

The demographics of the homelessness population in  
Hungary  
„Short paper” for CUHP

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## **1. Introduction**

In the first Hungarian short paper we listed the following relevant studies in last 5-6 years:

- (i) yearly survey of homeless people in Budapest from 1999 on (the yearly survey),
- (ii) survey on homelessness in 2001-2002 (the survey on homelessness),
- (iii) the analysis of the health care system for homeless people, 2001 (the health care system),
- (iv) complex pilot program to support the reintegration of homeless people into the labour market, 2001 (the complex pilot program),
- (v) the analysis of homeless providing institutions in 1997 (the homeless institutions),
- (vi) the empirical research of homelessness in 1997 (the network research).

These studies used the 'narrow definition' of the homelessness that meant they examined rough sleepers and persons who live in shelters, but not those who are at risk of becoming homeless (but probably there are some interviewed people who belong to this last group).

There are basic differences of the aims, the targeted sub-populations and the methods among the researches. One of them, the report on health care system for homeless will not be discussed here because of its topic and method focused on the operation (demand and supply) of the health services system, not the service users, the homeless people themselves.

The structure of the current report is the following:

In the first chapter we compare the researches using the suggested table (Table 1).

In the second chapter we describe the main results of the studies and eventually we outline the current status of the homeless services, and policies.

In the Appendix two brief reports on homelessness are presented that were summarized by three experts of homeless research for this session of the project.

**Table 1 Comparison of the point in time researches on homelessness**

	<b>The yearly survey</b>	<b>The survey on homelessness</b>	<b>The complex pilot program</b>	<b>The homeless institutions</b>	<b>The network research</b>
Method of sampling	<p>No sample, the aim was to ask all people belonging to target groups: homeless who live in night and temporary shelters, rough sleepers who used tea-service at stands set up at railway stations and busy junctions in the city; and persons found in the streets by the "crisis car" – a mobile service for the homeless.</p> <p>From 1999 on, every 3rd of February between 5 PM and 12 PM in Budapest</p>	<p>Sampling of personnel interviews with 150 young homeless and 408 other homeless</p> <p>The questionnaire for managers of the service providing institutions was sent to all night and temporary shelters - two third of the questionnaires were completed and sent back (all cities above 50 000 inhabitants have sent back answers).</p>	<p>Sixteen homeless providing institutions of four regions and labour centers in concerned counties who are responsible for services of unemployed people participated in the pilot program.</p>		<p>The sample consisted of 2180 people who were interviewed during the Mobile Prevention of Hungarian Maltese Charity Service that was taken on mobile lung screening bus. The examination was conducted through the year, since 1997 February. The examination was conducted in 12 different places mostly during the winter time and spring, as homeless people use during this period not only shelters but heated day-time shelters and public areas as well.</p>
Number of participants	<p>2500 homeless who live in shelters, and 360 rough sleepers (in 2001)</p>	<p>150 homeless under 30 years were interviewed, examining the habits of using the shelters 408 homeless people were asked in 9 settlements</p> <p>data of 122 night and temporary shelters and 51 day-shelters were collected and analysed.</p>	<p>The 1200 applicants and the selected 317 participants were interviewed.</p>	<p>47 homeless care institutions were examined, among them 29 were located in Budapest, the other 16 in the agglomeration of Budapest and two in medium sized towns near to Budapest.</p>	<p>2180 people</p>

	<b>The yearly survey</b>	<b>The survey on homelessness</b>	<b>The complex pilot program</b>	<b>The homeless institutions</b>	<b>The network research</b>
Instruments and procedures	<p>15 blocks of questions in the questionnaire, that were asked personally by the social workers working in homeless providing system</p> <p>The questionnaire consists of two part: (1) basic demographic data, (2) special blocks, which aim to explore different problems each year.</p>	<p>Personnel interviews with young and elder homeless,</p> <p>Questionnaire for managers of institutions</p> <p>Records on users of shelters</p>	<p>Those 1200 homeless who wanted to participate in the program were asked to fill a datasheet (education, profession, working career, working experiences, opinions on his place on the labour market, health, social status), motivation tests (social connections, motivations, safety needs) and they were personally interviewed as well (needs and tasks of satisfying of needs). Eventually 317 homeless were selected to participate in the program, and all of them were interviewed again.</p>	<p>The survey was conducted by a questionnaire filled out by managers of the institutions.</p> <p>Analysing records on users of shelters.</p>	<p>The homeless people filled a questionnaire during the time of examination.</p>
Limitations of the study	<p>The managers of 3 shelters did not cooperate with the team, which meant 300 homeless people were not asked in those shelters in 2001.</p> <p>There are no – representative - data on the number of street dwellers.</p>	<p>One third of the shelters did not answer the questionnaire.</p> <p>Representativeness of the survey examining the young and elder homeless.</p>		<p>The collected data on shelters and other institutions cover only three counties in central part of Hungary.</p>	

	<b>The yearly survey</b>	<b>The survey on homelessness</b>	<b>The complex pilot program</b>	<b>The homeless institutions</b>	<b>The network research</b>
Comparisons	The 'basic data' of the questionnaire can be compared with the Census data, other statistical data and surveys. The data of 'special blocks' can be compared with some special national surveys (personal networks, health condition).	Research on homelessness that was made by Pro Domo Methodological Center in 1997.  The homeless institutions (in fifth column of this table)		The survey on homelessness (in third column)	The social-demographic data of the homeless can be compared to other surveys (ex. the yearly survey) on homelessness testing the "representativity" of the survey.

## **2. Summary of the main results of the researches**

### **2.1. Yearly survey of homeless people in Budapest from 1999 on<sup>1</sup>**

From 1999 on, every 3rd of February between 5 pm and 12 pm the homeless population in Budapest is surveyed (Bényei-Gurály-Mezey-Gyori, 1999, 2000, 2002). Almost all service providers in the capital participated in the research:

- the social workers make interviews with their clients in all night and temporary shelters,
- the stations of the 'mobile tea-services' which distribute tea, foods and warm clothes for homeless in different points of Budapest, the people are asked to fill out the questionnaire during the time of waiting<sup>2</sup>,
- the social workers visit those public spaces where they know that homeless live (street social workers and staff of the 'crisis car').

Below the main results of the survey conducted in 2001 concerning the socio-demographic features of the homeless population is presented:

The 4/5 of the homeless people are men and only the 1/5 is women, this distribution has been basically the same since the yearly survey was started. Regarding their age, the homeless typically are middle aged between 30-60 years old (78%). It is very important that the phenomenon of child homelessness practically does not exist and the proportion of the minor aged young people is also very low, which is due to the existence of the strong child protection system. The older people, over 60 years old are also represented in the homeless population in Budapest but with much lower share than their average share in the population.

The education level in general is not worse than the average, the specific feature is that the ones with vocational school is considerably over-represented among the homeless. However, examining their profession, it can be seen that these professions are the less competitive ones.

Regarding the health condition of the homeless population, 44 % of the people reported working disability, which can be considered very high. As a consequence, half of them has no working income and one-sixth of the homeless has no income at all. The main sources of their income are some kind of local benefits and one third receives regular social security (pension, or pension for disabled).

Despite of their very unfavourable income position almost half of them has some kind of working income, which is much higher proportion than the public opinion estimates generally.

The main reason for becoming homeless was identified as family reasons such as divorce or other separation form from the family; two-third of the homeless reported such reasons. The other main reason was the "economic reasons" that meant for example that someone was not able to pay the rent, or lost the accommodation that was provided by the employer etc. One-third of the homeless people indicated

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<sup>1</sup> For the more detailed description of the survey and its main results see the Appendix: Péter Gyori: A Survey on Homelessness in Budapest in 2001

<sup>2</sup> They could not asked all people who waited for foods, it did not cover the whole population.

economic reasons for becoming homeless. The third most important reason, which characterized one-tenth of the cases was the displacement from a state care institution (state orphanage, prison, hospital etc).

## **2.2. Survey on homelessness in 2001-2002**

The Ministry of Social and Family Affairs ordered the research of homeless providing services and groups of homeless people (Gyuris, 2002). The researchers interviewed 150 homeless under 30 years, collected and analysed data of 122 night and temporary shelters and 51 day-shelters. A questionnaire was sent to all night and temporary shelters - two third of the questionnaires were completed and sent back (all cities above 50 000 inhabitants have sent back answers). Examining the habits of using the shelters 408 homeless people were asked in 9 settlements.

The main aims of the research were the following:

- analysing the current situation of the providing system and confront it with the legislations,
- researching the demands for and comparing the supply in the providing system,
- analysing the circumstances of young homeless under 30 years (reasons of homelessness, living conditions, habits, effectiveness of services),
- effectiveness of services in reintegration of homeless people.

*Most important results of the research:*

The number of shelters slowly increased in the last years, but the quality of their operation did not change. Only 10% of the institutions fully satisfy the quality requirements set by the legislation, 20% of the total number of beds is threatened by closing down. The shelters are crowded and the number and skilled level of workers are lower than regulated.

Every seventh homeless can get a bed in a shelter on national average; the situation is worse in big cities where the number of homeless to beds ratio changes between 13 and 33.

The services for women and young homeless are imperfect.

Only two third of the concerned local governments operates day-shelters and only one third of them has enough street social workers, as required by regulation.

The majority of the young homeless has left their homes because of conflicts in their family (physical, mental abuse). The lack of access to any housing solution leads to homelessness.

Half of the people in temporary shelters are homeless people, who are unable to work, who should live in shelters giving permanent accommodation or sanitary institutions. The other half of them has work and incomes, which means that if they were given relevant housing allowance they could rent rooms or flats on the housing market.

The institutions can hardly reintegrate their clients. Those who became homeless get few help and the main direction of their mobility is towards (in) shelters and not out of the homeless life.

The probability of the reintegration is very low, based on data only about one seventieth of the homeless could get access to the lowest segment of the housing market.

### **2.3. Complex pilot program to support the reintegration of homeless people into the labour market, 2001**

Sixteen homeless providing institutions of four regions and labour centers of in concerned counties who are responsible for services of unemployed people participated in the pilot program. The 1200 applicants who wanted to participate in the program were asked to fill a datasheet (education, profession, working career, working experiences, thoughts on his place on the labour market, health, social status), motivation tests (social connections, motivations, safety needs) and they were personally interviewed as well (needs and tasks of satisfying of needs). Eventually 317 homeless people were selected to participate in the program, and all of them were interviewed in the framework of research by National Institution of Family and Social Policy (Ladányi - Gyuris, 2002).

The aim of the pilot program was to support the employment of homeless people in the labour market and their reintegration into the society by the establishment of cooperation among the state, non-profit and economic sectors. To reach this strategic aim the selection methods of homeless people and the methods of their preparation for work and for restructuring their lifestyle were elaborated during the model program. The tools, which help the homeless people to appear and stay permanently in the labour market also had to be developed in the framework of the program.

#### *1. The main results of the survey that examined the 1200 applicants for the program:*

The  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the applicants was men and  $\frac{1}{4}$  was women that meant that the women were over-represented among the applicants compared their share to the homeless population. The applicants average age was 43-44 years old that coincides the other more general homeless survey but considerably lower than the national average 46,3. The highest share was represented by the 40-49-age cohort but younger age group (18-29) was represented with a high share (20%), higher than their share in the homeless population.

The social features of the young homeless group showed a very unfavourable picture:  $\frac{2}{3}$  of them had no profession at all and  $\frac{1}{4}$  of them was never employed. 60% of the 18-24 years old people did not have any income (neither from work nor from social security) at the time of the survey. Almost half of the young homeless lived in the street or in night shelters.

The distribution of the applicants according to their education reflects the general tendency of the entire homeless population, namely the share of those who have completed vocational school or training is very high (48%) and only few of them had no completed elementary school. However their professions were among the less competitive ones, connected mainly to heavy industrial branches. The other very unfavourable feature that  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the applicants reported some kind of working disabilities.

Regarding their labour market situation, 12% was employed and had regular working income, 34% was registered unemployed, but 30% did not have any kind of income

at the time of the survey. Half of the applicants received unemployment benefit before but they “disappeared” from the provision gradually.

Motivation indicators also were measured among the applicants. Almost everyone wanted to participate in the program because they thought they would have better chances to solve their housing situation and to ensure the basic goods for themselves. 80% of the applicants said that it was important to enjoy their work and 67% said that it was also important to feel that they are useful member of the society.

## *2. The main findings of the survey of the actual participants of the model program (317 persons):*

Gender distribution of the participants: 77% men, 23 % women. According to their family status 43% is divorced, 43 % is single, 13 % is married, but the majority (88%) of them lives alone while only 12 % lives in some kind of partnerships.

Regarding the age distribution of the group, the largest subgroup consists of the 40-49 age category (35%), the groups of 30-39 and 18-29 years old people represented 27 and 25 % respectively, while the smallest group represents the oldest people between 50-59 years old (13%). The group of the young is significantly over-represented among the selected people.

The striking feature of the selected group is that one third of the homeless people started their adult life carrier without family support, 37% of them was grown up in state care institutions.

Regarding the educational level of the group almost half them (44%) have elementary school education, while more than one third (38%) completed some kind of vocational schools. 13% had final exam of high school and almost 2% had university diploma. The intergeneration mobility was also examined, 30 % of the homeless people has the same level of education as their father, 36% has higher, while 25% has lower education. The upwards mobile people generally have vocational school, while their father only completed elementary school, and its reverse is true for the downwards people.

Regarding their housing carrier, it was shown that on the average they lived in smaller, more crowded, more substandard housing than the average of the whole society. The worst housing in that they lived was the house where they lived for most of their childhood, which indicates that they mainly came from lower class family, with less capital than the average. Almost all of them (94%) moved from the house of their childhood and the majority lived in better housing situation afterwards. However, according to the different age groups, it can be stated that the elder people mainly experience the exclusion from the housing market (they had home as an owner, tenant before), while as for the young they cannot even enter to the housing market, they live outside of the market in different institutions or on the edge of the market (in sublettings, night-lodgers etc).

Regarding the length of their homeless carrier almost one third of the people became homeless in one year and another one third spent five years or longer time in homeless existence. The majority of the young became homeless in two years.

The main reasons for homelessness were the family conflicts, difficult financial situation and divorce, and less dominant but still significant reasons were the loss their sublettings and the leave of the state care institutions because of the age of consent.

Half of the homeless people, mainly people over 30 years old have not had legal employment for more than five years, while one-fifth has not been employed only less than one year. However two-third of the participants had odd jobs in the last one year. Those who had odd jobs were people mainly with vocational school qualification.

#### **2.4. The analysis of the homeless providing institutions in 1997**

47 homeless care institutions were examined, among them 29 were located in Budapest, the other 16 in the agglomeration of Budapest and two in medium sized town near to Budapest (Budapesti Szociális Forrásközpont, 1997).

The aim of the survey was to examine how the homeless care institutions complete their basic task. The basic task of such institutions was defined as to serve homeless people in meeting their basic needs (such as hygienic needs, autonomy to spend leisure time, sleeping facilities etc) thus compensate them for the circumstances of being homeless that often hurts human dignity. The institutions to complete their task have to meet concrete requirements (physical equipments and qualified stuff) that are defined in the concerning regulation (decree of Ministry of Social Welfare in 1994 (2/1994 (I.30.)).

The survey was conducted by a questionnaire filled out by the institutions. The survey examined:

- status and mobility of homeless people in institutions
- the type of institutions, physical conditions of the buildings, location of the institutions in the settlements, the size of rooms
- the management's attitude toward financing the institution
- the quality of human resources (whether there are enough employees, qualified experts)
- financing of the institutions (techniques and desires)
- the degree to which the institutions meet the legal requirements

#### **2.5. The empirical research of homelessness in 1997<sup>3</sup>**

The Maltese Charity Service conducted a survey in the capital city Budapest among those who participated in the tuberculosis screening that was completed in a special mobile lung –screening bus. The survey was taken in 1997, and the bus visited those places through the year, which were mostly favoured by the homeless population. The survey included a short questionnaire that was asked before the health examination. 2180 people answered the questionnaire. The survey main results concerning the socio-demographic features of the homeless population can be summarized as follows.

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<sup>3</sup> For the more detailed description of the survey and its main results see the Appendix: Fruzsina Albert – Beáta Dávid: If the net breaks ...

The overwhelming majority of the homeless population consists of men, approximately 90 % of the surveyed persons was man. Regarding the age distribution of the examined population, the middle-aged group between 30-49 year old is over-represented compared to the whole population of Budapest, which means 63% and 33% respectively. The group of young people is considerably under-represented, among the homeless it was only 15% opposed to the 27% in the whole population. Examining the education features of the homeless population, in some respects they are more favourable than the ones of the whole population however these data could be compared only to the national data. The share of those who has no completed elementary school is lower among the homeless than the national average (6% and 9% respectively), and the percentage of those who has vocational school is considerably higher (39%) than the national average (15%). However, less homeless people have secondary school degree (15%) or college / university degree (5%) than the average (22% and 12% respectively). According to the survey most of the homeless people live alone, regarding their marital status 45% is divorced, 40% is single and 4% is widow, while half of the capital adult population lives in marriage.

The past social background of the homeless people is much worse than the average that also reflected by the fact that the proportion who ever lived under state care is thirty times higher among the homeless.

One of the main focus of the examination was to map the number and the intensity of homeless people's relationships. Almost 40% of the homeless said that they did not have any interpersonal relationships, only 15% had relationships both among the homeless and non-homeless people and the others had only homeless or only non-homeless contacts. There was an unambiguous connection between the number and the intensity of relations with non-homeless people and the time spent in homelessness: the longer period being homeless the less "external" relations someone had. The age of the homeless also matters; the younger and the more qualified people tend to have more relations than the elder ones.

### **3. Access to services and policies**

#### **3.1. Service system for homeless in Hungary**

The 1993 Law on Social Management and Social Security (later Social Law) determines the different services for homeless and those who are responsible for providing the services. The homeless providing systems have to be developed and operated by the local governments, except in Budapest where the City Municipality is responsible for doing that. But every local government has to provide a shelter, food and 'temporary financial aid' for a homeless if the safety of his or her life/health are at risk.

Based on the Law the following services are operated (**Table 2**):

##### **1. Shelters**

- Night shelters, free service for night stay,
- Temporary shelters, long term accommodation, the fee depends on the income of the client,

- Nursing homes for the homeless, long term accommodation for those who cannot be housed in temporary shelter because of their physical, psychological, mental condition. The fee depends on the income of the client.
- Rehabilitation institutions for those homeless who are willing to participate in the rehabilitation process, the fee depends on the income of the client,

## 2. Other services

- Street social work: searching the homeless, providing them with information, helping them to get into a hospital if necessary, 'mobile tea-service', 'crisis car'. These services are free of charge.
- Day shelters: free service during the day time,
- Communal kitchens, free warm food, served on streets.

## 3. Other services, which are not regulated in the Social Law

- information office, free of charge,
- public bath, free of charge,
- health care services, free of charge
- mobile health provision (general practitioners, filtering of tuberculosis, ambulance),
- special 'crisis' and 'convalescence' departments for homeless patient and convalescents,
- 'protected shelters', 'half-way flats, houses' to support the homeless' reintegration into the society.

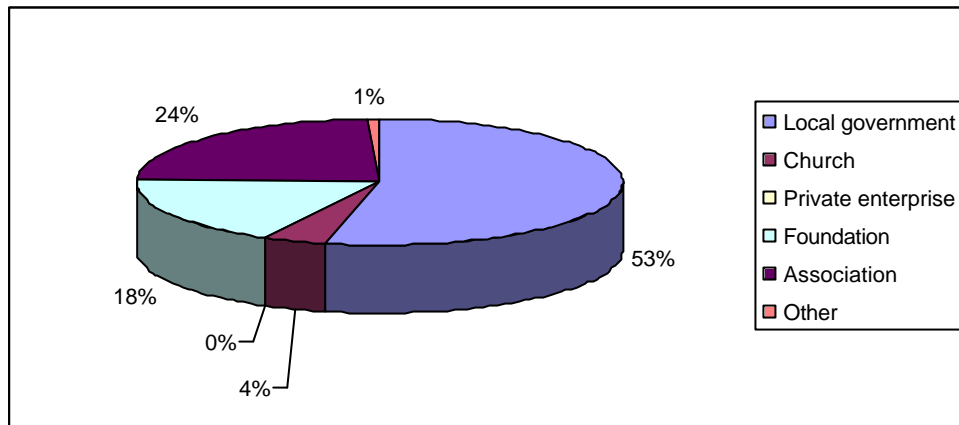
**Table 2 Some capacity data on homeless providing services in November 2002**

	Hungary	
	Number of buildings	Number of beds / capacity (persons)/ workers
Night shelters		7550
Temporary shelters		
Rehabilitation institutions	11	310
Nursing homes	4	125
Day shelters	70	3600
Street social workers	-	50
General practitioners	-	9

Source: Press conference of Miklós Vecsei, the Commissioner Of Homelessness and the Vice President of Hungarian Maltese Charity Service in November 2002.

The role of the non-profit sector is decisive in providing for the homeless in Hungary. They make public-service contracts with local governments as Figure 1 shows, about 46% of the homeless were accommodated in shelters run by NGOs in 2001.

**Figure 1 Number of residents in long- and short term residential social institutions by maintainer in Hungary, 2001**



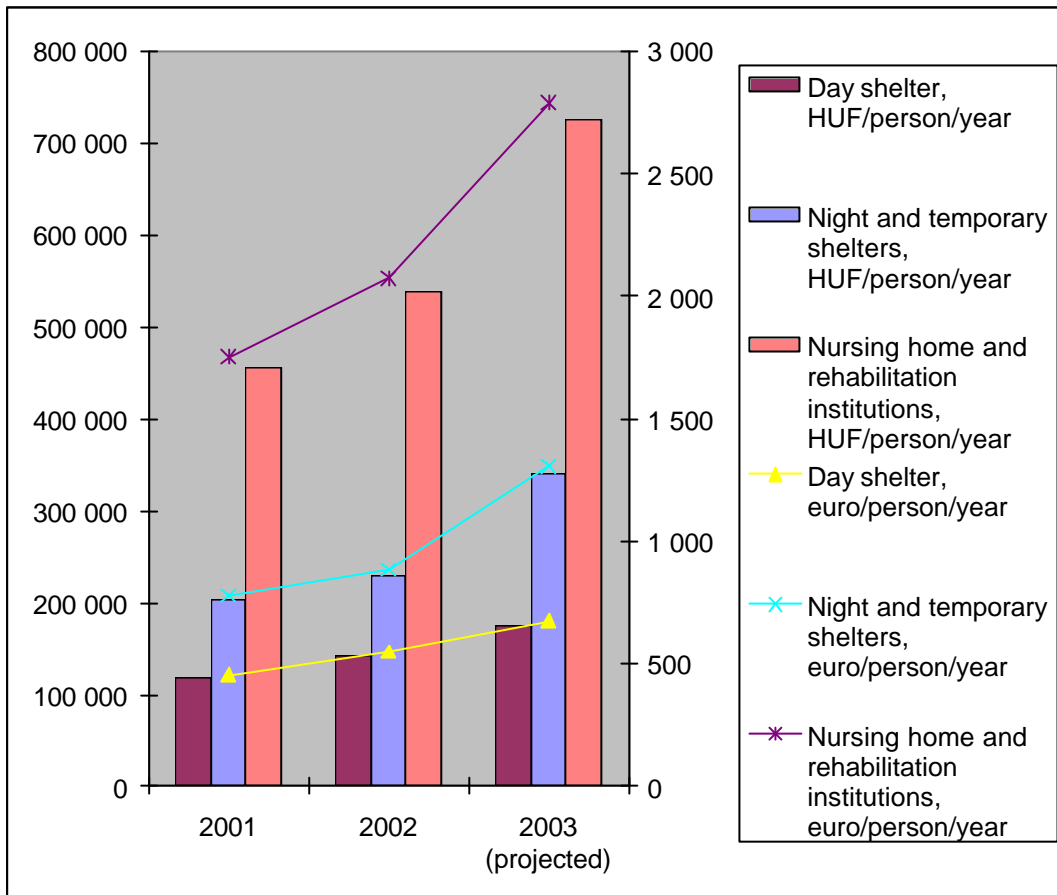
Source: Statistical Yearbook of Hungary, 2001,

The Social Law defines two forms of social subsidies, services that should play a significant role in the prevention of homelessness: housing allowance and arrears management, the latter meaning financial subsidy and consultancy for households being in arrears. The housing allowance is financed by the central budget with normative grants, but the local governments determine the eligibility criteria and the monthly amount of the subsidy. So in principle, there are as many different subsidy systems as local governments. Due to the underfinancing of the housing allowances system and of the whole sector of local governments, many low-income families, who cannot afford to pay housing expenditures, can not get that subsidy. The service for households in arrears is a new institution that hopefully will be able to manage effectively and efficiently the huge amount of arrears.

Experts estimate that half of the homeless population, about 7-10 thousand people, lives in Budapest. From the total 8000 beds of the shelters, there are approximately 3600 in Budapest. Around half of them is maintained by non-profit organizations, while the other half is maintained by the Budapest Municipality. Besides maintaining shelters, the Municipality provides cash subsidies for the homeless, based on the regulations of the Social Law. According to this law, the districts should grant the basic personal provisions and daily provisions for the homeless (daily shelter, communal kitchen, information office, public bath). The Municipality makes public-service contracts with NGOs and has a homeless institution that provides different services (Methodological and Social Center of Budapest and Its Institutions, shortly the BMSZKI).

The central government gives normative grants for financing the homeless institutions (see their yearly amounts on Figure 2).

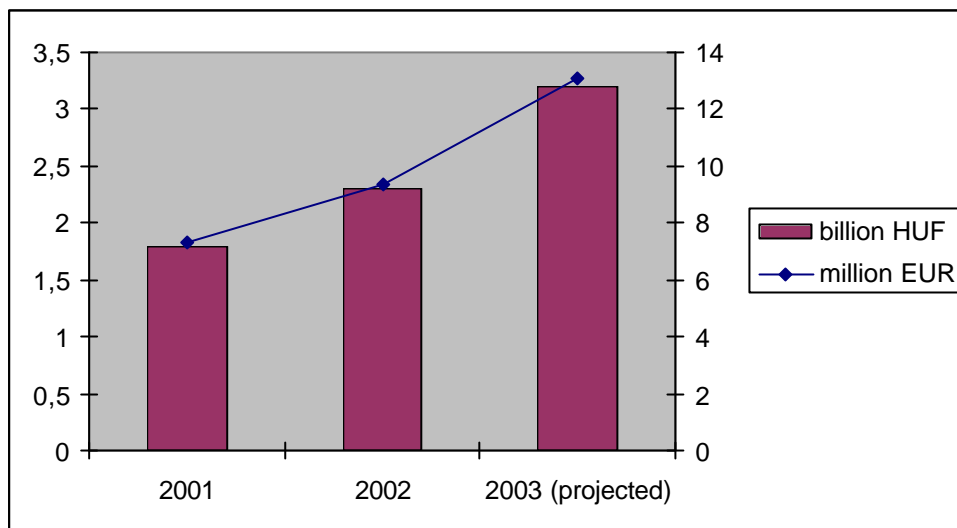
**Figure 2 The normative grants for operating the different types of shelters, in HUF/person/year and euro/person/year**



Beside the normative grants the Ministry of Health, Social and Family Affairs regularly invites tenders to develop and operate the service system, mainly in winter periods.

The expenditure of the homeless providing system in the central budget amounts to approximately 3,2 billion HUF (12,3 million euro) in 2003, which means that it was almost doubled since 2001 (Figure 3) and it will probably increase further in 2004 as well.

**Figure 3 State sources pending on 'effective homeless' between 2001-2003**



Source: Press release of Miklós Vecsei, the Commissioner Of Homelessness and the vice president of Hungarian Maltese Charity Service in November 2002.

The Municipality of Budapest supplements the state sources of NGOs. In 2001 it distributed

- subsidies for undetermined periods,
- subsidies adding a 30% supplement to the state normative grants for contracted NGOs that operate shelters and
- other types of subsidies which are distributed by bids (e. g. form the Solidarity Fund of the Budapest Municipality).

The budget to finance homeless services, without the budget of BMSZKI, was 905 million HUF (3,6 million euro) in 2001.

The following items summarize the main problems of homeless providing services based on the opinions of experts in the sector:

- After the period of 'crisis management' in the early 1990s, the established system of shelters and other services has not provided appropriate provisions that could meet the differentiated needs of homeless. The homeless population consists of different subgroups with different needs that requires unlike solutions, services (as Table 2 shows for example the very low numbers of rehabilitation institutions and nursing homes for elderly homeless).
- The current regulations of the homeless providing services resulted in such a situation that mmmany people become and remain homeless. The tools of prevention are weak, inefficient, and often are not able to save the people who are at risk of becoming homeless.
- Those homeless who are ready to exit from homelessness but currently live in temporary or 'protected' shelters, cannot move out and cannot enter to the housing market. There are no ways to leave the shelters, not even if somebody has a work, a regular income and is not a substance addict

because of inadequate housing allowance system and the low proportion of social rental sector.

- More and more young people and families have been becoming homeless, but the institutional system cannot manage their specific problems and re-integration.
- In many cases the distribution of responsibilities and tasks among the different sectors (social, health care, employment, etc.) is not defined clearly that considerably contributes to the increase of homelessness.
- The service sector focuses on the sheltered homeless people but not on rough sleepers on the streets. The capacity of day services (day shelters, street social work, communal kitchens) is low and is developing too slowly.
- The local governments do not provide all those services that they should according to the Social Law.
- The service units (shelters etc.) are in very bad condition, the institutions are usually overcrowded, the personal security is on a very low level in night shelters; therefore part of the homeless avoids these shelters. Furthermore, the number, the education level and the personal, professional skills of the institution staff are not defined by legal regulations, the wage of the staff is among the lowest comparing other sectors of economy. The regular supervision of social workers and assistants is also an unsolved problem. These facts often result in professionally inadequate services.
- Because of the services are underfinanced, the operating costs are often paid from funds, originally intended to finance developments.

### **3.2. Policies and strategies: continuity and the necessity of fundamental change**

On practical level, the current homeless providing system and the related researches determine the future policy tasks of. These tasks are well described in the background study on social policy for National Development Plan (ESzCsM Szociális Stratégiai Önálló Osztály, 2002). The most important tasks are as follows:

- to strengthen the services, provisions (e.g. day time services) for rough sleepers, for those who are living on the streets, in public spaces or in places not appropriate for human habitation, besides helping the sheltered or hospitalized homeless,
- to develop tools for managing the problem of young homeless and homeless families,
- to develop the tools of prevention and of re-integration of the homeless on both country and local level,
- in order to reduce the size of homelessness, instead of delegate it to the competency of social policy, the problem of homelessness must be regarded as a complex policy task, which requires the cooperation of social, housing, employment, child protection, education and criminal policies,
- to get reliable and valid data on homeless people in order to develop and implement the above mentioned tasks.

The social policy of the new government has been focusing more on the issue of homelessness since 2002, this fact is supported by the nomination of Miklós Vecsei, the Vice President of Hungarian Maltese Charity Service as the Commissioner of Homelessness in November 2002. His main tasks are the following:

- to co-ordinate the cooperation between the Ministry of Health, Social and Family Affairs and the service providers in the winter crisis period. To find solution to unexpected problems in wintertime.
- To develop reform proposals concerning the regulation and financement of the homeless services. In order to fulfil this task the commisioner works together with professional experts and with the representatives of the homeless population.
- To help to strengthen the social solidarity by giving comprehensive information to the public.

The new mentality of the ministry can be demonstrated by the following facts:

- the normative grant for homeless providing services increased from 828 million to 1108 million HUF (the increase is 34%) in 2003,
- 590 million HUF (2,2 million euro) will be spent on homeless service development in 2003.
- The minister of social affairs declared that all the infrastructure of the ministry - health and social institutes, the former hospital of the ambulance, garage of the ministry, etc. - can be used in order to decrease the dangers threatening the life of homeless people.

On a 'theoretical level', the intended changes in the homeless service system are part of a more general shift in the social policy. The experts and the policy makers agree that the Social Law of the transition period is not able to solve the current social problems and there it is inevitable to elaborate a completely new one. As a part of this process a new concept for the homeless policy is being developed. The authors of the above mentioned background paper aim to reform the current service system based on the actual number of beds and to open the 'upper level' of shelters and to develop a 'bottom level' of services. It means that on the one hand, those homeless who are able to leave the temporary shelters have to be motivated and financially supported to rent flats or rooms in the housing market, on the other hand the services for rough sleepers have to be made much more effective.

In accordance with the new ideas of service system the Ministry starts a pilot program to subsidize those homeless people who leave shelters and rent flats or sub-let a room in a flat from someone. The subsidy covers only about 50% of the cost of the cheapest rental flats in the private rental market (15-17 thousand HUF per month) for six months, but the amount can be increased with additional subsidies as well.

Simultaneously, experts of the Budapest Municipality are trying to develop a new approach concerning the homeless care institution system (Gurály, Gyori, Mezei, Pelle, 2002). This new approach already includes the more complex concept of homelessness: homeless people need not only a place to sleep, but also security, social relations, partnerships, intimacy, autonomy to form their own daily routine etc. The current institution system is not able to provide services that fit into the every day life of the majority of homeless people. Therefore these existing institutions quite

generally have unused capacity. These new attempts try to transform the institution system in such a way that takes into account more the real needs of the homeless people.

Homelessness has been analysed since it became visible again in 1989. The researchers were managing several, smaller or bigger independent researches in the subsequent ten years, which described the homeless populations in the shelters and in the streets, the users of different services, the operation and staffs of the institutions. There were only few co-operations among the researchers, the different 'schools of social work' that impeded the implementation of regular and comprehensive researches on homelessness. The yearly survey of the homeless people in Budapest from 1999, the analysis of networks of the homeless and the research of the complex pilot program to support the reintegration of homeless into the labour market opened a new period of researches, which could take us closer to understand the homeless population. Hopefully the questions concerning of the role of individual, the psychological factors will be answered with full particulars in the future.

The researches that have been made so far are able to describe the basic sociological features of the homeless population, to give information on general and specific needs for the homeless people, to analyse the operation of services for homeless. In this sense the researches can be seen as policy oriented works.

There is no middle- and long-term homeless policy yet therefore new concepts of the homelessness and the new Social Law is being developed. During the transition period the homeless providing system has been established, the quantitative capacity of the system seems to be enough to satisfy the needs, however the quality of the institutions, and the services for special sub-groups (youth, women, elderly and ill homeless, persons who are willing to participate in rehabilitation process) still have to be developed. The system has already managed the phenomena of homelessness somehow, but its operation is strongly impeded by the lack of cooperation between other parts of social services and other sectors, such as housing, labour, child protection, etc. One of the weakest points of the social safety net is that it cannot secure people to fall down to homelessness and cannot help their reintegration into the society. For example the state cannot afford / does not want to finance the costs of an effective housing allowance system. Interestingly no efforts have been made to explore and support those groups who are at risk of homeless. (For example, the households, which accumulated big amount of arrear – the 7% of all households - are at risk of homelessness, obviously not all of them will become homeless, but there are several ones who are at real risk).

The - not existing – long term homeless policy should face with the dilemma that it tries to substitute the deficiencies of social and other sectors or to stay in the role of a professional crisis manager.

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## 5. Appendix

### 5.3. Péter Gyori: A Survey of the Homeless in Budapest in 2001<sup>4</sup>

#### Sampling Methodology:

An average winter day, 3rd February was selected for taking the survey in each year.

The target group of the survey was homeless people living in Budapest: more accurately, all persons coming to one of the temporary homeless hostels or night shelters in Budapest; sleepers in public areas who came to have some tea and sandwiches at stands set up at railway stations and busy junctions in the city within the frames of the „winter crisis action” program; and persons found in the streets by the “crisis car” – a mobile service for the homeless.

Three of the homeless shelters, with a combined capacity of three hundred beds, refused to participate in the survey. Participating homeless shelters operated 2800 beds that night. 2500 of their clients answered the questionnaire.

In addition, 360 of persons getting tea and sandwiches distributed in railway stations and busy public places within the frames of the „winter crisis action” and of those found in the streets by the crisis car agreed to being interviewed.

These limitations taken into account, the survey is to be regarded as fully covering users of homeless shelters while only partially street sleepers. In the latter, however, interviewers did not record the number of refusals.

In terms of its purpose, this research is a survey without separate sampling.

#### The questionnaire and interviewing:

The research is directed by a team consisting of several members (sociologists, social politicians and social workers), who are responsible for specifying the focus of the research, compiling the questionnaire, organizing interviews and taking care of processing and analyzing data.

Interviews are conducted on this single day by social workers, who work in the homeless hostels and shelters and in street services where the interviewed homeless are clients. The comparison of the subsequent annual surveys as well as with some other databases available (records of institutions) suggests that the survey is adequate.

Member of the research team are highly experienced experts, who work in the research and methodological units of various civil and municipal institutions for the homeless. The research basically is financed by the Budapest Municipality, and participating civil organizations contribute if necessary.

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<sup>4</sup> The summary is based on: **Zoltán Bényei, Zoltán Gurály, Péter Gyori and György Mezei**: After ten years. Report on the Homeless in Budapest, 1999. Esély, 2000/1.

**Zoltán Gurály, Péter Gyori, György Mezei and József Pelle**: On the Periphery. The Homeless in Budapest at the Turn of the Century (1999 - 2000 - 2001) : Esély, 2002/3.

The questionnaire and data sheet consists of about 15 groups of questions, including constant ones (basic data for temporal comparison) as well as special panels concentrating on specific topics that change year by year. Some of the basic data (age, sex, education etc.) are comparable with the census data taken every ten years as well as with regional statistical and demographical data. Data in some of the special panels can be compared with data of sociological research involving national representative samples (network of relationships), and with special national representative surveys (health).

In Hungary, there has not been a similar national research of the homeless conducted.

### **Basic demographical data obtained from the research on the homeless in Budapest, 3rd February 2001**

Data presented in the paper include respondents found both in institutions and in public areas.

Four fifths of the homeless in the capital city are men while one fifth are women. Their respective shares are essentially the same in those sleeping in shelters and outdoor. It appears that the capacity of institutions for men and women is largely adequate for the share of sexes in the total homeless population. It is also to be noted that the male/female proportions have not changed significantly over the years and seem to be fairly constant.

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Number of persons</b>	<b>%</b>
Men	2118	84
Women	400	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>2518</b>	<b>100</b>

The breakdown of the homeless by age shows that child-homelessness is not typical in Hungary, and in particular in Budapest; even minors rarely show up as homeless. Apart from society's general cultural behavior towards children, it is prevented by Hungarian child welfare institutions and regulations: should a child become orphan or runaway or expelled by his/her family, the child protection authorities takes care of the child by placing him/her in a children's home or with foster parents. Up to their age of 18, children are in state care statutorily.

The breakdown by age also shows that while persons over 60 are present among the homeless, their share is much smaller than in the total population. (However, analyzing the causes is out of this paper's scope). The typical age for the homeless in Budapest seems to be 30 to 60 (78%).

<b>Age (years old)</b>	<b>Number of persons</b>	<b>%</b>
Under 19	7	0.3
20 to 29	239	9.5
30 to 39	509	20.0
40 to 49	775	31.0
50 to 59	680	27.0
60 to 69	246	9.8
Over 70	52	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2508</b>	<b>100</b>

Information from the survey taken in 2001 shows that the breakdown of the homeless by education is not worse than that of the non-homeless population. The share of those having less than or only primary education in the total population is larger than in the homeless, while the share of the homeless with a vocational training tends to be larger than that of the total population. (However, more detailed analyses have shown that these vocations are generally unmarketable and obsolete).

<b>Education</b>	<b>Number of persons</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than primary education (8 grades)	110	4
Primary education	965	39
Vocational training	965	39
Secondary	325	13
Higher	107	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>2472</b>	<b>100</b>

Somewhat more homeless living in Budapest reported to be able to work, both in terms of age and health, than who reported unable. Compared with the total population, however, the share of homeless unable to work is extremely large (44%). This also closely relates to the fact that the majority (52%) do not have an income directly from work. Every sixth homeless has not any kind of income, for some the main income is a local aid, while a large number of them (one third) live on regular social security payments, or on old age pension or disability pension.

Nearly half of the homeless in Budapest (48%) live on a wage, which is a smaller share than in the total population in the same age group while is much greater than what the public opinion generally thinks about the employment of the homeless.

Health condition	Number of persons	%
Able to work	1313	56
Unable to work	1049	44
<b>Total</b>	<b>2362</b>	<b>100</b>

Sources of income	Number of persons	%
Has no income	394	17
Wage	1118	48
Social security payments	677	29
Aid	157	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>2346</b>	<b>100</b>

Every tenth of the homeless living in Budapest date the beginning of their homelessness at coming out of an institution. This institution most often is a child-welfare one where young people separated from their families may stay up to their age 18, or 24 according to a new regulation; other release institutions can be hospitals or prisons from which the person does not have a place to go as his/her family refuses to let him/her back in their home.

Nearly every third homeless specifies some kind of „economic reason” for becoming homeless, such as not being able to pay the sub-tenancy rent, being evicted, the employer stopped providing housing.

In most cases, however, the direct cause of losing one’s home is a personal or family conflict: divorce or separation of couples; parents, children or heirs throw out the family member, who often is an alcoholic, has become unemployed etc. The shares of causes of homelessness have not changed over the years.

<b>The cause of homeless</b>	Number of persons	%
Personal conflict	1500	62
Economic reason	710	29
Release from institution	205	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>2415</b>	<b>100</b>

One fifth of respondent homeless said that they had been homeless for over ten years while every second reported to be homeless for over five years. Research, however, has suggested that the actual situation is much more complicated. (This discussion is out of the scope of this paper. See reference papers.) An important piece of information in all such surveys is the number of persons becoming homeless over the past 12 months and whether the number of the „new” homeless tends to increase or decrease and whether their mix is different from that of the „older” homeless. These issues, again, can be addressed only by more detailed later analyses.

<b>Period of being homeless</b>	Number of persons	%
Less than one year	324	14.0
Over one year	245	10.0
Over two years	245	10.0
Over three years	220	9.2
Over four years	205	8.5
Over five years	196	8.2
Over six years	157	6.5
Over seven years	122	5.1
Over eight years	121	5.0
Over nine years	96	4.0
Over ten years	472	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2403</b>	<b>100</b>

Respondents were asked several dates as to where they had slept the previous night, the previous week etc. Answers to the question asked in February 2001 on the place of sleeping a year earlier suggest that over half of the homeless in Budapest had been homeless a year earlier too, moreover had slept in homeless shelters. Every tenth respondent lived in an institution mentioned earlier (child care institution, hospital, prison) and a similar share of the homeless spent their nights in public areas (streets) a year earlier; about 20% lived in normal housing.

<b>Place of staying on the same day a year earlier</b>	<b>Number of persons</b>	<b>%</b>
Public area	307	13
Own housing	287	12
Institution	294	12
Homeless shelter	1315	54
Other housing	242	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>2445</b>	<b>100</b>

Information on the current place of staying truthfully reflects the possibilities offered by the homeless care system in Budapest (respective capacities of temporary hostels, night shelters and „boarding institutions” which are designed to provide long term, i.e. life-long accommodation for the homeless). However, the 2001 survey failed to establish the respective shares of homeless staying in institutions and in the streets (as it was mentioned to at the beginning of the paper).

<b>Type of institution</b>	<b>Number of persons</b>	<b>%</b>
Night shelter	1044	41
Temporary hostel	882	35
Boarding institution	266	11
Public area	330	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>2522</b>	<b>100</b>

A most important feature of the homeless assistance system, particularly in Budapest, is the large weight of civil non-local government organizations. Half of the services for the homeless is directly provided by the Budapest Municipality while the other half by non-local government organizations. To provide the services, civil organizations – among them „other” organizations, namely churches – receive central normative transfers supplemented by 30% by the Budapest Municipality. This, however, is a regulative and financing issue outside this discussion.

Maintainer of the shelter	Number of persons	%
Local government	1209	48
Civil	1138	45
Other	175	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>2522</b>	<b>100</b>

### **Some comparative information on the basis of the survey on the homeless in Budapest 3rd February 2001**

Compared to similar surveys in previous years, the breakdown of homeless persons in institutions and in public areas by *age, sex and education* as well as by *temporary and permanent address* of living essentially did not change in 2001. This, however, is quite remarkable as the individuals are not the same ones: **over the three annual surveys, 85% of respondents were different persons.**

Major changes in 2001 compared to earlier surveys was found in the homeless' *health, ability to work and income*. Increasingly more homeless report themselves unable to work, which (and the efforts of helpers) may be the reason why the share of the homeless receiving some kind of social security provisions has increased. At the same time, however, the share of the homeless earning some wage from work has perceptibly grown while the share of those without any income and living on aid has dropped.

### Changes in the breakdown of respondents between 1999 and 2001

	1999 (%)	2001 (%)
Unable to work (%)	34	46
Live on social security payments	28	32
Live on income from work	41	49
No income	20	13
Live on aid	12	6
⇒ Total	100	100
Live in temporary hostel	58	40
Live in night shelter	37	48
Live in boarding institution	5	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Of 2522 persons interviewed 3rd February 2001, 29% participated in the survey a year earlier too while 24% two years earlier and 15% in all three surveys. This clearly shows that the „housing” situation of about one third of the homeless in Budapest – living either in shelters or in the streets – had not changed over the years while over two thirds „went in and out”, not spending years in shelters and the streets uninterrupted.

Relatively few, hardly one tenth of the respondents, reported that they had become homeless and lost housing simultaneously and had not lived in a housing ever since. A larger share (17%) reported that they had become homeless and had first used a shelter simultaneously.

In terms of the above factors, no significant differences were found between younger and older and between men and women. As for education, twice as many of the better educated (24%) go to shelters at the same time as becoming homeless than those with less than primary education (11%).

A very interesting finding, however, is that the longer one is homeless the less frequently it happened that he/she went to a shelter right at the time when becoming homeless, and vice versa: *over the past one or two years, the probability has considerably increased that one goes to find a place in a shelter at the same time as he/she has become homeless.* 39% of those being homeless for not more than one year could find a place in a shelter immediately, and 19% of those homeless for one to two years; only 6% of individuals homeless for over ten years reported that they had gone to a shelter at the same time as becoming homeless.

On average, 21 months have elapsed between becoming homeless and first staying in a shelter<sup>5</sup>. In those who have become homeless over the past year, on average 6 months have elapsed between losing housing and becoming homeless, then only a little over one month before going to a shelter. In those being homeless for 1 to 2 years, the average time span between losing housing and becoming homeless is 9 months, and they first use a shelter in another 4 months. Time spans tend to increase: those who have been homeless for over ten years the difference between losing housing and becoming homeless is 27 months, and had been homeless for 65 months, i.e. over five years on average before first went to a shelter. Here again, education makes a difference: those with less than a complete primary education spent nearly three years (34 months) without housing while not regarding themselves homeless, and first went to a shelter in another three years (34 months), whereas persons with higher education reported themselves homeless only 2 months after losing housing and started to stay in a shelter in 15 months.

**Time between becoming homeless and first staying in a shelter (average, months)**

Groups	Number of months
All respondents	21
Homeless for one year or less	1
Homeless for one to two years	4
Homeless for over ten years	65
Less than complete primary education	34
Higher education	15
Men	22
Women	15
No income	27
Income from work	18
Living in groups/gangs	31
Singles	20

Finally, the summary table shows the main trends in the homeless in Budapest between 1999 and 2001, separately for users of night shelters and of temporary hostels<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Here and in subsequent data, 0 month and simultaneity are excluded and do not feature in the averages.

<sup>6</sup> A detailed analysis of data and of special panels of questions are discussed in papers given as reference.

As a percentage of responding users of night shelters				As a percentage of responding users of temporary hostels		
1999	2000	2001		1999	2000	2001
42.5	41.6	44.4	Average age (years)	45.8	45.3	44.9
24	26	37	Over 50	37	37	37
9	8	8	Women	28	28	24
39	42	41	Primary education or less	51	51	42
13	18	21	Income from social security	39	38	31
64	66	77	How long has been homeless? (number of months)	59	62	67
16	15	12	Homeless for not longer than one year	6	13	15
26	26	21	Homeless for not longer than two years	12	26	26
38	37	31	Homeless for not longer than three years	22	39	36
56	53	62	How many months ago did he/she live in a housing? (number of months)	60	61	67
71	64	63	Became homeless for personal reasons	62	60	60
17	26	28	Became homeless for economic reasons	28	30	31
83	85	80	Single	79	86	77
32	33	30	Has a permanent address in the country side (place of living)	24	24	23
3	4	8	Has a temporary address (place of staying)	1	6	1
72	63	65	Able to work	66	53	50
45	34	30	Has no regular income	17	16	9
42	48	49	Has income from work	43	47	56

#### **5.4. Fruzsina Albert – Beáta Dávid<sup>7</sup>: IF THE NET BREAKS... Homelessness in Budapest from a Network Prospective**

##### **Method of data collection**

Supported by non-profit organisations, a tuberculosis (TB) lung-screening program, launched in the preceding year, was carried on in 1997 among the homeless people of Budapest, Hungary (Dávid-Oross-Vecsei, 1997). The mobile lung-screening bus enabled the program to reach the homeless populations, virtually unapproachable for official institutions (lung-screening facilities), at their most common habitats, to instantly detect ill people and to refer them to adequate institutions. The numerous screenings, conducted continuously for a year at various locations, ensured the feasibility of investigating the homeless population in a number of respects. The screening was carried out in twelve different locations, mostly in winter and spring.

##### **Instruments and procedures**

One of the first steps of the screening was the administration of questionnaires. The length of the questionnaire was primarily determined by the time available for the interview (approximately 2-4 minutes).

The questionnaire is comprised of 5 segments:

- Data relating to the time and location of the interview.
- Detailed socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewed homeless person: sex, age, place of birth, level of education, if/s/he had been in state child care institutions, marital status etc. Originally we intended to inquire about the ethnic origin (namely whether the interviewed person is a Gypsy or not), but finally we decided to follow the procedure of the household panel survey of a major research institute (TÁRKI) and we asked the interviewer to decide himself on the ethnicity of the interviewee.
- Sleeping, eating, bathing and washing habits and money-earning strategies as well as monthly income of the interviewees. Generally in case of all questions, but especially in case of questions regarding sleeping habits it was of major importance to narrow down the answer to the greatest possible degree to increase reliability.
- Precise date of becoming homeless, where the person had lived and in what kind of a habitat before becoming homeless. During the 1996 tuberculosis screening several poor but not homeless people filled in the questionnaire in exchange for the 2 packets of cigarettes or bar of chocolate (a gift/motif for them). With this question we wanted to screen out those who are not homeless, and also those who are, but do not consider themselves to be one. In case someone answered the question „How long have you been homeless”<sup>8</sup> that s/he is not homeless, but

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<sup>8</sup> Three percent of the respondents claimed not to be homeless.

also answered the question „Where do you live” that s/he lived in a friend’s house, we concluded, that the given person is practically homeless. The location of becoming homeless is also important: it does make a difference whether one became homeless after living in a workers’ hostel in Budapest which had been shut down, or came to the capital from the countryside already homeless hoping to be able to make end meet better here. Those who came to Budapest when already homeless were also asked how long they have lived in the capital.

- Although our research focused on interpersonal ties, owing to the hurried interviews, the questions aimed at discovering the egocentric network based on the so-called Fischer method could not be posed. Hence traditional network analysis could not be performed.<sup>9</sup> There are two questions in the questionnaire regarding the personal relationships of the homeless: "How many homeless people do you know by their (full) name?" and "Are there any not homeless people to whom you may turn for help? If there are, who are they?"

### **Number of participants**

The database obtained from the some 2,200 questionnaires made it possible to explore the internal demographic and sociological composition of the homeless population in a sample of considerable size and standard deviation.

#### ***Definition:***

Our research definition intended to trace the group of the effectively homeless, although it is doubtful whether one renting a bed, or those living in hostels are homeless or not. In our definition we considered homeless those who considered themselves to be homeless. Our decision is partly based on the fact that our research does not only include the clients of a certain type of shelter/homeless institution, thus the usage of such a place could not have been a starting point for us. On the other hand the interview situation and the limited content of the questionnaire did not facilitate the collection of data with such a volume and detail based on which we could have sketched a more refined categorisation (reference to the episodic nature of homelessness etc.<sup>10</sup>).

### **Main results**

Nine out of ten homeless people in the sample are men. As regards age, the 30-49-year-old cohort is over-represented in the homeless population, they constitute 63 percent of the whole sample. In terms of education, the homeless population seems to be in a more favourable position as compared to the whole population: in comparison with the adult population, the proportion of those possessing vocational qualifications is nearly three times as high, while the proportion of those who have not completed elementary education is one third of the respective figure.

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<sup>9</sup> Such a questionnaire was also prepared and administered to patients treated in hospital. This sample, however, is small, comprising approximately 50 persons, not to mention the fact that it represents a special segment of the homeless population.

<sup>10</sup> During the interview the respondents had neither advantage nor disadvantage depending on whether they defined themselves to be homeless or not, although the aim of the program was to screen homeless people, but all the applicants were screened regardless of this.

Concerning marital status, the homeless population departs considerably from the Hungarian population. 98 percent of the population under examination live without a family: more than half of the respondents have divorced or live apart from their spouses. 40 percent are singles.

There are considerable differences between homeless men and women: on an average, women have been homeless for a shorter time period, a higher proportion of them had been under state guardianship in their childhood, the proportion of unqualified labour, those with only elementary education is higher among them, more of them have children, the ratio of Gypsies is higher among them.

**Age distribution of the homeless population as compared to the adult population of Budapest (%)**

Age	Homeless population (N=2103)			Adult population in Budapest		
	Male (N=1913)	Female (N=190)	Total	Male (N=718e)	Female (N=891e)	Total
15-29	15	17	15	30	25	27
30-39	24	20	24	14	13	14
40-49	39	40	39	20	18	19
50-59	18	18	18	15	15	15
60 +	4	5	5	21	29	25

**Educational distribution of the homeless population as compared to the Hungarian adult population (above 30 years<sup>11</sup>)(%)**

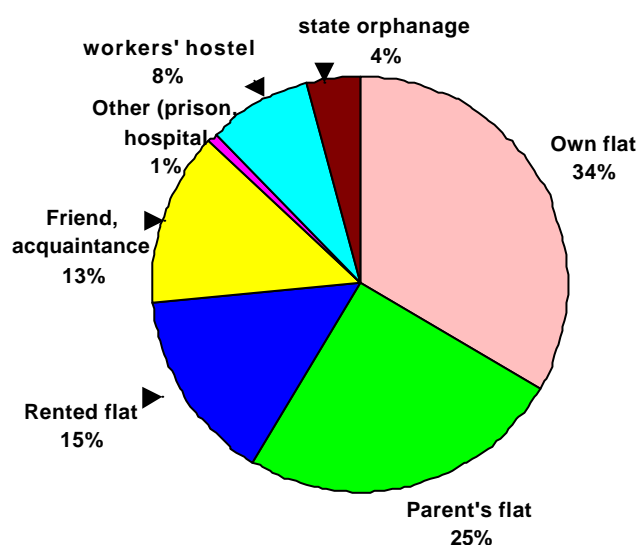
Education	Homeless population (N=1706)			⇒ <i>Hungarian adult population</i>		
	Male (N=1621)	Female (N=155)	Total	Male	Female	Total
Less than 8 grades	6	10	6	14	24	19
8 grades	32	50	34	30	35	32
Vocational	41	17	39	23	8	15
Secondary	16	13	16	19	22	22
College/University	4	8	5	14	10	12

<sup>11</sup> Those above 30 because in case of the younger, the age changes according to school types (15, 18, 25 years)

**Distribution of marital status of the homeless population as compared to the adult population of Budapest (%)**

Marital status	Homeless population (N=2100)			Adult population in Budapest Mikrocenzus, 1996		
	Male (N=1912)	Female (N=188)	Total	Male	Female	Total
Married	2	5	2	56	46	50
<i>Married living separately</i> <sup>12</sup>	8	19	9			
Divorced	45	38	45	9	12	11
Single	41	24	40	31	24	27
Widow/er	3	14	4	4	18	12

**Place of living preceding homelessness (N=1756)**



The demographic and geographical distributions of the unemployed and the homeless populations are quite different in a number of respects: the unemployed are younger, the ratio of women to men is higher among them, and a smaller proportion of them live or reside in Budapest.

<sup>12</sup> Statistics of the general population does not include data regarding those married but living separately. The ratio of such people is quite high among the homeless.

Gypsies, definitely the most disadvantaged group in Hungary as regards education, unemployment and income, are present in the homeless population to a much smaller degree in comparison with their proportion among the poor. In our opinion, there are less homeless people of Gypsy ethnic origin because in considerable sections of the Gypsy society familial/kinship solidarity still prevails and, though under very meagre conditions, can keep community members safe from actual homelessness.

In comparison with the adult population of the same age, the proportion of those who had lived under state care once is *thirty times* higher in the homeless population. Compared to the average, this figure is nearly twice as high within the Romany homeless population.

Approximately two thirds of the homeless people in Budapest were not born in the city.

In Hungary, more than half of the adult population live in marriage. Within the homeless population, this ratio is **2%**. If those in the category "married, living separate" are included as well, this figure is 9%. Comparing the 30-59-year-old cohort of the homeless population (80% of the whole sample) in itself with the whole population of the same age, it is revealed that the ratio of singles among the homeless is almost four times the respective figure pertaining to the whole population. In this age group, nearly 75% of the average population is married.

### ***Being homeless***

The desolation and isolation of homeless people was also confirmed by the data recorded in course of the 1997 TB screening: to our question "Are there any non-homeless people from whom you may ask help?" only less than one third (29%) of the sample answered in the affirmative. 45 percent, 36 percent and 12 percent of non-homeless assistance come from friends, other relatives and parents respectively. We have no data regarding whether friends and acquaintances are "fresh" or remaining older contacts. Social workers were not mentioned by the respondents. In 7 percent of the cases, assistance is lent by children or spouses/partners. A higher proportion of women turn to their spouses, while men are more likely to turn to their friends.

In the questionnaire, there were four<sup>13</sup> more questions in addition to the above mentioned one regarding which the respondents had the opportunity to mention also non-homeless people who can provide support or help for them. 62 percent of the whole sample has a support network of at least one person. In case of the homeless, it seems reasonable to differentiate between contacts with other homeless people and with non-homeless people. The distribution of these within the population under examination is shown by the following chart.

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<sup>13</sup> These questions are the following: "Are there any non-homeless people to whom you may turn for help?", "Where did you sleep last night?", "Where will you sleep today?", "Where did you do your laundry last week" and "Where did you wash last week?" If the respondents mentioned a friend, an acquaintance or a relative regarding any of these questions, they were given a point; this is how our "network" variable ranging from 0 to 5 was constructed. On the variable, those ones scored 0 who had a feeling that they have noone to turn to for help, and could not mention any non-homeless people with whom they are in contact in respect of the situations specified in the questionnaire either. The values between 1 and 4 do not indicate the size of the supportive net, but the number of situations in which one can count on receiving help.

### The interpersonal relationships of homeless people

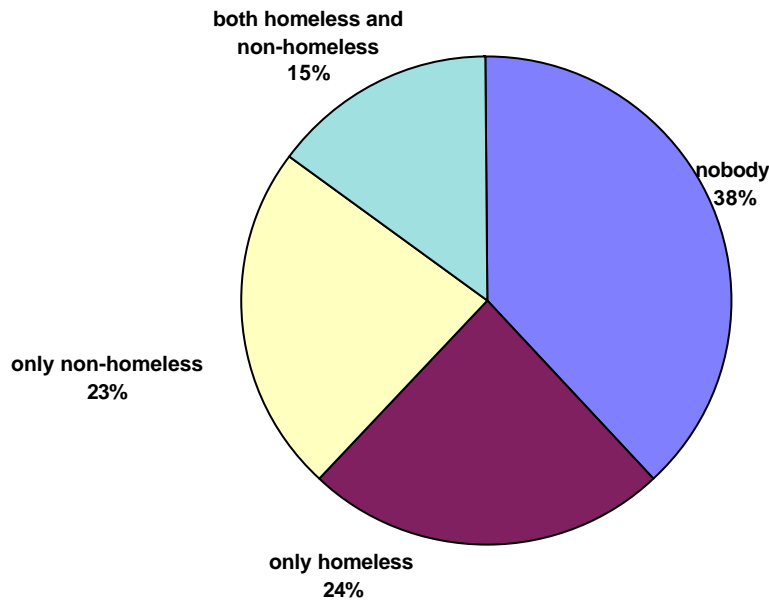


Figure 3 reveals that 38 percent of the homeless people reported no contacts. According to our data, the proportion of those who are in contact with both homeless and non-homeless people is only 15 percent. These four segments of the homeless population – those in contact with both homeless and non-homeless people; those in contact only with non-homeless people; those in contact only with homeless people; and those in contact with none – significantly differ from one another in terms of age, education and the time period spent homeless. Those in contact with homeless as well as non-homeless people are younger, a larger proportion of them had obtained at least vocational qualifications, and they have been homeless for a shorter time. A higher proportion of those in contact with other homeless people earn an informal income, and a considerable proportion of those who can turn to non-homeless people for help can also sleep at their friends' place (34 percent of those mentioning only non-homeless acquaintances, and 26 percent of the ones mentioning homeless people as well, spent the night preceding the day of the interview at a friend's).

Approximately only one of every three respondents can rely on any non-homeless assistance whatsoever. It is not surprising that the number of non-homeless contacts, the chances of receiving "external" help, and the length of the time spent homeless relate negatively to each other: over time the remaining "external" contacts come loose. As regards marital status, the married ones have the most contacts: a higher proportion of homeless women stay in contact with their former spouses, even if they leave their husbands.

Only 38 percent of the whole sample have any homeless acquaintances whom they know by their name. Among them, 27 percent have one, 30 percent have two, and 29 percent have three acquaintances. The average number of named homeless acquaintances is 0.95 in the whole sample, and 2.4 among those mentioning any homeless acquaintances.

### **Limitations of the study**

The socio-demographic characteristics of the homeless in Budapest had not been studied in such a big and diverse sample by 1997, since 1990. At the same time, unfortunately, we have to face the fact that as we do not have precisely comparable data of other deprived, non-homeless populations (the poor, the Gypsies), the distinguishing features of the homeless are difficult to find and are questionable.

Also, the homeless population is a hidden one, with no permanent residence and thus address, so we cannot tell exactly how many people belong to this category, and thus also a traditional representative sample cannot be drawn either. Studies seem to follow two major tracks: 1.: the sample consists of the clients of one/more service providing institutions in a given time-frame, or 2. tries to reach various homeless groups, those in various types of shelters and also those hiding, who are living in the streets or in caves, or with friends, etc. who can be partly reached during the day in public spaces, railway stations and the like. We also followed this latter direction by trying to reach several different homeless groups in various locations of the city.

### References:

Dávid B. – Oross J. – Vecsei M. 1997: *Homelessness and TB*. Soros Foundation, Budapest.