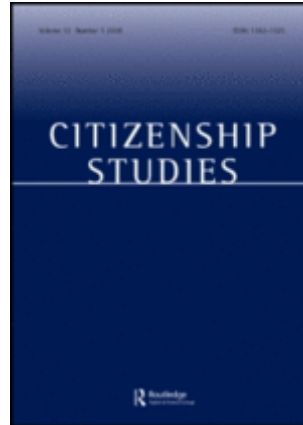




'Without an address, you do not exist'. The invisibility of people experiencing homelessness in Belgium.

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Abstract

Population registers have become essential instruments in the expansion of welfare states to determine a person’s eligibility for social rights and benefits. The registers accordingly serve as an entry to society, and have become an instrument for inclusion and exclusion of citizens. Given the importance of this registration for local citizens, Belgium introduced the ‘reference address’ to (temporarily) register persons without a permanent address, such as persons experiencing homelessness. In this article, we explore the concept of the domicile-based and local citizenship, as well as its historical context, of which we will argue it disproportionately hampers the access to rights for persons experiencing homelessness and creates an ‘invisible crisis’ in Belgium.

Introduction

Collecting data of citizens in state registers is a centuries-old strategy to govern the population (Foucault, 1980). Introduced in Napoleonic times, many European countries rely on a civil registry to collect data of each citizen, e.g. the name, address, and events such as the date of birth, death, et cetera. Whereas it was initially used for purposes of taxation and military enlistment, with the expansion of welfare states, welfare provision became premised on being registered. In other words, determining a person’s eligibility for social rights and benefits depended on having a permanent address or domicile. In many EU Member States, this registration is essential to obtain an identity card, to vote, to be entitled to health insurance and social housing, and to obtain welfare benefits (e.g. child allowance, unemployment benefits, pension). For these states as well as for citizens, registration became essential to gain access to rights and services (Peeters & Widlak, 2018). Consequently, “*a civil registry is, besides a source of information, an instrument for inclusion and exclusion*” (Peeters & Widlak, 2018, p. 176).

Despite the increased importance of being registered across European welfare states, few scholars have researched the implications for disadvantaged citizens. Studies on the importance of registration and the link with the notion of citizenship mainly focus on immigrants (e.g. Coll, 2011; Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2003), yet, little attention has been paid to citizenship regarding people experiencing homelessness. For persons experiencing homelessness, having no address leads to the vicious cycle that has come to be known as the ‘Postal Paradox’: having no address keeps people homeless because access to social rights and services is restricted. Providing an address is thus said to not only be a matter of location, but a matter of rights and citizenship (Byrne, 2018). Accordingly, the address has outgrown its initial purpose as a location device for postal services and tax authorities. Several institutions now adopt the individual’s street address (or one’s domicile) as a proof of citizenship, an identifier of the individual. Hence, “*without an address, you do not exist*” (Prescott, 2015). In other words, citizenship at present has been reduced to a domicile-based citizenship.

In this paper, we critically examine this concept of this domicile-based citizenship for people experiencing homelessness in Belgium. Our main research question is: “If and how can domicile-

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3 based citizenship disproportionately hamper the access to rights for homeless persons?”. To
4 answer this question, we build upon the existing literature on administrative invisibility and
5 domicile-based citizenship in the context of homelessness and secondary qualitative data of
6 interviews with professionals and stakeholders in Belgium with a particular remit regarding
7 accessing social rights for people experiencing homelessness¹. More concretely, we unravel the
8 Belgian practice by analysing two cases: the reference address for people experiencing
9 homelessness in Belgium and the administrative deletion. First, the reference address is an
10 alternative administrative address that is provided for persons without an official address. If the
11 reference address was designed to administratively include vulnerable groups without a
12 permanent address, such as homeless persons, attention needs to be paid to the question whether
13 its design effectively ‘includes the most excluded’ (Robben et al., 2022). Second, being
14 administratively de-registered causes the loss of access to rights and services and therefore poses
15 a serious challenge for people experiencing homelessness.
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3 **1. Address registration, citizenship and administrative invisibility**
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5 **1.1 Historical context**
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8 In Europe, citizenship as the link between the nation state and the individual has its roots in the
9 14th century. Prior to the French revolution, citizenship was bound to allegiance and protection to
10 the King, and the feeling that one belongs to a historical community (Weil, 2011). It was not until
11 the French Revolution and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen that the
12 notion of citizenship appeared more formally. To be French was then equivalent to being a citizen
13 of the French Republic, despite individual differences in social, cultural, religious or ethnic terms.
14 The Napoleonic Code determined the first principles and linked the notion of citizenship to that
15 of nationality (Pierre, 2019).
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18 The French Revolution marked a turning point in terms of identification. At that point in time,
19 citizens were no longer perceived as *subjects* for purposes of taxation and military conscription,
20 but as *citizens* by right. In fact, in the nineteenth century, citizenship transformed to a conditional
21 status based on rights and duties (Weil, 2011). A legal definition of 'a citizen' was introduced in
22 the Constitution of 1791. This definition is based on four criteria: place, date of birth, sex, and
23 profession. However, this required a precise knowledge of the population and so, the first civil
24 registers were launched (Noiriel, 2007). After the French Revolution, new statistical and
25 administrative tools emerged. The coup d'état of the 9th of November 1799 initiated the new
26 Consulate and established an ambitious administrative plan with the new Civil Code, universities,
27 prefectures, statistics office, land registry, and censuses (Gaven, 2017).
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31 In *Seeing Like a State*, Scott indicates that “the premodern state was, in many crucial respects,
32 partially blind; it knows precious little about its subjects, their wealth, their landholdings and yields,
33 their location, their very identity” (Scott, 1998, p. 2). Population registries, Scott stated, made it
34 possible for state officials to picture a perfectly manageable population. Subsequently, these
35 registries became a *sine qua non* for many Western European countries to manage its citizens
36 (Poulain, Herm, & Depledge, 2013). Through the rise of welfare states, registration became
37 important for nation states and citizens to be eligible for social security benefits and therefore to
38 get access to services and benefits that depend on the registration (Peeters & Widlak, 2018). An
39 important principle for setting up such a registry, however, is that it should cover the entire
40 population (Poulain et al., 2013). This begs the question to what extent every individual, certainly
41 those who do not fit the registry’s criteria, is covered.
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46 **1.2 Domicile-based and local citizenship**
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48 In present-day society, citizenship, nationality and domicile are increasingly used
49 interchangeably. *Citizenship* is often determined by belonging to a nation, and connotes inclusion,
50 and the possession of social, economic and political rights (Isin & Turner, 2007; Tassin, 1994). In
51 fact, three definitions can be distinguished. The first is legal: through a national ID or a passport,
52 an individual is linked to a nation state. The second is political and civic. Adult citizens can elect
53 their representatives and participate in civil society. The third is psychological: the feeling that
54 one belongs as a member in a community (Weil, 2011). *Nationality* is synonymous with the legal
55 definition of citizenship, and refers to the legal link between the individual and the nation. Lastly,
56 *domicile* has its roots in the Latin term ‘domicilium’ (i.e. household, residence, or home) and refers
57 to citizenship based on ‘effective residence’ or the habitual address of residence (Bauder, 2014;
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Hammar, 1990). Traditionally, a person's domicile determines one's state citizenship, what scholars regard as a domicile-based citizenship (Bauder, 2014).

The domicile account of citizenship has a territorial aspect and a time-bound aspect. First, this notion of a domicile-based citizenship implies that citizenship can be defined through territorial boundaries, on the national and even local level. On the national level, this domicile-based citizenship has become an important point for debate, certainly in the era of globalisation (e.g. Birnie, 2020; Staeheli, 2011). Processes of globalisation expose the limits to solely beholding citizenship and the entitlement to rights as contained within national territories. Kostakopoulou (2008) addressed this tension between the domicile principle and its territorial nature, and the fact that individuals are increasingly mobile, and non-committal to one particular locality. This is not only relevant for people who migrate (e.g. Canepari & Rosa, 2017), but also for persons experiencing homelessness, who are characterised by a high mobility rate (Simon et al, 2020). In theory, registration for one domicile is possible, even though in practice, one can be residing in multiple locations (Birnie, 2020). In fact, both citizenship and domicile fail to measure one's immediate physical presence (Zelinsky, 2010). On the local level, scholars discuss this domicile-based citizenship through the lens of local citizenship. Regulated by central authorities, local authorities are the responsible actors to actually grant residency to people who legally and habitually live within its territory. Gargiulo (2016:328) interprets the vital role of the municipal registration and the status of a local resident as 'local citizenship'. By examining the municipal membership in Italy, Gargiulo suggests local authorities can use residency as a selective tool and (often illegally) tighten the conditions to obtain this local citizenship. In doing so, mechanisms of exclusion differentiate the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' claimants (Gargiulo, 2016). Indeed, as a means for accessing rights and services, this registration can also lead to the distinction between citizens and non-citizens (Gargiulo, 2016; Peeters & Widlak, 2018). As addressed by Gargiulo (2016), residency has become a condition of formal membership and therefore has become a tool of exclusion towards some groups.

Second, a domicile implies someone's *permanent* place of dwelling, with a past-oriented dimension (in which the dwelling was established) as well as a future-oriented dimension (the intent to stay). In practice, this past-oriented dimension is integrated in jurisdictions stating that a citizen's domicile can only be recognized and registered after a significant period of time (Birnie, 2020). However, echoing the work of Cohen (2018), the experience of time is highly subjective. Is residing somewhere for a month, a year or even multiple years sufficient as to determine one's domicile, and consequently one's citizenship and the social and civil rights this entails?

1.3 Administrative invisibility

In many European welfare states, a significant number of social groups are not officially registered, such as exchange students, mobile population groups and homeless persons. These 'invisible', 'hidden' or 'hard to reach' groups (Glasser, Hirsch, & Chan, 2014; Nicaise & Schockaert, 2014) prove to be a difficult fit for the registry's criteria. Besides a source of information, the civil registry has clearly become an instrument for inclusion and exclusion (Peeters & Widlak, 2018). Setel et al. (2007) refer to a 'scandal of invisibility': an absence of reliable data of persons who are not included in the civil registry leaves a large group unaccounted for. Because of this, nation states fail to administratively include the most vulnerable population groups. This is problematic because being administratively excluded causes a 'cascade of exclusion': administrative exclusion (e.g. from official identity documents) systematically leads to the exclusion from benefits and

services, therefore keeping particular population groups 'off the radar' (Chudnovsky & Peeters, 2021). Likewise for the state, the registration is key to determine one's eligibility for social benefits. Research of Peeters and Widlak (2018) on the Dutch civil registry shows how the loss of one's residency status can trigger the loss of access to every service or benefit for which this residency status is a precondition. This study, as well as other studies on the access to official documents (e.g. Heinrich, 2018; Nisar, 2018; Chudnovsky & Peeters, 2021), show that exclusion from access to citizenship leads to the exclusion from other rights and services, what Chudnovsky & Peeters (2021) call the 'cascade of exclusion'.

Moreover, research suggests that specific claimants with particular characteristics are known to be more 'administratively disadvantaged' than other claimants, such as persons living in deep poverty (Brodkin & Majmundar, 2010). Specifically people experiencing homelessness are an interesting group to dissect. These persons are known for living 'off the radar', certainly when there's a lack of a permanent address or official registration. Assessing the effectiveness of social policy measures is difficult or even impossible when the state is not able to reach these groups that live 'off the radar' (Chudnovsky & Peeters, 2021).

2. Quid pro quo? On the (un)conditional logic of citizenship

The entitlement to rights also plays an important role when looking at the historical context. Administrative registration, and the welfare provision premised on this registration, traditionally adheres to the idea of responsible citizens that are actively engaged in the welfare state without needing bureaucratic assistance, and are actively obtaining benefits and services to which they are entitled (Brown & Baker, 2012). In this section, we will briefly discuss the normative shift from a rights-based citizenship to an active or obligations-based citizenship, and the implications for disadvantaged groups such as people experiencing homelessness.

A first strand of post war literature views the principle of universal entitlement derived from citizenship as a basis for the welfare state. One is automatically entitled to certain rights because one is a member of the welfare state (Marshall, 1950; Marshall & Bottomore, 1992). However, the idea of unconditional rights was swiftly met with criticism. A second strand of literature draws attention to what can be called the 'quid pro quo' principle, implying a reciprocal exchange of goods or services. Walters (1997) promulgated the 'active society' wherein access to social rights is linked to the willingness to work in the paid labour market. Mead (1997) also argued the principle of unconditionality would cause the recipients of benefits to become passive actors. Rather than passively receiving 'state charity', the responsibilities should be emphasized, for example by imposing compulsory work conditions (Mead, 1991). It was clear that the universal and unconditional approach on welfare benefits was perceived as outdated and likely to exacerbate passive welfare dependency (Cox, 1998; Dwyer, 2008).

Interestingly, a third strand of literature (mainly concentrated in the UK) recently emerged, that discusses the punitive logic in this 'quid pro quo' principle, specifically for individuals experiencing poverty. In 2012, the UK Coalition Government introduced a harsher regime of conditionality and benefit sanctions in the UK benefits system when failing to comply. Underpinned by the principle that rights must be balanced by responsibilities, these reforms were deemed necessary to tackle cultures of worklessness and benefit dependency (Dwyer, 2016; Reeve, 2017; Veasey & Parker, 2021). Research on the implications for vulnerable population groups, such as the homeless population, followed quickly (such as McCarthy et al., 2015; Reeve,

2017; Reeves & Loopstra, 2017). Reeve (2017) concluded this new regime as being punitive for the homeless population by setting conditionality requirements that homeless persons cannot meet. Moreover, failure to meet these conditions may disproportionately affect these groups (Reeves & Loopstra, 2017). Echoing Wacquant (2009), Reeve (2017, p. 10) argues that “*rather than producing a compliant working class, it pushes people out of the very system (social security) initially designed to protect them*”.

This debate on the ‘quid pro quo’ principle of certain rights, benefits and services is important, specifically when focusing on citizenship and population groups, such as homeless persons without a domicile, that are administratively invisible. Research shows that persons with complex support needs often struggle to comply with the imposed conditions (Henwood et al, 2011). When lacking the rights and entitlements associated with citizenship, people experiencing homelessness are not only unequal citizens, it makes it hard to impossible to escape their precarious living situation. In this article, we examine how this welfare conditionality of the local and domicile-based citizenship in Belgium is translated in practice for people experiencing homelessness, and has an impact on these (often already) excluded persons.

3. Administrative invisibility in Belgium: analysis

In Belgium, every citizen is obliged to register in the population register at their place of main residency. This is the place where one actually resides for most of the year, and is registered by the local municipality after a local police officer checks whether one actually lives on the address concerned. This registration is needed to obtain an identity card, to vote, to be eligible for child allowance and unemployment benefits, health insurance, social housing, and so on (POD MI, 2016). However, a multitude of groups might not have the possibility to register an official address, e.g. diplomatic or consular staff, skippers, nomadic groups, and persons experiencing homelessness. Since the 90s, the so-called ‘reference address’ in Belgium provides administrative anchorage to persons without a permanent address. To date, little is known about the number of beneficiaries of the reference address (Robben et al, 2022; Pierre, 2021). Furthermore, numerous persons remain administratively invisible because they cannot or will not claim a reference address, and/or because they are withdrawn from the population register. The whereabouts of these persons are unknown, and therefore they are deleted out of the population register (the de-registration is further discussed in section 3.3). In Brussels, according to the data of the ongoing research MEASINB, it concerns approximately 14,000 people each year. The research shows that the proportion of de-registrations due to international departure is very low, at only 2.8%. It could therefore be assumed that a large proportion of the unregistered persons are still present on the national territory, but are administratively invisible and bear the consequences this entails.

In this chapter, we empirically investigate the administrative invisibility in Belgium, and dissect our main research question: if and how can the domicile-based citizenship disproportionately hamper the access to rights for homeless persons? We elaborate on two cases: administrative invisibility caused by the reference address on the one hand and by the de-registration or administrative deletion on the other hand. For this, we build upon secondary qualitative data derived from two project: XXXX (including semi-structured interviews with 35 experts) and the ‘XXXX project (interviews with 36 experts). These interviews were conducted between 2019 and 2022 among Public Centres for Social Welfare (PCSWs), national, regional and local government and administrative bodies, civil society organisations, and advocacy organisations spread in Belgium.

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3 **3.1 Reference address**
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5 The reference address is an administrative address to retain administrative anchorage and to
6 prevent the loss of social rights linked to this anchorage. One can apply for a reference address at
7 a natural person's home or at the Public Centre for Social Welfare (PCSW/ OCMW in Dutch/CPAS
8 in French)². Since 1997, the reference address at a PCSW is provided for people experiencing
9 homelessness³. There is a Centre situated in every municipality, and its mission is to guarantee
10 human dignity for every inhabitant of the municipality and ensure the right to social integration
11 through the professional assistance of social workers. The initiative to start the claiming process
12 lies with the claimants themselves. A second alternative for persons experiencing homelessness
13 is a reference address with a natural person, which is often a family member or a friend. Both
14 reference addresses can be interpreted as an administrative address: whilst they can be used for
15 official documents and receiving their postal mail, claimants do not live on this given location.
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19 To apply, one needs to meet certain entitlement and eligibility criteria.
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21 One is *entitled* to a reference address if one is a Belgian citizen (or to be allowed to reside
22 in Belgium for more than three months), and is deregistered. This means the claimant cannot
23 already have an address and therefore an entry in the population register. If the person does have
24 an address, it will be necessary to initiate de-registration that needs to be verified by the local
25 government of the municipality. Although it is limited in time by law, the interpretation of this
26 time limit, as well as the verification of the other conditions, varies from one authority to another,
27 as the controls are mostly motivated by the fight against social fraud, which is itself defined by a
28 policy specific to each PCSW (Pierre, 2021). Moreover, for a reference with a PCSW, one needs to
29 demonstrate to have a local connection with the municipality of the Centre. Accordingly, the
30 application must be made directly to a PCSW that is territorially competent.
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34 One is *eligible* for a reference address if one can demonstrate to experience homelessness,
35 for example through a signed declaration of a night shelter. If requested with a natural person,
36 this person needs to formally consent. If requested at a PCSW, the request for social assistance at
37 this Centre is implied, which can vary from material, medical to social support (Commère et al.,
38 2019). If granted, the applicant must report to the PCSW once every three months.
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3.2 Case 1: Administrative invisibility through the reference address

Following the studies of Robben et al. (2022) and Pierre (2021), this paper elaborates on two conditions that are stated to potentially hamper the access to the reference address at a PCSW, and can cause the administrative exclusion or invisibility of people experience homelessness.

First, a local connection with the municipality of the PCSW needs to be demonstrated, of which the proof of burden lies with the claimant. Zelinsky (2010) noted that, when one's citizenship is equated with one's domicile, there's a need for fact-intensive determination of permanent residence. This is also the case in Belgium, where a social investigation is initiated. Claimants can provide proof of their presence on the territory of the municipality through their working place, receipts of cash withdrawals or purchases that were made, a local shelter one resides in, et cetera. However, because homeless persons are known to be a highly mobile group, a reference address is regularly denied because they do not fulfil the requirement (Pierre, 2021). This territorial logic and its procedure clearly hamper the access to a reference address for persons experiencing homelessness, and does not correspond to the reality for example in a city such as Brussels (Robben et al, 2022).

The territoriality logic is very complex. Even quite ridiculous in Brussels. For example, the Brussels South railway station lies on three territories. Depending on your specific location in this train station, three different PCSWs are responsible. For example, I went to the Centre of Saint-Gilles with a person sleeping in this train station, but he was lying on the side where another Centre was authorised. Social assistants, and these PCSWs, do not always realise it takes a lot of strength for homeless people to come to them. If you come knocking, and they say 'you have to go to another PCSW, a lot of homeless people just give up. (NGO, May 2021)

Indeed, having a local connection to a municipality is crucial when claiming welfare provisions in Belgium. In the case of social housing, a new Flemish reform that will be introduced in 2023 states a claimant needs to demonstrate an uninterrupted local connection of at least five years in the municipality (Agentschap Wonen-Vlaanderen, 2022). Local membership or local citizenship clearly plays a strategic role in housing and homelessness policies. This observation is in line with the work of Baptista, Benjaminsen and Pleace (2015) suggesting that where 'local connection' rules are poorly designed or implemented, persons experiencing homelessness are being denied essential assistance. For example, persons who experience long-term homelessness with high support needs can find it hard to demonstrate a local connection if they move around constantly, compared to persons that are renting a home (Baptista, Benjaminsen & Pleace, 2015).

Second, when applying for a reference address at a PCSW, the claimant indirectly applies for social assistance. The interpretations of PCSWs regarding this requirement appeared to range from solely providing a reference address to requesting additional (albeit unlawful) requirements of their clients, e.g. to actively look for accommodation or a job, or staying sober (Robben et al, 2022).

Different PCSWs impose different conditions for granting the reference address. In my opinion, they formulate criteria that are hard or sometimes even impossible for our clients to meet, such as looking for a job or staying sober. (Shelter, April 2021)

The reference address as an instrument to administratively include certain persons is simultaneously for certain PCSWs, and perhaps even more so, an instrument to achieve social

inclusion. However, if a client does not meet this requirement by denying additional assistance, the reference address is discontinued, leading to both administrative and social exclusion. This underlying 'quid-pro-quo' principle was previously discussed in Chapter 2. As suggested by Reeve (2017) and Reeves and Loopstra (2017), setting conditional requirements poses a serious challenge for homeless persons. Failing to meet these imposed requirements may disproportionately affect these persons, and excludes them from the social security system that was initially designed to protect them. In the Belgian case, these punitive unintended consequences are very palpable if one does not meet the requirements for a reference address: the reference address is being discontinued and the claimant is overall deleted out of the registry and thus loses the access to certain rights and assistance.

3.3 Case 2: Administrative invisibility through de-registration

The administration, which is responsible for the proper maintenance of the registers, ensures the accuracy of the information recorded by constantly updating it. The procedure of 'deregistration'⁴ or deletion out of the register corresponds to an administrative clean-up, by excluding all persons whose trace has been lost after a certain period. This includes persons who have moved abroad without registering with a diplomatic post, foreigners who lived in Belgium but moved without informing local authorities, but also persons who have lost their permanent address and do not or do no longer have a reference address. Although the administrative deletion remains an exceptional measure, it is estimated that 75,000 persons are annually deleted out of the register because the person does not live on its registered address and local authorities are unable to register their new place of residence.

The consequences of deregistration are severe. When withdrawn out of the population register, official documents such as the identity card and driving license become invalid, and one 'administratively disappears' and loses the social rights that are linked to this registration (Robben et al, 2022). One participant speaks of the invisibility in terms of the 'administrative death':

Deleting a person out of the registry has an enormous impact. This person loses all his rights, which we call 'administrative death'. You cannot continue, or do anything, without this registration. (Municipality, April 2021)

The State considers that there are no more social benefits to be given to someone who has disappeared. And so if the person is a pensioner, they no longer receive their pension, all social security coverage stops when they are delisted. (Municipality, March 2020)

As previously mentioned, the de-registration is an entitlement condition for the reference address. The paradox at the heart of this condition is that the right to a reference address only opens up once one is deleted out of the registry and therefore loses all rights linked to this registration. In order to regain certain rights, the claimant first needs to waive or discard them. The majority of the participants stated this deletion out of the population register is a cumbersome and often time-consuming procedure. The procedure usually takes between three and six months (varying from one municipality to another), which corresponds to the duration of the police investigation. A person who is deleted out of the register, is informed by postal mail on the address of the main residence. Ironically, claimants most often do not live there anymore, and thus are not notified by this new administrative situation. Again, the consequences are ubiquitous, as a respondent states:

What if you are suddenly deleted out of the register? Are you then illegal? I don't think that the impact of this deletion is well-known. If a person states he wants a reference address, wants to be part of society and wants to open a banking account, then he will first need to disclaim his rights by getting deleted out of the registry, and then hope the reference address will be granted. (NGO, May 2021).

4. Conclusion

Being registered in the civil registry initiates a series of social rights and benefits to which one is eligible. Unemployment benefits, child allowance, health insurance, but also voting and opening a banking account, are premised on being registered. For people in precarious housing conditions and people experiencing homelessness, obtaining a domicile might not seem like one's first priority, albeit the loss of their home and their permanent address has serious administrative and social consequences. Having no address leads to the vicious cycle that has come to be known as the 'Postal Paradox': not having an address keeps people homeless because access to social rights and services is restricted (Byrne, 2018). Once administratively invisible, they are no longer perceived as citizens and are no longer on the radar of social policies, observatories and statistics. Even though it is clear that one's domicile has become a legal fiction (because it does not accurately give us information about the actual residency), to date, domicile is still used to determine one's access to certain rights and benefits (Abrams & Barber, 2016). It is clear that this domicile-based citizenship, and the importance of being registered, is being challenged by these disadvantaged persons experiencing homelessness. Echoing the work of Peeters and Widlak (2018), the civil registry has clearly become an instrument of inclusion of those who meet the registry's criteria and exclusion of those who do not.

In showcasing the Belgian case of the administrative deletion and the reference address, this article further substantiates the argument that the current registration system is fundamental to the recognition and to the entitlement of rights, yet it fails to fulfil one key principle of the registry, that is to cover the entire population (Poulain et al., 2013). Therefore, we can conclude the domicile-based citizenship in Belgium disproportionately hampers the access to rights for persons experiencing homelessness. Whilst the reference address was designed to avoid the exclusion of citizens that do not comply to the registry's criteria, it is clear there are still a significant number of persons that remain administratively invisible. An important contributing factor is the underlying welfare conditionality of this reference address. Expecting claimants to meet the requirement of demonstrating a local connection and applying for social assistance appeared to go combined with additional (albeit unlawful) requirements. This is in line with the work of Gargiulo (2016), who suggested local authorities can use residency as a selective tool and (illegally) tighten the conditions to obtain this local citizenship.

Whereas the implementation of the policy of the reference address and de-registration is mainly located on the local level, the very notion of citizenship is being eroded on a national scale. Through the lens of people experiencing homelessness, we argue the understanding of the domicile-based citizenship needs to be broadened, as well as its implications for this specific vulnerable group. We argue it is a path dependent, historically grown political choice to classify certain citizens as eligible for official registration while others are not. More concretely, the political choice has been made to classify persons based on their local residency to determine who is a citizen that gets access to certain rights and services. However, obtaining and demonstrating the local citizenship is often nearly impossible for people experiencing homelessness that are

characterized as highly mobile. In this article, we question (1) the disproportionate consequences of the administrative and social exclusion when a person (temporarily) loses one's permanent residency, and (2) the underlying 'quid pro quo' principle to get access to the reference address. Overall, we found that the registration system fails to include certain excluded persons, therefore creating the issue of invisibility in Belgium and the disproportionate consequences this invisibility entails.

5. Discussion

5.1 A way to recognition?

The question that remains is how a registration system can be organised for the state as to cover disadvantaged groups such as people experiencing homelessness, as well as for the citizens as to pave the way to administrative recognition. Broader international lessons can be drawn on the importance of an accessible administrative address for people experiencing homelessness. Several EU Member States provide such an alternative to the official registration system, such as the postal address in the Netherlands, the fictitious addresses in Italy, the 'Main residence confirmation' in Austria, the 'Address point' provided by the postal service in Ireland and the 'ProxyAddress' in the UK (Crepaldi, 2019; FEANTSA, 2018). The latter alternative was introduced in 2020 by architect Chris Hildrey, who strived to link the concept of an administrative address to the individual, rather than to a location. Through a database of existing and unused addresses, the addresses are being duplicated to give homeless individuals a new 'proxy'. Through this proxy, the city council provides an address so as to not lose their access to social rights and services. When examining the available documents and literature, interesting differences with the Belgian reference address can be observed, such as the conditions the claimant needs to meet and the possible stigma. First, whereas a Belgian claimant needs to demonstrate a local connection, with the ProxyAddress one can choose and quickly customise the address or collection point. Moreover, because there is no competent PCSW linked to the claimant's dossier, one does not need to apply for social assistance. Second, whereas the Belgian reference addresses can be well-known in certain municipalities (see Robben et al, 2022), the ProxyAddress explicitly avoids stigma by using existing mundane street names (ProxyAddress, 2022). On the other hand, an alternative such as the ProxyAddress can also find inspiration in the Belgian Experience. For example, unlike the Belgian reference address, no additional social assistance is being provided for the claimants of the ProxyAddress. The burden lies with the claimant to actively look for social support, rather than having a PCSW on the sideline that provides a helping hand. Lastly, claimants of the ProxyAddress with digital literacy, or claimants with no access to certain technologies might be excluded.

Important to keep in mind is that Belgium is quite a unique case insofar as it has created the reference address at the PCSW specifically for persons experiencing homelessness, and linking social assistance at this Centre as one of the requirements. Conclusions reported in this paper should, as a consequence, be interpreted as the specific outcome of particular institutional changes and historical trajectories. Overall, further research on such international practices can be interesting to broaden the understanding about how the accessibility to an administrative address can be optimised.

5.2 Call for automation?

Not only the ‘undocumented’ persons experiencing homelessness, but also other groups such as undocumented migrants call into question the effectiveness and efficiency of an administrative address to prevent administrative invisibility. In a recent report of FEANTSA (2022), the access to rights, employment and healthcare is being examined for mobile EU citizens experiencing homelessness in Brussels. DIOGENES collected information about 314 mobile EU citizens in 2020. Even though 75% of the respondents had migrated to Belgium to find a job, 54% were forced to beg and 12% were working without a contract. Specifically worrying is that 67% did not have a residence permit in Belgium. The main cause of this concern is the lack of a reference address. A mobile EU citizen who does not have a residence permit cannot obtain a reference address at a PCSW. Consequently, one of the main recommendations of DIOGENES is formulated as such: *“Make the right to a reference address automatic for mobile EU citizens in order to ensure a Europe wide social protection system”*.

This begs the question if, and to what extent, the possibility of an administrative address for these administratively vulnerable groups needs to be at one’s disposal without too many restrictions of entitlement and eligibility conditions. In the light of a new critical movement against the conditional logic of welfare (see Chapter 2), interesting new ‘housing-led’ approaches such as Housing First emerge. In the Housing First-model, providing stable housing explicitly exceeds crisis or transitional housing and eschews the conditional logic (Clarke, Watts, & Parsell, 2020; Johnsen & Teixeira, 2012). Instead of withholding permanent housing for people who comply with certain behavioural conditions, stable housing in this new Housing First-model is premised on the principle that housing is a human right (Clarke, Parsell, & Vorsina, 2020; Padgett, Henwood, & Tsemberis, 2016). When reviewing the Belgian case, the question can be asked if in case of evictions or relocation, an alternative administrative address can automatically be assigned as a human right, so as to prevent this person from slipping through the cracks of the registry.

5.3 An alternative?

An important last question remains: should social rights be premised on having a permanent address? In the welfare literature, it is often considered, if not simply assumed, that all citizens are covered because of their registration in the civil registries. We call this assumption into question and propose a debate from the perspective of persons experiencing homelessness. To add to this debate, the Common Front of the Homeless, a Brussels-based association defending the rights of homeless people, argues to link rights to the national registration number rather than to one’s domicile. Since every person legally residing in Belgium has a number, they could thereupon get access to their rights. This alternative is grounded in the idea that being a citizen should not be defined by one’s place of residence, but by other principles, such as community of belonging. An interesting avenue and alternative position can be found in the work of Kostakopoulou (2008) who proposes the principle of ‘anational citizenship’, where the place of habitual residence is reconcilable with another domicile or administrative anchorage. This principle would allow, for example, people in a situation of poor housing or expatriates to preserve their access to rights.

This paper wants to contribute to the debate on the minimum requirement of having a permanent address to gain access to social rights, and seeks to trigger further discussion concerning the domicile-based citizenship that has become central in welfare states such as Belgium. It is clear that more reflection is needed on an alternative to this domicile-based citizenship. Firstly, because democratic decision-making, of which the right to vote is the embodiment, requires the

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participation of the entire population. Secondly, because the domicile-based model of citizenship fails to include everyone and effectively excludes those who do not have an address. If an alternative to the registration of the domicile is provided, such as the reference address in Belgium, it needs to be attainable for the vulnerable target group concerned.

Notes

¹ This article is based on two ongoing research projects. DETAILS REMOVED.
² In certain municipalities (e.g. Antwerp and Brussels), a reference address for mobile population groups such as caravan dwellers is provided. This third type of reference address lies beyond the scope of this article.
³ An important side note is that detainees or prisoners are also eligible for a reference address at the PCSW.
⁴ ‘Radiation’ in French or ‘ambtshalve afvoering’ in Dutch.

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