore it is not possible to get evidence of measures and strategies to be developed in the future, plans and strategies how to improve the provisions and services to prevent evictions etc.

In general bawo states that the NAPincl stays as indifferently and inappropriately as the NAP from the year 2001.

Critical aspects in the range of the housing chapters

HOUSING POLICY WITHOUT A RIGHT ON HOUSING

The essential goal of the housing system in Austria is described as to make housing affordable for all inhabitants of Austria. Therefore the NAP refers the high amount of funding and the large part of the so called “social housing” in the range of housing construction in Austria – nine of ten newly constructed apartments in apartmentbuildings are supported by social housing funds.

But this reference is only half of the truth because there are restricted conditions of access and not all of the Austrian inhabitants have the realistic opportunity / chance to get a socially funded accommodation or other monetary profits in the range of socially funded housing. In difference to the very approving statements in the NAPincl certain target groups are definitely excluded or at least disadvantaged. So many people, especially those who are living in the range of poverty, have no chance to get a cheap accommodation because the socially funding of housing is distributed inequally – households with middle and higher income are better off also in terms of funded housing. Furthermore there is the group of non-EU-citizens which are widely excluded by nationality or are disadvantaged systematically.

Furthermore in the NAPincl there is no hint that in Austria there is no right on housing established to improve the position of families and single persons as well. If households will be able to master the access barriers to get an affordable and adequate accommodation that depends on the specific an widely different conditions of regional and / or communal housing markets according to availability and affordability of accommodations.

GOOD PROVISIONS IN THE HOUSING SECTOR – AT THE AVERAGE

Furthermore the NAPincl strains the fact that in average the housing costs in Austria are quite low. This is a quite functional strategy to get quite proper arguments: The average of housing provisions is thoroughly good – high quality, low prizes, high standards and nice vicinity.

But if there is only the average of housing conditions in the focus of the analysis and argumentation in the NAPincl it is impossible to discuss problems of relevant target groups of social and anti poverty policy. Consequently the NAPincl doesn't mention any critical aspects and / or effects of housing policy, there is no hint that some target groups of social and housing policy are winners of the recent policies and administrative strategies – and some others are losers.

As far as there are good results in the average – there is no need to change anything?

The NAPincl does only know of one critical issue – that the average housing costs have been rising in the last decade. But even in the description of potential results of the rising housing costs in relevant segments of the housing market, the NAPincl avoids any remarks on the effects of liberalisation and / or the transfer of housing policy competences from the national level to the regions (Länder).

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES IN RISING THE HOUSING STANDARDS – BY FUNDING PROVISIONS

The NAPincl is very proud of the fact that the stock of accommodations with very low quality standards has been systematically reduced from 170.000 to 108.000 flats – since 1990. This has been a very important improvement of the housing conditions and housing standards in Austria – but in consequence there is a far reaching loss of a large amount of very cheap accommodations which has been a chance for low income families / persons to find an affordable accommodation.

These consequences were a reduction of housing chances of migrants and other people – mainly in the range of poverty – who had / have restricted conditions of access to the socially funded housing market. The improving of the housing standards lead to the situation that in many parts of Austria there is almost no stock of lowstandard cheap accommodations left and so a new kind of housing stress has developed in most of the cities of Austria – very selectively and evidently concerning only those Austrians who cannot afford alternative segments of the housing market.

Fact is furthermore that the Austrian housing policy did not develop and / or realize compensations for this far reaching restriction of one segment of the housing market, but the NAPincl does not mention these negative effects of housing policies at all.

IMPROVING THE AFFORDABILITY OF ACCOMODATIONS BY THE MEANS OF INDIVIDUAL HOUSING BENEFITS

The NAPincl states the fact that there are differences between the specific systems of housing benefits in the counties but without any hint that there are problems concerning specific target groups of social and housing policy like people in the range of poverty, immigrants etc. which mainly were caused by the thoroughly retreat of the federal policy and administration. Competencies in the range of housing affairs were almost completely delegated to the level of the counties.

So we have to state that there are at least almost 30 different systems of housing benefits according to nine counties and different segments of the housing market determining the chances and / or risks of housing in Austria. This fact leads to the situation that in Austria the chances to get an adequate and affordable accommodation depend on regional conditions. Therefore some target groups of social and housing policy have different chances and / or risks depending on the fact where these persons are living. But also this critical aspect of social and housing security in Austria is not mentioned in the NAPincl.

Statements and comments on Homelessness and strategies to improve measures for the Homeless

In the NAPincl one can find some informations about homelessness in Austria as well as the services for the homeless. In the first part the NAPincl cites the results of the survey on homelessness by the BAWO from the year 1997 / 1998⁷ but doesn't discuss the fact that this survey was handicapped by a lack of proper surveys on homelessness in the counties. So the numbers which are cited in the NAP are resulting from estimations and have only a weak empirical basis.

The NAPincl concedes that there are problems with the situation of homeless migrants which have a strictly limited access to services for the homeless which

⁷ Eitel / Schoibl, Survey on Homelessness and Services for the Homeless, Vienna 1998

leads to the effect that the knowledge about homelessness within this target group is even less proofed. Concerning the numbers and empirical based knowledge about homelessness the NAPIncl states the fact that the bawo is engaged within the European partnership to improve the knowledge about homelessness but doesn't mention the fact that a careful done survey on homelessness depends on funding.

De facto the NAPIncl keeps very vague with goals and strategies concerning the improvement of the situation of homeless persons like prevention of eviction, an easier access to social security as well as to affordable accommodations, housing provisions, services for acute homeless and to improve the transfer of homeless persons into accommodations in the range of social housing.

These goals are just stated but there is no discussion about strategies, means and / or funds to reach these goals. In fact the NAPIncl states that there is an umbrella organisation (bawo) which is struggling to improve conditions of prevention and / or reintegration of homeless persons – but the fact that this umbrella organisation is not funded by national funds that keeps a mystery.

PREVENTION OF EVICTION – SUCCESSFUL BUT ONLY IN SOME REGIONS AND CITIES

The NAPIncl introduces prevention of eviction as a very successful strategy to fight homelessness. As far – as nice, but the NAPIncl does not discuss the fact that the provisions to a systematic approach of the prevention of eviction can be found only in some larger cities of Austria and only in some regions where also the inhabitants of smaller villages and / or small towns have a realistic chance to get a professional support in the case when eviction will be announced to them and homelessness is threatening.

Instead of a critical discussion of the perspectives of the services, means and measures to improve the provisions to prevent eviction the NAPIncl pretend that in the cause of an announcement of eviction in Austria meanwhile it is quite usual that the households will be contacted by professionals to prevent this special risk of becoming homeless. There is no hint in this document that this practice is only fact in a few cities and / or counties of Austria and it is not even mentioned that the existing services have eminent problems according to sufficient resources and adequate legal based competences and adequate chances to intervene. In fact in Austria it is quite accidental if there will be professional help in the case of eviction

but the NAPincl is filled with contrary illusions like everything is quite nice and proper.

IMPROVING STANDARDS AND STRUCTURES OF SERVICES FOR THE HOMELESS – WITHOUT ADEQUATE LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORKS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL OF THE COUNTIES

As a highlight of the recent development of the services for the homeless the NAPincl describes that some of the regional governments are quite occupied with the development and implementation of measures and strategies to improve the structures and frameworks of cooperation at the one hand and the professional standards in the range of the services for the homeless. Especially it is positively mentioned that some of these initiatives are headed to

- reduce sleeping places in large institutions,
- build up provisions for the individual support in the range of supported housing and / or
- enable the services for the homeless to help their clients applying for social funded and / or communal flats / as a condition for reintegration into mainstream housing.

A statement like that could at least be understood as a hint that the conditions in the range of homelessness and or the provisions of the services for the homeless are – at least in some counties – quite prehistoric and to be characterized by deficits and deficiencies. Any way this could be the start for a critical discourse about standards, differences between local / regional frameworks, structures and / or resources in the range of services for the Homeless.

But the NAPincl just works it out like these measures in some of the nine counties are quite an exemplary model and / or a masterplan for all counties, cities and regions to cover up with these improvement strategies. This impression is simply wrong – and I cannot imagine that the authors of the NAPincl don't know the facts:

Most of the counties in Austria are not likely thoroughly to improve the situation and the living conditions of homeless persons. But instead of an open discourse about deficits and low standards in the most counties and cities in Austria the NAPincl just tell that in the counties there is a serious cooperation between the services for the homeless and the regional administrative councils, all of them in a serious coalition to improve frameworks, measures and resources. This statement is simply a lie, because it is just a fact in most of the cities and counties that there are only low chances to improve the working conditions and / or the standards and structures in the fight against homelessness – in order of political and / or administrative barriers. If the counties are not willing to pay for better standards and services there is no way to realize any improvements.

At least there is only one county in Austria where the government has established an office for planning and systematic development of services and provisions for the Homeless – that is the fact in Vienna, which is not only the capital of Austria but also a separate county, where a “staircase plan how to (re)integrate the homeless persons into mainstream living and housing” is established and where the services for the homeless are invited to cooperate in the range of these longterm plan and development. The cooperating services in Vienna also are adjusted with competencies to provide their clients with communal flats. So it can be said, that there is one planning and development office in Austria which is de facto working and effectively improving the chances of the Homeless – and there are eight further counties where there is no institutional basis for cooperation and commonly agreed development.

LOCAL / REGIONAL REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION – NETWORKS

There is one simple reason that in the other eight counties there are no provisions for planning improvements and / or developing standards, structures and measures against homelessness. It depends on the lack of cooperation structures between governmental institutions and offices at the one hand and NGO's at the other. Without a real cooperation and a kind of adjusted development the services at local and / or regional level are handicapped by missing resources and insufficiently elaborated instruments to provide their clients with social and housing security.

HARMONIZING THE FEDERAL SYSTEMS OF SOCIAL BENEFITS (SOZIALHILFE)

In the Austrian countries the laws of social benefits (Sozialhilfe) are the legal framework for the social services. These frameworks are different but all of them have in common that there is a lack on definitions concerning standards, targetgroup specific methods and / or measures of prevention and reintegration in the range of social services, especially for the Homeless. These legal frameworks are – in general – not constituting a structure or a regular basis for networking and cooperation in a local or regional system and therefore the effects of these laws on financial and / or legal security of the services are very weak.

Now the NAPincl is reporting of an initiative of the national and the regional bodies to harmonize the legal systems of social benefits by the way of a federal contract. It is intended to define standards about conditions of access and precedures how to get social benefits, definition about target groups which are allowed to apply for benefits and how much money they can expect etc.

But in this enumeration the critical lack of constituting adequate frameworks and resources for the social services as well as the need of a systematically harmonisation of standards of social services are not even mentioned. The NAPincl just gives an indifferent list of services which are provided for the Homeless like emergency shelters, day centers, supported housing in shared accommodations and reintegration programs into mainstream housing (“final accommodations”) and so on – without any hint on the fact that there are almost no services provided in smaller cities and / or the countryside, that there are far reaching differences in standards, that there are is a thoroughly lack on sufficiently elaborated provisions for specific target groups like homeless women, immigrants in extremely housing stress or mentally ill and homeless persons etc.

Any way it is to fear that also this initiative to harmonise the legal basis for the services will miss the important goal of improving the legal and administrative frameworks of the services for the homeless.

NATIONAL LAW ON HOMELESSNESS AND PROVISIONS AND SERVICES FOR THE HOMELESS – NOT TO EXPECT!

The NAPIncl fills a lot of pages with elementary issues of social security and social inclusion but is not able to build up a system of goals, strategies and / or a timetable when respectively if any of the mentioned plans and visions will be realized or not. This is also fact according to homelessness as well as to the provisions and services for the homeless.

As a summary it is to be stated that the NAPIncl does not give any reason for hope on future measures and / or improvements in the range of homelessness. Therefore it is not to expect that in this period of legislation there will be any initiative at national level to establish a general law on provisions and services for the homeless.

So the prospects are quite simple:

- There is no hope to develop / build up an Austrianwide survey on homelessness to get better numbers and knowledge about homelessness – the Austrian government is simply not interested!
- We cannot expect any improvements in the range of the regional laws on social benefits as the legal frameworks for the services for Homeless
- It is not to think of legal and / or administrative frameworks which can improve federal and austrianwide provisions for the prevention of evictions (which concerns yearly almost 3% of the tenancy contracts).
- As it has been all the years up to now the services for the homeless in Austria will continue to struggle at a local and / or regional level to improve standards, means and measures for the benefits of their homeless clients.

The NAPIncl just proofs – I am sorry – as a fake!