

„Frostschutzengel“ –

Mobile counseling for EU citizens from Central Eastern Europe in low-threshold homeless care institutions in Berlin

Summary of annual report 2013

1. The project „Frostschutzengel“

1.1 Aim and tasks of the project

The aim of the project "Frostschutzengel" is improving the precarious situation of homeless people from Eastern and Central Eastern Europe who use the low-threshold homeless care providers in Berlin and/or prevent their impoverishment. The main tasks consist of

- The support of organizations working in the low-threshold homeless care system when providing care for the target group,
- Establishing ways to mediate between the target group and existing services in Berlin as well as a long-term mediation in individual case work,
- Addressing social needs and claiming potential legal entitlements of individuals through medium-term case work
- Supporting communication between users and workers in institutions operating in the field of low-threshold homeless care.

1.2 Framework

The project "Frostschutzengel"¹ was launched with the start of the "Kaeltehilfe"² in November 2012. The project employs specialized consultants, with normal staff size of 260%: two social workers and one social care support worker. Project staff offer consultation and intervention in Polish, Russian, Bulgarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian and English. "Frostschutzengel" operates at their office located at Mariannenstrasse 21, 10999 Berlin, district Kreuzberg.

The project cooperates with various organizations in the low-threshold homeless care network. In these organizations, regular consultancy appointments and visiting hours are established. Additionally, the project staff is able to provide individual consultation and support intervention in various other organizations per request of those organizations.

¹ The name "Frostschutzengel" (literally "frost protection angel") follows the idea of the "Kaeltehilfe". Despite of its name, the project functions all year round.

² "Kaeltehilfe" is a network of homeless care organizations in Berlin, which offer services to homeless people from November until March every year, additionally to the already consisting homeless care institutions.

2. Case management

The target group of the client-focused counseling is clients of low-threshold homeless services in Berlin who originally come from EU member countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The case management is documented in the following description. Please note that the following information is specific to the project target group, and does not necessarily represent the entirety of the Central and Eastern European homeless population residing in Berlin.

2.1 Individuals Who Received Services

In 2013, 305 persons of the target group received consultation, connected to other service organizations or, in cases were accompanied by project staff to relevant appointments. 1006 contacts were established; 82,35% were male.

More than half of the group that received consultation were originally from the Central Europe region, and a great majority of those possessed a Polish passport. More than one quarter of the people consulted (28,76%) were originally from a country in Northern Europe, approximately 2/3 of those people were from Latvia. 14,38% of the people consulted held a passport of a country in South East Europe, out of these, 45% held a Romanian or Bulgarian passport.

The great majority of the people consulted were of working age. At the time of first consultation, 94,12% were between 20 and 59 years old. Those under 30-years-old made up 17,7% of the group.

152 persons indicated their level of education. Of the 152 individuals, 69,28% indicated that they had completed their studies at some level. 52,20% had completed 2-3 years of their education, while 17% had graduated from a specialized training course, held a Master's certificate, or had a Bachelors or Masters degree.

In more than half of the cases (54,14%), search for employment was indicated as the reason for entering the country. 11,83% indicated that they had entered the country because of private problems. Receiving social benefits was not mentioned as a reason for entering the country.

At the time of initial contact, 16,7% of the people consulted had entered the country within the last four weeks. More than one third (34,31%) had lived between 1 and 12 months in Germany, 20,59% had been living 1-5 years in the country. 14% indicated having entered Germany more than 5 years ago.

2.2 Current Living Situation

85% of the people consulted indicated that they were homeless when project staff first made contact. 2/3 said that they slept outside or in homeless night shelters. 14,38% slept at acquaintances', 2,94% slept in public accommodation such as a dormitory. 20,92% indicated they were sleeping on the street. 4,58% of the people indicated they resided in their own apartment.

115 persons commented on how they made a living. A large portion (39,13%) indicated they lived on the money earned from selling street papers and/or collecting and recycling bottles. 22,61% indicated that they have a legal working contract. 18,26% were working illegally. 11,3% received social benefits such as unemployment money or retirement benefits.

2.3 Counseling

In approximately 19% of counseling cases, search for work, accommodation and sleeping arrangement, or psychosocial support dominated the conversation. In 18% of cases, the topic of securing one's everyday survival came up. Questions concerning health were brought up in

11% of the consultations. The return to the country of origin or to another country was brought up in 8,86% and 6,87%, respectively, of the consultations.

Aspects of international mobility were important in 80% of the contacts made for consultation with people who had entered the country within the last month. In the consultations with people who have been in Germany less than one year, mobility was cited in only 27% of the cases. Continuing the journey to another country was of particular concern for people who had entered the country within the past month, while persons who resided in Germany long-term considered continuing their journey as a minor topic. The issue of “returning” to the country of origin gained importance in relation to the length of the stay; however it was often not important within the first year of the person’s stay in Germany.

Issues concerning health and the health care system became more important with the length of the stay of the person.

Material goods that support individual’s basic needs also become more important the longer an individual resides in the country, though it does play a major role every stage of consultation. Within the first year of entering Germany, it came up as an issue in 60% of the consultations. The issue arose in 80% of the consultations with people who have been living in the country for more than five years.

Work is a major topic of concern during consultations regardless of the individuals’ length of stay in the country.

Through the project’s activities people were directed to easily-accessible organizations that provided services for individuals’ basic physical survival. People were also directed to organizations working directly on issues of homelessness and migration. One third of the people consulted were sent to additional consulting centers such as the Polish Social Council, the Advisory Center of the German Labor Union, the organization Amaro Foro e.V., the contact and consultation center for refugees and asylum seekers, (KUB e.V.), Suedosteuropa Kultur e.V. and emergency consultation centers concerning the loss of housing and securing one’s survival. A large portion (19,31%) of the institutions individuals were referred to provided accommodation, specifically low-threshold night shelters for homeless people. The severity of becoming and remaining homeless was not addressed though, simply through residing in a shelter overnight.

Due to the fact that the return to the country of origin was only a minor issue during consultation, the professional and/or informal contact with service organizations in the country of origin played only a minor role.

2.4 Summary

The Project and its consultancy staff have, through implementation over the period of more than one year, drawn the following conclusions regarding the current state of play for homeless migrants:

- Structural barriers interfere with substantial integration of this particularly vulnerable population and facilitate the creation and maintenance of structures of labor exploitation and impoverishment.
- Feelings of shame and experiencing discrimination shift individuals’ values and establish long-term destructive coping mechanisms.
- These conditions often lead to high costs for public follow-up services.

3. Conclusion and Outlook

Without a doubt, low-threshold homeless care institutions in Berlin indicate the need for continued support regarding the issue of migrants from European Union countries in various fields: There is a need of

- Foreign-language and professional skills within the low-threshold homeless care system in order to decrease the occurrence of conflicts, initiate consultations with clients, and help individuals claim their legal rights and entitlements in the judicial system.
- The expansion of capacities of further support (for example, migration services) that will complement initiatives for greater societal inclusion of homeless EU citizens
- The removal of structural barriers for accessing legal rights and entitlements.

In this context it is important to point out that the issue of homeless EU migrants can be influenced by essential legal and structural framework on the macro-level, for example:

- The lack of a ruling by the Federal Social Supreme Court of Germany regarding social benefit entitlement of EU citizens searching for work.
- Structural barriers to enter the labor and housing market as well as to integration services,
- Limited resources of migration consulting services and homeless care.

Easy-to-access consultation, direction and support services must be established while structural barriers must be removed in order to improve and, if possible, fully prevent the precarious situation of homeless migrants.

Mobile social counseling implemented by organizations within the low-threshold homeless care network provides an adequate model of sustainably improving the situation in different organizations regarding the situation of “EU-migrants”. In this way, social counseling is easier to access for the target group.

One year after the start of the project „Frostschutzengel“, it can be stated that the project has become well-established in the field of low-threshold homeless care. It has been made clear that without the project’s support to partner organizations, their own work would be impossible. However, the continuation of the project is not secured. The reduction or even complete closure of the project “Frostschutzengel” would lead to a considerable decline in the supply of and support of low-threshold homeless care institutions. At the same time, the process of systematically revealing the needs of the target group would be interrupted. Moreover, the already established easy-access counseling for the target group would be halted.

If we do not actively, promptly, and adequately address the diverse needs of this target group, the situation for homeless migrants in Germany will almost certainly deteriorate.

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