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# Homelessness in the New Member States



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# HOMELESS *in Europe*

Summer 2008



The summer 2008 edition of *Homeless in Europe* focuses on the issue of homelessness in Europe's New Member States, those twelve countries that have most recently joined the EU. They are Malta, Cyprus, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania<sup>1</sup> and lastly Romania and Bulgaria<sup>2</sup>, bringing the number of EU Member States to twenty-seven.

What the majority of these new members have in common is that they were under Soviet domination for fifty years, until the fall of the Iron Curtain and the remarkable events of 1989-1990. Since then, they have experienced significant socio-economic and political changes, transitioning from planned economies to free-market models. The far-reaching economic reforms and political liberalisation that have taken place have transformed institutional structures, including social services, beyond recognition and new solutions have had to be found to old and new problems.

Some countries, like Hungary, were totally unprepared for the large amounts of people that became homeless following the collapse of socialism. Lack of preparedness, lack of resources, and a lack of understanding of the phenomenon, launched a fire-fighting response to homelessness, which in many respects lives on today. Miklós Vecsei, Ministerial Commissioner for Homelessness outlines the major movements in homeless care in Hungary from 1989 – 2008, and gives suggestions for change.

In other countries, the transition to capitalism, and the removal of state intervention in the housing market, has had an enormous impact on tenure rights. The worrying problem of 'sitting tenants' across Central and Eastern Europe is explained by Tanja Sarec, President of the Association of Tenants of Slovenia. Some 2,700 000 families across CEE, who during communist regimes had the right to permanent, secure and inheritable tenure in their homes, have in the last few years found that their rights have been minimised and their level of protection severely reduced. With maintenance costs increasing and the purchasing of property beyond the means of most families, what is the future for these vulnerable tenants?

In the last few years, the new member states have also had to adapt to EU membership – which along with certain obligations for reform, has also entailed the disappearance of restrictive borders. Romania is currently experiencing the effect of 'brain drain' – the massive emigration of working age citizens to other, more prosperous parts of Europe. Since joining the EU, it is estimated that as many as 3.4 million Romanians have left the country to live and work elsewhere in the European Union, leaving public social security systems even more short-changed and even less able to cope than before. Ian Tilling, President of the Casa Ioana Association in Bucharest outlines the urgent problems that Romania is facing, with rising levels of poverty and an acute lack of adequate and affordable housing.

Open borders have brought great freedoms, but not everyone is welcome, it seems. The Roma, as Claude Cahn, Head of Advocacy Unit, Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, outlines, are persecuted across many of the older member states. France and Italy have both either openly or quietly pursued policies to encourage or force the Roma out of their borders, and the author questions if a Europe where Roma are included with equal dignity is imaginable.

Andrus Toompuu, Senior Expert at Tallinn City Government paints a slightly more optimistic picture. Although homelessness has become a problem in Estonia, especially in Tallinn, positive moves to tackle it have been made with the Tallinn Social Welfare Development Programme and the Social Welfare Action Plan. NGO's and local authorities are working better together and the needs of homeless people are more frequently taken into account. However, levels of debt are so high the city of Tallinn has started a debt counselling service to help families with financial difficulties keep their homes.

Lukasz Browarczyk, Research & Publications Coordinator in the Pomeranian Forum in Aid of Getting Out of Homelessness, gives a socio-demographic profile of homeless people in the Pomeranian region, based on the results of several social surveys conducted since 2001. Research shows that homeless people in the Pomeranian region are predominantly male, have been homeless for a long time, are on average almost 50 years old, and are generally in poor health. He suggests that for this group, proposing employment as a way out of homelessness is not possible – so what are the alternatives?

Finally, Barbora Cernusakova, from Habitat for Humanity International gives a case study of a project in Slovakia which takes a holistic approach to addressing housing need for those experiencing the most extreme forms of poverty. Some 138 houses were renovated in the Svinia Roma settlement, with the participation of the families whose houses were renovated. The author argues that one way out of the ghettoization and poverty for marginalised and excluded Roma is to integrate housing services with social work in a very pragmatic, participatory framework.

As always, FEANTSA would like to extend its sincere thanks and gratitude to the contributors to this issue of the magazine. If you would like to contribute to a future edition, please write to [charlotta.odlind@feantsa.org](mailto:charlotta.odlind@feantsa.org). •

## NEW! Letters to the Editor

In this month's edition, we would also like to launch a new section of the magazine, entitled Letters to the Editor. We would like to give you the chance to comment on any of the articles which appear in *Homeless in Europe*, enabling you to voice your feedback, thoughts and critique, and to stimulate debate. Please email your letters to [charlotta.odlind@feantsa.org](mailto:charlotta.odlind@feantsa.org).

<sup>1</sup> These countries acceded to the European Union on the 1st of May, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> These last two countries joined the European Union on 1st of January, 2007.





# Homeless care in Hungary, 1989-2008

**Miklos Vecsei, Ministerial Commissioner for Homelessness**



The transition from socialism to capitalism in Hungary took place between 1989 and 1990, and gave rise to a sharp transition from a socialist planned economy to a capitalist market economy. The birth of the market economy immediately brought about the mass appearance of homeless people in the winter of 1989-90 on the streets, train stations and underpasses of Budapest, as well as in other large cities of Hungary. Society and domestic policies were totally unprepared for this.

The collapsing large, national social system had not yet been replaced by a self-governed, municipal social care system, and thus there was no one to be made responsible for the problem. There were no homeless institutions, no instantly available financial support, no catering, no sanitary facilities and no accommodation. It was only then, that public opinion learned the meaning of "homelessness" (alongside the already existing Hungarian term: "csöves"/tramp, homeless). The word referred to youths who had run away from their families, and people who were said to be living on the edge of cities. Since /local authorities had no available means, the first shelters for those living on the streets were opened by charitable organizations in former soviet barracks, ships and trains in the winter of 1989-90. Thus the first treatment of homelessness began with a "firefighting" approach.

From 1990, the government started providing financial support for civilian and state organizations that work with the homeless, and began to establish a homeless care institutional system. By 1995-97 a national homeless care system has been established and solidified to take care of basic human needs, and to alleviate life-threatening misery. With the support of the central state budget, further significant developments were made from 2000 onwards. To better satisfy the needs of homeless people, street outreach services were established, along with additional temporary shelters open in the winter months, and improved access to basic health care services. Homeless care in Hungary still bears the marks of the initial years to this day. This urgent and life-saving approach has also become a tool to bind people to homelessness. The majority of homelessness services are inappropriate for decreasing the volume of homelessness and for helping individuals to regain their membership in society. In spite of all our heroic fighting, we have managed to create a homeless care system in Hungary that treats homelessness as an ultimate destination and mostly only helps homeless people to stay alive. Its main characteristics are the following:

1) The Hungarian Social Law lists those groups that are eligible for any kind of social services, including the homeless (such as the elderly, psychiatric patients, addicts and the disabled). A separate child-protection law provides for children.

With the identification of groups requiring special assistance, came the establishment of forms of care destined only for special, separate, social groups, regardless of whether the provision of parallel care services was justified or not. An example of unjustified, separately provided social care services strengthening the segregation of homeless people is the so-called "soup kitchen" - free meals are provided for the homeless only, when a free "social kitchen" already exists for other citizens in need of food aid. The segregation of the homeless is similarly strengthened by separate "residential homes for the elderly homeless", when regular homes for the elderly already exist; or the "day centres" set up for homeless people only, when this daytime service could also be provided to others.

2) The Social Law defines who can be considered as homeless, with respect to social care. According to the Law, a person is 'homeless'

(roofless) if he/she has no officially registered place of residence, if he/she is in a shelter for homeless people, or if he/she spends the night in public areas or in a room unfit for habitation.

Even though the existence of this regulation can be considered as a significant step, this definition is unsuitable for ensuring adequate access to social care for the homeless.

3) The Social Law makes the local governments of each community responsible for homeless care (homeless elderly, and those requiring rehabilitation in institutions are taken care of by the county governments.) However, the obligation for them is only to provide homeless care services, not to care effectively for homeless people. (If for example, there are 150 homeless people in a town, local governments can fulfill their legal duties by simply establishing a homeless shelter for 20 people.)

Local governments usually try to narrow down their responsibilities in providing social-care, and strive to exclude homeless individuals coming in from other municipalities. They also hinder the development of local services in order to avoid attracting even more homeless individuals to their municipalities.

4) The Social Law specifies what kind of homeless care institutions need to be provided by the local governments for the homeless.

Through this regulation, homeless care was organized into separate institutions in Hungary. There are street outreach services for those living on the streets, primarily with life-saving tasks; day centres to aide with daytime administration, bathing and washing; mass night shelters; temporary accommodation for the homeless for one year continual living; homes for the homeless requiring permanent institutional care; and rehabilitative institutions for homeless individuals in active age, who would still be able to return to work.

This social care system provides services only for actual homeless persons (those living in public spaces, or those who spend their nights in homeless shelters), so primarily single men. This care system is separated from other social care services, and its users are segregated from other members of society.

5) The Social Law specifies where social services need to be provided.

The larger the population of a given place, the more types of institutions it is required to provide; however, it is not mandatory to provide homeless services in a place with a population of fewer than 3.000 people.

6) The costs of all social services provided for the homeless are financed with state per capita support from the national central budget, meaning that institutions are financed annually by a legally prescribed amount. (In 2008, for example, the national central budget paid 2,100 Euros per capita support for temporary shelters for the homeless.)

State per capita financial support is given to institutions, regardless of the quality and efficiency of their services. This method of financing places great emphasis on the existence and sustenance of the institutions, while the quality and content of the provided services are of secondary importance. A consequence of this is that only the most cooperative and the least problematic homeless persons "fit" into these institutions.



The current homeless care system is simultaneously under-regulated and over-regulated; not controlled enough, and overly controlled; lacking in funds, yet wasteful; built from the bottom up and controlled from above. It is high time to make the necessary changes, which must concentrate on three major areas:

1. The services provided for homeless persons living in public spaces should be capable of making significant decreases in the number of homeless people living on the streets.
2. The services provided for homeless individuals should fit with their individual needs, and should result in better life circumstances.
3. A new system of instruments targeted to decrease homelessness needs to be established and operated, both to prevent homelessness and to eradicate it.

The calls for change have been accompanied by several promising programmes and experiments in the last few years, which we will briefly present hereafter:

### 1. STRENGTHENING COOPERATION BETWEEN THE SERVICES - A BETTER USE OF CARE SERVICE CAPACITIES

Homeless care in Hungary is currently operated in more than 100 places, in nearly 150 institutions with over 350 service units. It provides shelters for 7.600 persons in temporary accommodation or night shelters. The services are highly autonomous, but are operated in isolation from the rest of the social, healthcare, and employment services.

It has proved necessary to strengthen inter-professional contacts, to open up services towards each other's clients, and to better take advantage of and use available capacities. The organization and coordination of homeless care at regional level also proved necessary. So, since 2003, the regional homeless dispatcher services have taken care of the following; the organization of homeless services at a regional level; the partial tracking of homeless clients' paths with regard to their moving in and out of social and health care institutions; the harmonization of catering, street-care, and winter accommodation between the municipalities and at the regional level; the handling of citizen reports; the organization of aid-giving; and the registration of available places in temporary and night shelters. For the solution of crisis cases that arise at night during the winter period, the dispatcher service mobilizes **street care services**. Since 2005, these services have arrived at emergencies with a crisis ambulance.

Besides the dispatcher services and crisis ambulances, there are **Medical Centers** which provide 24-hour medical care, sick-rooms and patient care, reaching beyond the boundaries of the patients' own settlements. These Medical Centers are specialized in providing medical help for sick homeless persons living on the streets, who are directed or taken to the center by the street homeless-care services.

### 2. LEAVING HOMELESS SHELTERS THROUGH SUPPORTED INDEPENDENT HOUSING: THE PROGRAMME OF SUPPORTED HOUSING

This is a nationwide tendering program which started in 2005, aimed at helping homeless people move into market-based sublets or rented apartments, through the financial support of monthly housing costs (deposit, rent, public utility costs) for a duration of up to 12 months. Social support is provided as well. The cost of housing is financed generally fifty-fifty both from the support provided by the programme as well as self-contribution/financial contribution of the homeless person. In between 2005-2007, as many as 1.300 people received housing support and moved into sublets.

Through the funds provided by the European Union, programmes aimed at helping the social integration of homeless persons can run until 2013. The funds can be used to improve employability and to help homeless people gain independent living, even through helping them to move to a sublet. These programs provide an opportunity for homeless people living in shelters to have their own income from work and to move into independent housing. This way, according to the plans, as many as 3.000 places could be liberated and provided for homeless people currently living on streets. The shelters must be made suitable for welcoming them, and instead of mass-shelters, smaller rooms must be established. The necessary investments will be financed in part from EU funds – although it is yet unknown how much money will be made available for the renovation of homeless shelters, since the tendering process is not yet finished.

### 3. A NEW HOMELESS STRATEGY

In Hungary, a very active professional community is fighting for the security of homeless care. Their work has been supported by two public foundations since 2002. In September 2007 version 0. of the homeless strategy "Where to go further?" was presented. Regional, professional debates are currently taking place.

In the strategy that we plan to submit to the government, concrete tasks in three main areas have been formulated:

1. In the area of prevention, it offers alternative solutions regarding accommodation, the social housing sector, the politics of rented apartments and the preservation of housing.
2. It makes proposals regarding the transformation of the regulation and financing of the care system with a view to replacing the existing inflexible and inefficient institution-oriented system with a new structure based on buying services. Hence the old, narrow system of concepts would be replaced by a broader one, much closer to European practice.
3. With the title "Opening to the street" it deals with the care of homeless people and its problems. Its final aim is that no person should remain on the street uncared for (a positive zero tolerance). ●



# Housing Situation of Sitting Tenants in Transitional Countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Analysis of collated data)

By **Tanja Sarec**, *President of the Association of Tenants of Slovenia*

## 1. TRANSITIONAL COUNTRIES INCLUDED IN THE SURVEY

part of Central and Eastern Europe	countries included in survey (8/15)	countries not included in survey (7/15)
North – East Europe (Baltic)	Latvia Estonia	Lithuania*
Central Europe	Poland Czech Republic Slovakia	Hungary**
Balkans West	Slovenia Croatia Serbia (and Montenegro)***	Albania* Bosnia and Herzegovina**** Macedonia****
Balkans East	—	Romania* Bulgaria*

During and after the transition, states changed their housing systems and ceased to be active players in the housing sector.

## 2. HOUSING SITUATION IN CEE COUNTRIES AT THE START OF THE TRANSITION

Before the transition in the early 90s, the CEE countries had so called 'providing housing systems' in place for almost half a century. The state was actively involved in resolving citizens' housing problems by allocating public flats to individuals and families and/or by strictly regulating the private rental sector. However, during and after the transition, states changed their housing systems and ceased to be active players in the housing sector. The 'providing housing system' was abandoned and replaced by the so-called 'enabling housing system' where existing public housing stock was privatized.

During the old regime, the construction of new flats was a priority over the maintenance of existing ones. Therefore, at the start of the transition period, there was a large, poorly maintained, public housing stock. In order to shift the responsibility for the upkeep of the apartment buildings to individual residents and other private entities, the CEE states opted, as a rule, for mass privatisation of the existing state owned housing stock. Furthermore, the change of socialist regimes to market oriented societies also introduced changes in legislation and a change in social principles. In general, the protection of private property was given priority over resolving social issues of the population.

\* There is no active tenant organisation in the country. Official data on tenancies in the CEE region are according to the experiences of the authors and other tenants' organisations in the region, and are not a reliable source of information. Therefore the individual states whose data could not be re-examined in cooperation with the local association of tenants are not included in this survey.

\*\* Even though the data are not collected directly from tenant associations in respective countries it can be concluded from more than one reliable source that the situation in **Hungary** does not differ from the rest of the CEE transitional countries. This means that the general observations of this survey are very much applicable to sitting tenants in the above mentioned country. In Hungary, after the completion of privatisation, only 4 – 5 % of rental stock is left in the country, the majority of which is in the bigger cities, while the remaining tenants suffer from similar accompanying problems provoked by the social change in post-socialist societies as in other parts of the CEE (source: National report of the Hungarian Tenant Organisation (LAGE), Oct. 2003).

\*\*\* Data were collated in 2005 and relate to the territory of the **State Union of Serbia and Montenegro**, which existed between 2003 and 2006, until Montenegro formally declared independence on 3 June 2006.

\*\*\*\* The case of **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and the case of **Macedonia** are not included in this survey as the nature of the problem in both countries differs substantially from the subject that is presented in this article.

In the CEE countries it was commonly believed that the change of socialist regimes to market oriented societies also had to be reflected in the housing market.

### 3. PRIVATIZATION OF FORMER PUBLIC HOUSING STOCK

In the CEE there were several models for the privatization of former public housing stock. Individual countries usually pursued more than one model. For the purpose of this analysis, privatization models are qualified as follows:

- Model I - privatization to the benefit of tenants,
- Model II - privatization to the benefit of others and
- Model III – restitution to the benefit of once expropriated persons.

**Model I** was pursued in all analysed countries. Its consequence was that the majority of former housing right holders in public flats became home-owners for a payment of well below market value of the purchased flats. For example, in the Balkan countries the price did not exceed 10% of the market value; in Latvia a sitting tenant could pay for a flat with received privatization certificates; sitting tenants in Russia can, until 30<sup>th</sup> of March 2010, privatize their apartments free of charge by simply registering and paying a 4 Euro registration fee, etc.

Ignoring the negative effects to national economies, this privatization model was deemed to be the most protective one for existing tenants, as it resolved their potential housing problems and secured their position in their homes in the new political order. However, negative effects have also been recorded. The so-called poor-owner problem, which has resulted from the mass privatization of public housing stock, is quite a common problem in the CEE.<sup>1</sup>

**Model II** was usually introduced alongside Model I. Two different examples of this model are found in Poland and Latvia. In Poland this model was pursued within the privatization of former public companies. Through privatization of a public company owning a dwelling, the former public owner (public company) was substituted by a private owner (the same company, which was privatized), so consequently a dwelling got privatised as well. In Latvia tenants in public flats were allowed to transfer the privatization right to any third person, although abuses of this option in practice are said to have happened in numerous cases. For that reason Latvia's model is qualified as Model II.

The main consequence of pursuing this model is that former public owners were replaced by private owners, while sitting tenants remained in flats with more or less legal protection.

**Model III** was pursued in all analysed countries except in Poland and only to a small degree in Croatia (where only about 300 housing units were confiscated after WWII). Buildings and dwellings that were confiscated, nationalized or in other way expropriated after WWII were privatized to the benefit of the former owners or their heirs.

Similar to Model II, private owners replaced former public owners and sitting tenants stayed in their respective dwellings with more or less legal protection.

### 4. TRANSITIONAL CHANGES OF HOUSING LEGISLATION

In the CEE countries it was commonly believed that the change of socialist regimes to market oriented societies also had to be reflected in the housing market. That is why they introduced radical changes in the existing housing legislation. Former restrictions for private landlords (strict rent regulation systems, high levels of security of tenure) were dismissed and the new private landlords can more or less do as they please. Control mechanisms and surveillance systems of the housing market have become ineffective, which has caused the growth of unregulated tenures and the black housing market in the CEE.

Sitting tenants who acquired tenures before transition, either in public or private flats, were granted a certain level of protection of their vested rights (rent regulation and certain levels of security of tenure.) However, in the last ten years, this protection has gradually diminished. State policy and court practice often neglect the obligation to preserve vested rights and give priority to the legally induced property expectations of the new landlords. The trend of weakening the position of sitting tenants and annulling the instruments for their protection is still in process in most CEE countries.

<sup>1</sup> Extreme examples of the poor-owner problem have been reported in Russia, Moldova, Latvia, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia and other CEE countries. In Latvia there have been reported cases of families, who, unable to pay maintenance costs and suffering from accumulated debt have been forced to sell their homes at auction. They have ended up either on the street or in shelters (source: Liepaja's Tenants Association, Dec. 2004).





## 5. CHANGES IN HOUSING POLICIES

In general, the new CEE 'enabling housing system', is inefficient due to a lack of effective planning and poor financial and legal instruments. Public inclusion in the active housing policy is weak; therefore the real estate market has become extremely profit-oriented.

## 6. OTHER SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES AFFECTING TENANTS

Owing partly to bad regulation in the CEE in general, it is believed that each individual must resolve his/her housing problem by himself/herself and that the only efficient way of resolving it is by buying, and not renting a flat. Younger people usually see tenure as a transitional stage only, until they have the possibility to buy a flat, or inherit one from their relatives. Families and the elderly usually become or remain tenants only if they are forced to do so through lack of money.

However, lack of any active or efficient public intervention in the housing market has caused a gradual rise in the price of housing, putting home ownership out of reach for a growing number of people. Rents, maintenance and operating costs are on the rise in all CEE countries - in general, well above the average rise in a family's monthly net income - and non-payment of these costs is qualified as a culpable reason for eviction.

However, tenants have been unable to organise themselves as an effective pressure group, mainly because of the transitional nature of new tenures and the fact that the elderly are often too infirm to mobilise. Generally speaking, tenants have become a marginal, vulnerable group of people and tenancy is becoming one of the key elements for social exclusion in the CEE.

In the Balkan countries, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Macedonia, there is another big group of vulnerable individuals - refugees and displaced persons from the war.<sup>2</sup>

## 7. VULNERABLE TENANT GROUPS IN CEE

Vulnerable tenant groups in the CEE can be classified into two types:

- i. sitting tenants (who gained housing right before transition) and
- ii. new tenants (who gained tenancy right during and after transition).

i. The term "sitting tenants" denotes tenants in CEE who, in the times before transition (i.e. prior to 1990), acquired a civil right for resolution of their housing needs. The legal specifics vary from country to country, however in principle, these rights entitled them to permanent, non-profit, secure and inheritable tenure in their homes. These rights could be acquired on either public or private flats that were controlled by public authorities, and were in accordance with the legislation in force at the time.

But during the transition, public housing stock was privatised; the state withdrew from the private housing sector on the one hand, and failed to introduce any mechanisms for its regulation, on the other. Sitting tenants are those former occupancy right holders in the former public housing stock who - due to legal and/or personal reasons - did not have the possibility to become owners of their flats, and thus continued to use the flats as leaseholders. During the transition process, their rights were minimised and their level of protection was severely reduced. States failed to replace the loss of tenants' vested rights, while personal reasons (old age, financial weakness etc) and the rise in real estate prices on the housing market, prevented those tenants from acquiring new homes to live in.

<sup>2</sup> In Bosnia and Herzegovina the privatization of once publicly-owned flats as well as private flats was introduced soon after the institution of both entities (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina /app 186,500 flats/ and Republic of Srpska /app 63,000 flats/ and Brčko District /app 3,400 flats/). These privatization processes were regulated somewhat differently in all three territories, however the right to favourable purchase of inhabited or substitute flats is common to them all. For this reason, Bosnia and Herzegovina is not included in this survey since legislation does not institute per se a "sitting tenant" problem; however post-war conditions, lack of financial resources and vacant flats, difficulties connected with vested rights and re-housing of refugees, justiciability of the right to housing and the right to buy the flat remain to be fictive and in many cases practically non-executive (source: National report of the Association of Tenants of BiH (BIHUSS), Nov. 2006). In Serbia the restitution of once expropriated property and housing transition has not started yet. However, following the projections of national tenant organizations, approximately 13.000 sitting tenant families / 40.000 individuals/ could become endangered as a consequence of planned forthcoming reforms. In Macedonia the problems of tenants differ substantially from the problems in countries included in the survey. In Macedonia the process of privatization started in 1991, however in contrast to the majority of the CEE countries, housing privatisation was executed strictly to the benefit of the existing housing right holders (model I). However, cases are reported that neglect to respect valid legislation (from the side of restitution landlords and administrative bodies) may lead to the eviction of a tenant and his/her family. The biggest problem in Macedonia however is with the refugees from Kosovo (official data: 350.000 refugees were recorded in the year 1999) and internally displaced persons (official data: 30.000 people at the start of the war in 2001, while 9.000 people are still living in student homes, hotels and hostels even today). The authorities are trying to have them returned to their homes, but financial difficulties, fear for personal security or devastated homes often prevent them from doing so (source: National report of the Union for protection of tenants (MakeDom), April 2007).

During the transition process, the rights of sitting tenants were minimised and their level of protection was severely reduced.

In regard to the legal background of their problems, there are three different groups of sitting tenants who, however, share similar difficulties:

- sitting tenants in privatized/restituted dwellings<sup>3</sup>,
- sitting tenants in private dwellings<sup>4</sup>,
- sitting tenants in public dwellings<sup>5</sup>.

ii. The second special vulnerable group are new tenants in private flats. The absence of any effective and efficient state regulation in the form of control mechanisms and surveillance systems has caused increases in rents, arrogance of new landlords, and a wide spread black tenancy market. Tenants in the private sector often find themselves without any or with minimal legal protection. However, due to lack of data this group is not included in this analysis.<sup>6</sup>

## 8. TABLE

Table 1: Structure of vulnerable tenant groups in 8 analysed CEE countries;

Source: IUT ROCEE, Survey on Housing situation in transitional countries (2007).

	Latvia	Estonia	Poland	Czech Republic	Slovakia	Slovenia	Croatia	Serbia and Montenegro	analysed CEE countries (7/15) together
privatis. model	Model I Model II Model III	Model I --- Model III	Model I Model II ---	Model I --- Model III	Model I Model II Model III	Model I --- Model III	Model I --- Model III	Model I --- ---	
changes of housing legislation	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	not yet	
sitting tenants in privatised /restituted flats	problem (78.000) and more	problem (3.600)	problem (600.000)	problem (350.000)	problem (30.000)	problem (13.000)	problem (300)	potential problem (13.000)	1,090.000 and more
sitting tenants in private flats	---	---	problem (900.000)	---	---	---	problem (5.000)	potential problem (60.000)	965.000 and more
sitting tenant in public flats	---	problem (50.000)	---	problem (450.000)	---	problem (65.000)	---	problem (80.000)	645.000 and more
TM	78.000 and more	53.600	1,500.000	800.000	30.000	78.000	5.300	153.000 and more	2,700.000 and more families

<sup>3</sup> Sitting tenants in privatized/restituted dwellings are those housing right holders who acquired civil right on publicly owned dwellings which were nationalised, confiscated or in any other way transferred to the public domain after WWII, and who were excluded from privatization of those dwellings as a) privatisation priority was given to previous owners and their heirs – or - b) privatisation was completed via privatization of once public companies which were privatized together with all the existing assets and thus continued to use the dwellings as leaseholders in private sector.

<sup>4</sup> Sitting tenants in private dwellings are those housing right holders who acquired civil right on private dwellings that were controlled by the public authority and who were in the time of transition excluded from privatization of those dwellings as *nuda proprietas* of the actual landlords was made effective by withdrawal of public control from existing relationships.

<sup>5</sup> Sitting tenants in public dwellings are those housing right holders who acquired civil right on publicly owned dwellings and who did not choose or could not afford to privatise them in times of transition and thus continued to use the dwellings as leaseholders in public sector.

<sup>6</sup> Extremely difficult situations in this respect are reported from Serbia. The rents are very high (from 200 EUR to 1000 EUR). The number of people without any legal protection in a form of rental contract trying to resolve their housing issues at least temporarily on a black housing market is estimated at 80.000 families and individuals (source: Conference on the housing conditions in Serbia, Belgrade, Oct. 2006). In Czech Republic the number of free market tenures is recorded to be 200.000 tenant families (source: Czech Association of Tenants (SON), Dec. 2006) etc.





# Homeless Policy in Romania

By Ian Tilling, M.B.E.

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## CONTEXT

Socio-economic changes in Romania, such as the economic transition to a liberal regional and global market, and industrial restructuring have combined to create a major reduction in the number of reasonably paid full-time jobs in the traditional economic sectors. Thousands of redundant workers have been forced to either depend on restricted social welfare benefits, or take insecure low-paid jobs. Growing numbers of people are living in poverty, on low or sometimes no income at all. Most simply cannot afford to pay for or maintain adequate accommodation in the private housing market and virtually all are denied access to the almost non-existent social housing market.

The scope of homelessness in Romania is characterised by its complexity and multifaceted nature, confirmed by the diverse homeless population and the difficult and wide-ranging character of the causes and effects of being homeless. Ignoring the street children phenomenon, in 1998 it was generally assumed that the homeless population was made up of single males aged between 45 and 55 years of age. Soon afterwards, they were joined by single women and the age of homeless males started to come down. In the early 2000's, more and more retired older people were finding themselves homeless and during the last few years they have been joined by a significant and increasing number of families.

The situation is both the legacy of the former communist establishment and the outcome of the harsh economic transition. Despite its principals and objectives, the establishment failed to provide suitable housing for everyone. Hidden homelessness (namely those living inappropriately in prisons, psychiatric institutions, factory hostels and other institutions) already existed in socialist times, although the authorities denied its existence. The closing of workers' hostels and children's institutions, increased family dysfunction and a lack of adequate resources, high unemployment or family responsibilities preventing employment, has led to some of the most vulnerable losing their homes and living on the streets. Many individuals who become homeless have multiple problems associated with a history of institutional care or confinement, family breakdown, alcoholism, mental and physical health problems, unemployment and a lack of financial resources.

Although the key determinants of housing exclusion are similar to those in other European countries, it must be stressed that the extent of the population at risk of homelessness is higher in Romania and in other former socialist countries in the region.

The situation in Romania is acute because of the lack of adequate and affordable housing and the increasing level of poverty. This is exacerbated by the fact that homeless people and many others, who leave their towns and villages to find work in the larger cities, find themselves outside the social and health assistance structures. Moreover, the living conditions of those who become homeless tend to be harsher and many situations seem to acquire features of long-lasting social and housing exclusion.

Poverty is on the increase in Romania, and economic restructuring has led to social exclusion; such trends are stronger in certain regions of the country, such as mono-industrial centres and rural areas. In recent years, in the absence of adequate social services, financial transfers have provided vulnerable social groups with more family allowances.

## DEFINITION AND EXTENT OF HOMELESSNESS

There is no official definition of 'homeless' in Romania, although the general perception of homelessness is restricted to its visibility, meaning those experiencing 'rooflessness' and living on the street and in other public places. However, there is an increasing acceptance, particularly at the level of local authorities and non-governmental organisation (NGO) service providers, to include those experiencing 'insecure housing' and 'inadequate housing' and to a lesser extent, those experiencing 'houselessness'.

Romania has a long history of care institutions and the reluctance to perceive 'houseless' as a form of housing exclusion is probably because people living in residential institutions and shelters receive care and support.

Without a common homeless definition, it is impossible to estimate the number of 'homeless' people living in Romania accurately, whether they are in urban or rural areas. However, various studies put the numbers of homeless people at anywhere between 10,000 and 13,000 people.

## GOVERNMENT POLICY

There are no specific policies to tackle homelessness, although a number of other policies have been developed to try and meet the challenges faced by those facing homelessness and housing crises. These policies include improving the situation of the country's Roma population, integrating children and young people with minor disabilities into mainstream education, and improving the situation of institutional care facilities for those with severe disabilities.

## GOVERNMENT STRATEGY

The Romanian government's strategic objective for 2006/2008, is to "create an inclusive society" able to provide the resources and means to ensure that all citizens have a decent life. This strategy attempts to identify and encourage an integrated approach based on partnership.

Specific strategies target social protection and the integration and inclusion of people with disabilities, the inclusion of young people leaving the residential care system and combating domestic violence.

The National Strategy for the Development of Social Services is in line with the governance programme for social security and services 2005–2008. In brief, the strategy leans heavily on European policy on social services in the current European and national context. It also includes a SWOT analysis for Romania (an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats faced) and presents the reasoning behind the goals, principles and objectives it is designed to reach. The government's strategy is also in line with the objectives put forward by Romania in the Social Inclusion Memorandum designed to prepare the country, following its accession, to participate in the open method of coordination (O.M.C.).

## GOVERNMENT ACTION

According to the Commission of European Communities<sup>1</sup>, the challenges to be met in the area of social protection and social inclusion include population shrinkage and ageing, the extent of the informal economy and high rates of employment in subsistence agriculture. Additional challenges identified included the quality of human resources, the insufficient development of social services in terms of their territorial coverage, quality and diversification. Other important challenges were described as the continuing low level of social benefits, and obstacles for vulnerable groups trying to gain access to the labour market, services and resources.

The Romanian government's action on homelessness is included in its activities targeted at disadvantaged groups in relation to social inclusion and other measures to reduce poverty. A Joint Inclusion Memorandum (JIM) was signed by Romania and the European Commission in 2005, aimed at preparing the country for full participation in the O.M.C. agreed by EU member states on social inclusion. In the JIM, the following specific measures on homelessness were identified:

- the drastic reduction in the homeless phenomenon, mainly through building a network of emergency centres and social housing

- prevention of evictions due to the inability to pay utility bills and where eviction cannot be prevented, adjustment of social housing for those who are evicted
- development of a viable programme for building social housing that address the needs of vulnerable categories (young people, young families, families with many children, etc.)
- improving access of young people and young families to build or buy housing
- developing shelters and social centres for young people leaving the child protection system
- increasing the number of shelters for homeless people

Housing legislation stipulates that "free and unrestricted access to a house is the right of every citizen" and during the last three years a range of normative acts have been elaborated by the government aimed at offering support for people to maintain or build their own homes. These measures include encouraging banks to provide special loans for young people to buy homes, supporting local authorities to build social public housing, providing a range of financial assistance to those living on low incomes. Over the next few years, it is planned that a network of 37 multifunctional 'social centres' will be established for young people leaving the residential care system. In direct response to the homeless situation, the government is offering financial support to build 50 shelters throughout the country. To tackle the housing crisis experienced by the Roma population, the government intends to improve housing conditions and provide land for constructing new homes.

Out of the six measures presented in the JIM, three measures relate to building shelters and emergency centres to lead to 'the drastic reduction in the homeless phenomenon'. Worryingly, 'shelters' and 'social centres' also seem to be the government's answer to the growing number of young adults leaving residential care without jobs, adequate life-skills or a place to live.

Shelters do not reduce homelessness; they simply provide homeless people with nighttime shelter. Social centres and emergency centres can only offer homeless people a place to stay during the daytime and be a resource to obtain information. The difficulty with the homeless phenomenon is that homeless people have very complex problems and therefore require comprehensive support, only achievable through a multi-agency approach that requires a good deal of resources.

<sup>1</sup> Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion - Brussels, 22.02.2007



Again, social housing is mentioned in three of the measures and is aimed at homeless people and those evicted from their homes. The government speaks about, 'a viable programme for building social housing that addresses the needs of vulnerable groups' and mentions young people, young families and families with many children. Here the government is on track with its thinking; social housing would answer the needs of those simply requiring an affordable place to live and call home.

There are however two issues with the government's actions as it relates to homelessness and housing exclusion. Homelessness represents a combination of social dislocation and marginalisation. The experience of homelessness causes a high level of complex needs, requiring access to adequate and appropriate housing together with psychosocial support to maintain social and residential stability. In short, the answer to homelessness is not simply a bricks and mortar issue; many people will need social housing (particularly young people leaving the care system) together with support services. Without this support, they will simply become homeless again.

Secondly, social housing is not being built. Although the government has allocated funds for building social housing, the municipalities and local authorities (landowners) must make the land available for social housing. In Bucharest, land is at a premium and attracts vast sums of money when used for 'class A' office blocks or half a million Euro villas. There is no financial reward in developing social housing for either the owner of the land or the developer. In short, unless the government compels local authorities to make land available for social housing, it will simply not be built.

Taking into account the profound changes that Romanian society has experienced over the past 18 years, the government intends making it a priority to target key groups and strengthen dialogue with social partners and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to prevent compromising the fragile balance that has already been achieved.

The Law on the national social security system and Government Ordinance on social services have laid the foundations for the national social

security system. The complex character of the social security system reform, and the difficulties involved, means that solutions cannot be found quickly. Reforms require the mobilisation of human, financial and material resources; furthermore, communities, individual citizens and beneficiaries should be jointly engaged in the reform process.

The current legislation in Romania provides a general framework for the organisation and administration of social services. However, a large number of irregularities persist, such as the uneven distribution of services, wide discrepancies between regions and counties and between urban and rural areas, and the gaps between the needs of beneficiaries and available resources. Other irregularities identified, include the absence of any strategic community planning, various differences between the categories of beneficiaries and the poor management structures together with the lack of qualified personnel.

Around 1.2 million workers are thought to be working in the informal non-agricultural sector out of a workforce of approximately 10 million workers. Whilst the unemployment rate (7.2%) is very close to the EU average, the reasonably low employment rate is not the result of economic growth or government policy, but the result of massive emigration to established EU member states<sup>2</sup>. According to the National Trade Union Syndicate, about 3.4 million Romanian citizens work abroad. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports that there are 1.2 million citizens legally working abroad, whilst the Ministry of Labour, Family and Equal Opportunities estimates that the figure is more than 2 million, legal or otherwise. Of concern to the budget authorities is that, according to the National Bank of Romania, Romanian citizens working abroad sent home a staggering ?5.3 billion in 2006.

However, these citizens do not contribute to the public social security systems (pensions, health-care and unemployment) and while these transfers of funds have a say, in the short-term at least, to alleviating poverty in the poorest regions of the country, the massive emigration of labour has created concerns. ●

**Shelters do not reduce homelessness; they simply provide homeless people with nighttime shelter.**

<sup>2</sup> 'The need to put social security back on the agenda', Valentin Burda (FDCS)



## “Please Go Away” - Western Europe and Eastern European Roma

By **Claude Cahn**<sup>1</sup>, *Head of Advocacy Unit, Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions*

During the Autumn months of 2007, the media of Geneva canton in Switzerland began a high profile discussion, based on information provided by the public authority, about circa 50-70 Roma from Romania who were sleeping under bridges in Geneva, and begging or busking in the city. Within several weeks, the authorities had resolved to have all of them arrested, put in social shelters for several weeks, and then collectively expelled on busses to Romania. The legality of these acts were not challenged, not least because Switzerland has not yet ratified the relevant international law – Protocol 4 to the European Convention on Human Rights, which includes a ban on the collective expulsion of aliens.

Expressed views about these acts were highly ambivalent. One editorial in a Geneva daily considered the extensive media attention to the acts unwholesome and prurient – nearly every moment in the lives of the homeless Roma concerned, from the moment they were detained to the moment they were expelled, was photographed by media or local artists. Geneva civil society engagement focused primarily on challenging new laws criminalizing begging – laws which had been used by Swiss police to shake down the persons concerns to the tune of several hundreds of thousands of Swiss francs. Some noted that Roma face extreme difficulties – and possibly persecution – in Romania. The idea that the persons concerned might be integrated in Switzerland was however evidently considered too wildly absurd to contemplate. Then the issue faded from public view, until March of this year, when an evidently chagrined media began reporting that the Roma from Romania were back, and begging again.

Geneva media and the public reassured themselves, during the expulsion episode, that the Swiss approach to the “problem of Romani beggars” was superior to the Italian model. Italy has had, for at least the last decade, a practice of widespread and regular destruction of informal Romani settlements, generally in the early morning hours, and with no legal proceedings whatsoever. During mid-2007, following a widely reported criminal act evidently committed by a Romani man from Romania in Rome, anti-Romani hysteria reached fever pitch. Under the pressure of the media and popular anger, Italian authorities moved to placate the mob.

Several hundred people were forcibly expelled from Italy. However, unlike Switzerland, Italy is bound by the 4<sup>th</sup> Protocol to the European Convention.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Italy is bound by the law of the European Union, including a 2004 Council Directive – Directive 38/2004 – which makes forced expulsion of the alien citizens of one European Union Member State to another possible in only very exceptional circumstances. In the main, the expulsion of an EU citizen from another Member State now requires demonstrable evidence of very serious public order concerns. These shall be “based exclusively on the personal conduct of the individual concerned” and prior criminal conviction cannot be invoked solely as a reason for expulsion. As a result, the wanton expulsion of one ethnic group, based solely on the incitement of the media-inspired mob, has not been a public policy option available to the Italian government, or at least not one resorted to easily.

The solution Italian authorities found in 2007 to this problem was to not actually expel Romanian Roma from Italy (or at least not more than a few hundred Roma), but rather to undertake a range of acts to make their lives as miserable as possible. The primary mode of doing so is the pre-dawn raid, in which the impromptu housing and all of the possessions of the persons concerned are summarily destroyed, and the persons themselves are turned out onto the street. The primary idea seems to be that, if repeatedly subjected to such treatment, eventually, the persons concerned will leave. These acts, although illegal, are very difficult to challenge. Thus, the homelessness of the persons concerned evolves into a justification for draconian measures, rather than grounds for any form of social assistance.

The result sought — the complete disappearance of Roma from Italy — has, however, proved illusory. This is also true of French efforts in this area. While the actions of the Italian government have often made front-page international news, at the same time, French authorities have been more quietly expelling Romanian Roma to Romania. The arrangement from France goes as follows: upon expulsion, adults receive 300 EUR per person and children receive 100 EUR. Persons expelled are also invited, upon arrival in Romania, to submit a plan for small business or small agriculture (in Romania). This, if deemed successful, receives a further 3000 EUR grant from the French authorities. Thus, France pays modestly to exclude aliens on an ethnic basis. As in Switzerland and Italy, the dominant mode of discourse is, “These poor people need to be integrated into society – not here, but rather in their countries of origin.”

It is difficult to understate the impact of these repeated spasms in Western Europe. They are literally shaking the foundations of the post-war order in Europe to exclude racial considerations from public policy. Although smuggled back in code, their raw racial character inevitably repeatedly breaks the surface. It is no wonder that bodies such as the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the European Union itself have begun devoting ever greater energy to trying to see these matters resolved. The recent election of a new government in Italy, including elements of the extreme right at both national and local (including Rome) level, shows how elusive that resolution is, and how powerful are the forces of popular anger at work.

The problem is that, without viable and far-reaching integration policies in both Western and Eastern Europe, it is difficult to see how the extreme exclusion of Roma in Europe can be resolved. The fantasy that repeated expulsion from Western Europe can resolve matters is exactly that – a fantasy.

Romania likely has over two million Roma. Ethnic hatred is intense enough in Romania that during the period 1990-1993, there were repeated pogroms in which a number of people were killed, and many whole Romani settlements were burnt to the ground. These acts were often undertaken with the support or under the direction of the local authorities. Today, although these wild episodes are now

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<sup>2</sup> Belgium was found in violation of Article 4 of Protocol 4 by the European Court of Human Rights after Belgian police tricked a group of Slovak Roma into custody and collectively expelled them. All or most of the European Union Member States have collectively expelled groups of Roma during episodes of public hysteria about the arrival of “hordes” of Gypsies. Most of these incidents have never been ruled on by the Court however, do to the fact that the victims are far away and networks to weak to press claims sufficiently. Some claims raised at the Court – such as the expulsion by Italy of Roma to Bosnia – have been settled amicably.





for the time being a thing of the past, widespread loathing of Roma results in high levels of poverty and unemployment. This systemic exclusion is fuelled by widespread segregation in education, which perpetuates massive under-education. Although the Romanian government regularly commits to addressing these issues – and indeed acts on those commitments – powerful forces reinforce and exacerbate this exclusion. Thus for example, as I write these words, an informal but not particularly slum-like Romani neighborhood (by comparison with many others) called Kuntz, existing since the 1920s on the outskirts of Timisoara, is under threat of eradication as the city develops rapidly. Thus persons in situations of marginal poverty are pressed toward homelessness. And Romania is not the only country in Central and Southeastern Europe with a Romani population living in extreme precarity.

One striking fact of recent months has been the numbers of persons declining the French offer of 3000 EUR – if the choice is between 3000 EUR and staying in Romania on the one hand, and going back to France on the other, preference leans toward going back to France. The considerations in this choice should be evident even to the most short-sighted policy-maker; no one wants to be paid to stay nowhere, when the alternative is to go someplace with a future, and to try to make the best of it. These are the basic foundations of hope. Policies based on bribing an unwanted ethnic group to leave the economic centre and to stay on the marginal periphery are doomed in advance.

For the time being, however, a number of the main alternative policies on offer are worse. Thus, following the election of the extreme right in Italy, Minister of Interior Roberto Maroni was quoted by media on May 11 as having stated, “All Roma camps will have to be dismantled right away, and the inhabitants will be either expelled or incarcerated”. Also according to media, exceptional powers were given to the prefects of Milan, Rome and Naples to “solve the problem of the Roma in those towns”. The Florence newspaper *La Nazione* reported that large-scale, arbitrary detentions of Roma had taken place in Florence on April 23, May 12, May 13 and May 14. In Trieste, the local administration cut provision of water and electricity to a Sinti camp (i.e., Italian citizens) apparently to force them to leave. In Vicenza, near Venice, a number of Romani women were reportedly stopped and prevented from entering a supermarket.

In Milan, on May 11, four Molotov cocktails were thrown at the Roma camp in Novarra, near Milan. Milan Deputy Mayor Riccardo de Corato has reportedly stated that he wants to institute a *numerus clausus* on the number of Roma in Milan. Milan Mayor Letizia Moratti has reportedly requested that the Milan prefect Gian Valerio Lombardi be named to a post to be called “Exceptional Commissioner for the Roma Emergency” for the Lombardy region. The new Italian policy is thus the old Italian policy on steroids.

And then there were the events in Naples. According to *Agence France Presse*, two Roman settlements in Naples were burned to the ground on May 14 “to keep their inhabitants from returning after they fled attacks by local residents”. The blazes were apparently sparked by the reported attempted kidnapping of an Italian baby by a 16 year-old Romani girl the previous Saturday, although a number of local sources have brought forward indications that the attacks may in fact have been carefully planned in advance.

The accusation against Roma of child theft — the spark which has ignited the Naples crisis — belongs to the deepest of the embedded anti-Romani stereotypes, similar to the blood libel accusation against Jews. The return to policy considerations of raw racial incitement of this kind is of deep concern. A number of Italian commentators have worried actively about the fresh new life given to fascist rhetoric once thought dead, and to previously marginalized fascists. These concerns cannot be dismissed lightly.

But a failure to think in non-racial categories is now prevalent across the political spectrum, left to right, moderate to extreme. There are few now capable of imagining the inclusion of Roma with equal dignity in European societies. Those working toward such a goal are marginalized or often blocked by more powerful opposing forces. The politics of exclusion on an ethnic basis rules throughout Europe, even where not accompanied by banner-waving and Molotov cocktails. That fact is as worrying as the return of the extreme right to the mainstream of European politics. ●



## Homelessness in Estonia

By **Andrus Toompuu**, *Senior Expert, Tallinn City Government, Social Welfare and Health Care Board*



During the last decades Estonia has gone through many changes and not everyone has been able to adjust to them. Homelessness is a serious social problem.

Many people have not managed to retain a permanent income due to increased competition and have lost their homes because of growing debt. Homelessness has become a problem especially in the capital, Tallinn, where 33% of the total population lives. Those who have lost their homes in other counties and smaller cities, have come to Tallinn hoping to find work and a place to live. Not all people have been able to fulfill that wish and have ended up homeless.

In the first years of Estonia's re-independence, homeless people were mostly offered temporary help such as access to soup kitchens and shelters. Today, however, the circle of services for this target group has widened. An important factor in bringing homeless people back to a stable life has been the development and improvement of additional housing services.

Through the Tallinn Social Welfare Development Program 2006-2010 and Social Welfare Action Plan 2006-2008, the government has started to offer housing services with different self-funding levels, including the service of paid shelters and dormitory-like living units to different target groups in need of re-socialization (homeless people, former convicts, people who find it hard to cope with their everyday lives due to mental/physical disability or old age, or addiction).

Offering social housing services and other accompanied welfare services has made it possible to re-socialize a large number of people who have struggled with a chronic lack of housing, been in shelters for a long time, and who have had other housing problems. However, the number of people who are homeless may yet increase, as a growing number of people are being evicted from their apartments by court order due to debt.

More attention has to be paid to helping and rehabilitating people with housing problems and other difficulties, in order to prevent the increase of social exclusion, which would cost

society even more. Homelessness is a multifaceted problem, and homeless people need different services. It is important to deal with the re-socialization of homeless people to bring them back into society. And in order to prevent homelessness, services aimed at supporting people who still own a home are needed.

The city of Tallinn has therefore developed and started a new debt counseling service. It helps families or individuals with financial or economic difficulties by advising on a number of issues such as rental debt; bank loans and loans from individuals; paying by installments; unpaid alimony; credit card debt; mortgages; student loans etc. The debt counseling service is currently mostly provided to people living in municipal or social apartments (apartments that belong to the city). At the moment, the demand for the service is bigger than the offer, and the city has plans to widen the service further. The syllabus developed in Tallinn is being used to train debt counselors across Estonia.

During the past few years in Estonia, homelessness as a social problem has been noticed more by society in general. For the last two years, an event called 'The Night of the Homeless - On the Other Side of the Threshold', has been held and large numbers of people, homeless or not, have taken part.

Also, NGO's and people of the city are trying together to change the attitude of the community towards the homeless, and different interest groups are lobbying government to minimize homelessness. The needs and interests of the homeless are taken into account more when planning and social service provision are being organized.

But at the same time other trends can be seen – real-estate developers have in the past few years forced welfare institutions to close down or move to other locations, which are generally unsuitable.

However, it is positive to see that there are so many socially-minded people in Estonia and hopefully as a solid group we can stand up for those who lack the strength, motivation and knowledge to stand up for themselves. ●



## Socio-demographic profile of homeless people in Pomeranian Region, 2001 – 2007

By **Lukasz Browarczyk**, *Research and Publications Coordinator in Pomeranian Forum in Aid of Getting Out of Homelessness*

The institution which has conducted a social survey of homeless people in the Pomeranian Region every two years since 2001, is the Pomeranian Forum in Aid of Getting out of Homelessness. The main aim of the social survey is to reach the greatest number of homeless people and define them as a group in terms of their basic socio-demographic characteristics. The task has been made possible due to the cooperation of the private and public sector institutions, and organizations working with homeless people such as social welfare centres, institutions for homeless people, the police, the railway security service, prisons and hospitals.

The four surveys which have been conducted so far have contributed to the amount of information available concerning the basic characteristics of homeless people in the Pomeranian Region. We believe that the types of homelessness in other regions of the country do not differ greatly from the one regularly monitored in the Pomeranian Region.

The definition of homelessness used in the socio-demographic survey is based on the European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) developed by FEANTSA. Homeless people are classified according to four conceptual categories of their living situation; "roofless," "houseless," "living in insecure housing," and "living in inadequate housing" but only the first two categories were used for the purpose of our research.

In each survey the number of homeless people that that were reached was different (year 2001 – 1871 people; 2003 – 2169 people; 2005 – 2470 people; 2007 – 2408 people). This fact, however, does not mean that it was the exact number of homeless people in the Pomeranian Region, but only the number of those who could be reached by those conducting the survey. We can safely assume that the number of homeless people in the Pomeranian Region, (one of the sixteen regions of Poland inhabited by two million people), has not changed drastically and is more or less constant.

The socio-demographic survey has allowed us not only to grasp the scale of the phenomenon of homelessness but also the evolution of the socio-demographic factors which have been studied. The features which are the most interesting and worth considering are the age of the population, the length of time spent in homelessness, health factors, whether or not they are employed and working legally, and the typology of homelessness.

What is interesting about the phenomenon of homelessness in Pomerania is that it concerns mostly men. When analyzing the surveys conducted in previous years, the proportions observed in both sexes are more or less constant – six homeless men to every one homeless woman. In 2007 there were 1848 adult homeless males and 363 adult homeless females.

In 2007 almost half of those surveyed claimed that they were staying in an institution for homeless people (shelters, etc.) Plots and garden sheds were given as a place of residence by 17% of the homeless and almost 7% claimed that they were in training flats. The categories of institutional homelessness (people staying in shelters, night shelters, training flats – category "houseless" in ETHOS Typology) and non-institutional homelessness (the homeless staying in plots, garden sheds, railway stations, etc. – category "roofless" in ETHOS Typology) have been created. The division into institutional and non-institutional homelessness is in a ratio of 60% - 40% which means that the help provided by the institutions fails to reach almost 40% of homeless people.

In the span of four years (2003 - 2007), the age of the homeless people represented in the survey increased by two years. The average age in 2007 was 49,2 years, 48,3 years in 2005 and 47 years in 2003. If we compare the ages of the surveyed group we find that whereas the number of homeless people in their late fifties is decreasing, the number of those over sixty is increasing. Such a trend suggests that it is hard if not impossible to propose job reintegration as a way out of homelessness, as the ageing homeless are no longer able to work.

Age is also a crucial issue differentiating homeless men from women. The latter are relatively young – two thirds of the homeless women taking part in the survey have not reached the age of fifty whereas in the case of men, almost 80% have reached the age of forty one.

Homeless people in Pomerania are not only getting older, but the length of time they are experiencing homelessness is increasing. This questions the efficacy of the help that is offered to homeless people. In 2007, the average time of being homeless was 7,4 years, while in 2005 it was 5,9 years. This length of time in homelessness may be called a *chronic phase*, which means that the homeless person has adapted to the conditions of homelessness, he or she has made his/her place of residence more cozy and resembling a home, and has weakened or broken the relationship with people who are not homeless.

**Homeless people in Pomerania are not only getting older, but the length of time they are experiencing homelessness is increasing.**

When comparing both sexes, it appears that the time women are homeless is relatively shorter (5,9 years) than the time men are homeless (7,7 years). However, the time women are homeless has increased by 1,5 years. Almost half of the women surveyed had been homeless for four years or less, and almost half of the men taking part in the survey had been homeless for at least six years.

With regards to the health of the homeless surveyed, we found that it was generally bad and getting worse with time, even if 33,9% claimed that their state of health was quite good, and 34,8% claimed it was sufficient.

Almost half of those surveyed (44,6%) declared that they are physically disabled to some degree, a percentage which seems to be much higher than in the group of the "non-homeless," and higher than it was in 2003 (38,4%). More than half of those surveyed in 2007 (59,2%) claimed that they were not able to work due to their health. Compared with previous surveys, it appears that this is an increase of about 20% – in 2003 it was 41,4% and in 2005 it was 46,3%.

With regards to employment, the surveys show that almost 50% are ready for employment and would like to start working. We can also observe an increase in the number of homeless people who have worked - from 10% in the years 2003-2005 to 25% in 2007, which is an impressive increase considering that it has happened in a relatively short period of time. What is more, 29% of the homeless surveyed in 2007 claimed to have employment contracts.

If we check the number of people working legally, we see that there is a definite increase – 82 people in 2005 and 159 in 2007. But here the question arises, how will the aforementioned fact of having a legal job influence fighting homelessness? We may be able to answer this question after the next survey.

It should be pointed out that the homeless people surveyed are often heavily indebted – almost one third claim to have financial difficulties. The fact of having a legal job allows them to pay their debts, but not to improve their financial situation, or to move out of poverty.

The study concerning homelessness makes us wonder which features one should possess in order to stop being homeless. These are: young age, being homeless for a relatively short period of time, being in a good state of health, lacking financial commitments, and earning a living. Bearing in mind the socio-demographic features of the homeless people in the Pomeranian Region, we observe that the group which seems to have the greatest chance of getting out of homelessness are young women staying in training flats, plots or garden sheds. Homeless men staying in shelters or inadequate housing have, according to the factors, little chance of getting out of homelessness.

In conclusion, homelessness in the Pomeranian Region seems to be constant both in terms of the number of people who are homeless and the ratio between homeless men and women. Those homeless, are predominantly male, who have been homeless for a very long time. They are usually older, ill, and disabled. The majority of the homeless in the Pomeranian Region are those who are unable to work due to their age or state of health and thus irrevocably excluded from society.

In order to fully understand the problem of homelessness, one should focus on finding and defining its causes, and understanding that even though the number of homeless people in the Pomeranian Region has not drastically changed, the phenomenon itself is progressing. This means that it is not only the welfare system that needs to be modified and improved, but the grounds on which the system of social politics is based should be reconsidered and well thought-out. ●





## Turning hopes into homes in a disadvantaged community in Slovakia: Holistic approach as an answer to severe social exclusion

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The processes of the post-1989 transition in Central and Eastern Europe brought deep social, political, and economic changes that heavily affected accessibility of housing in the region. With drastically reduced rental-housing stock, low-income groups were forced to turn to the market, where they could often neither afford to buy the apartments at market prices nor qualify for mortgages. The reduction in public rental sector – a consequence of privatization/restitution that in most countries took the form of selling-off the apartments to sitting tenants – coupled with a low priority given to housing policies in general had serious consequences. In the years following privatization, house prices and rents increased much faster than the average income. This led to a long-term loss of accessible and affordable housing for vulnerable groups, and to difficulties for low-income owners to fund the repairs and maintenance of their dwellings. Habitat for Humanity responded to those pressures with projects addressing the growing needs of vulnerable groups – mainly the Roma.

### LIFE IN A GHETTO

Low-income families and vulnerable groups are the 'traditional' beneficiary groups on which Habitat for Humanity focuses its activities of building and renovating houses. In spite of considerable experience helping the poor and socially excluded, Habitat for Humanity found the housing need in Roma communities in East Central Europe presented a specific challenge. When Habitat representatives first arrived at the Roma ghetto in Svinia (Slovakia), they were shocked by the level of poverty. Some families huddled in earthen huts infested with rats, while others lived in concrete boxes. Running water and electricity were absent. The community well was contaminated, and the many people who were sick received no medical attention.

The Roma today remain the most deprived and socially excluded ethnic group in Europe. In many regions, significant portions of the Roma communities live in destitute poverty. The social exclusion is a multi-dimensional process combining exclusion from participation in decision-making, from employment and material resources, and from integration into common cultural processes. It usually has a spatial manifestation, in Central and Eastern Europe represented by the Roma settlements, where people experience a combination of inadequate space, inadequate or lack of access to social services and utilities, as well as geographic isolation. This geographic isolation, coupled with low level of education and high unemployment rate, is considered to be strongly related with the risk of poverty that Roma are more likely to experience than other groups of the Slovak population (World Bank 2002). According to the United Nations Development Programme the average unemployment in Roma communities in Slovakia is 72 percent, although it is significantly higher if the communities are segregated (76 percent), and there are studies that admit that in certain areas the unemployment rate in segregated settlements is close to 100 percent.

### LACK OF POLICY RESPONSES

Poor housing is both a symptom and a cause of the problem of social exclusion, and the conditions of Roma housing and settlements reinforce the prejudices towards the community. The high levels of social exclusion go hand in hand with discrimination and frequent violations of fundamental rights of the marginalized. Notwithstanding the gravity of the situation, the Roma housing problem is rarely addressed by systematic public policies. The efforts of human rights bodies to highlight the problem represent a positive development: they call on the governments to take an action. In late 2007, the Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg and UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing Miloon Kothari issued a joint statement in which they pointed out that the housing rights of Roma are abused in several parts of Europe. They were alarmed by the dramatic growth of reported evictions of Roma communities and families, and by the intensified segregation and ghettoization. Among the recommended policies were the formalization of Roma settlements lacking recognized tenure, and implementation of national legal frameworks that will provide for efficient protection of housing rights by the local municipalities.

The first experiences of Habitat for Humanity's work in severely disadvantaged Roma communities brought about several lessons: mainly the need for tailored, multifaceted interventions, and the identification of the complex web of roots of the deprivation. Research on the Roma housing conditions commissioned by Habitat for Humanity concluded that there are nine major obstacles related to the right on adequate housing:

- Extreme poverty
- Absence of indoor water supply and/or (functional) sanitation
- Absence of, or insufficient heating
- Extreme overcrowding
- Inappropriate building materials
- Housing not in conformity with safety standards
- Wetness/dampness
- Degraded housing
- Infestation by vermin and lice

### THE PILOT PROJECT

To address the problem in Slovakia, Habitat got involved with a large and respected local NGO – ETP Slovakia – Center for Sustainable Development, as well as with respective local municipalities. In 2004 a joint project began focusing on implementing community-strengthening and development programs in the Eastern part of the country. The goal was to renovate and reconstruct houses in the Svinia Roma settlement and to improve the general living conditions in the settlement by providing access to clean drinking water. One of Habitat for Humanity's principles is the beneficiaries' contribution

to the work, which in this case meant Roma families had to contribute "sweat-equity hours" – help a certain amount of time with the repairs and renovation work. Because of the high levels of social exclusion and poverty of the community, the 138 partner families did not need to buy materials for renovation such as paints, disinfectant, linoleum rolls, beds and fuel heaters, and received them for free, as well as the training in the basics of home renovation.

As the Roma housing poverty is intertwined with other aspects of social exclusion, in order to make long-term impact Habitat for Humanity and ETP Slovakia developed a holistic approach addressing housing need. Habitat for Humanity provided the supervision and assistance of the construction manager and foreman, and the ETP Slovakia was in charge of the community social work. After the completion of the project in 2005, all 138 houses were successfully renovated, all existing water wells were cleaned and disinfected, and a new water reservoir was built to provide drinking water for the community of approximately 1,200 people. The project was very well received by the local media, with local media calling it the most equitable intervention in the settlement to date.

### THE PARTNERSHIP CONTINUES – NALEPKOVO MODEL

Well-planned, multi-stakeholder involvement that integrates housing services with social work could be the way out of ghettoization and poverty for the marginalized Roma. The Habitat for Humanity experience with the Housing Development Program in Nalepkovo, a municipality in Eastern Slovakia with considerable Roma population, makes the case. In Nalepkovo, Roma represent 45 percent of the population: 1,300 out of 2,800 inhabitants. Many of them lived – and some still do – in shacks, old caravans or houses without floors or bathrooms, suffering from cold and humidity through leaking roofs and lacking privacy.

In 2006, Habitat started to implement the project Improvement of Housing Conditions of Low-Income Families through its partner ETP Slovakia. As the project attempts to address the housing issue in the broader social development context, it consists of several elements, including the renovations and reconstruction of houses in poor repair, provisions of interest-free loans, inclusion of Roma people into social economies, and social support for elderly people. Several stakeholders are involved, including the local authority, the Labour Office and local entrepreneurs. The project is based on the "Habitat model" in which the families receive not only no-profit loans, but also construction training and supervision at the reconstruction works, as well as the support of the community center run by the ETP.

The selection of the participating families is based on strict set of criteria: housing need, ability to pay back the loan, and willingness to partner. Within the process of the selection, the project coordinator visits the candidate family, consults on the reconstruction plan with the family and the municipality, and prepares the photo documentation. The goal is to select very low-income families who cannot afford conventional financing but have sufficient income to afford the monthly payments and other costs associated with homeownership. Thus no more than 40 percent of a family's monthly income should be spent on housing, including utilities, mortgage payment, taxes, and insurance. Another issue that is taken into consideration when assessing the potential family partner's capacity to pay back the loan are the costs associated with basic needs such as – food, water, clothing, health, education, transport and communications. To meet these criteria, credit takes the form of micro-loans up to ? 1000. However small this amount might seem, once used for the renovation or purchase of some basic equipment or a piece of furniture it makes a real difference.

After its first two years, the housing renovation project helped 89 families, including 16 families in public rental apartments. Due to neglected maintenance, the public rental houses were in a dilapidated state. Partner families received loans for interior reconstructions, mainly for putting new floor-linoleums, changing the kitchen units, bathrooms. Support was offered to a family whose house was damaged by a fire, to families who did not have bathrooms or proper floors, as well as families who needed to apply insulation to cut heating expenses.

### HOLISTIC APPROACH

To expand families' capacity to pay back the loan, a strong element in the project is the employment assistance provided by the ETP Slovakia and its team of personal advisors/social workers. Roma suffer extremely low employability due to low or no qualifications, coupled with discrimination. The role of the social workers is thus to help the unemployed families to get enrolled into the activation work program run by the municipality or local not-for-profits, and to enhance their chances to succeed in the labor market through vocational training courses, or to continue with further education. Another form of help offered by the personal advisors is assistance with the search for jobs including the initial communication with prospective employers. The clients can also get assistance with applications for grants from the Labor Office to start up small enterprises, and support in resolving social, health and legal concerns. Another type of service offered by the Community Center is training in the basics of family budgeting.

The efforts of all the key actors have helped to employ the majority of Roma work force from Nalepkovo in the municipality's Activation Work Program or in seasonal works of local private companies. Some jobseekers found employment in the local community center as assistants to community social workers or personal advisors. So far, there have not been any major problems with the payments of the loans, and three families have already paid back in full.

Nalepkovo was an ideal candidate for project implementation due to support of a local authority that has been genuinely interested in tackling the poverty housing since the 1990s. It has invested considerable amounts of its budget to the construction and renovation projects. In 2006, Habitat, ETP and the local authority also joined in the construction of 20 new rental houses for low-income families. As these units were unfurnished and the tenants did not have resources to purchase furniture and appliances, they received loans for necessities.

In 2007, Habitat and ETP expanded the housing conditions improvement project to 10 more municipalities in Eastern Slovakia. The hope is to help another 300 low-income families to renovate and/or reconstruct their homes, as well as to provide construction training and support for employment seekers. To make an impact on the housing policy in the country, the partners have also started an advocacy initiative to promote the housing development model for the disadvantaged groups to the Government. So far, the holistic approach has not only increased the quality of housing and attracted positive response from the media, but has also had an impact on the self-esteem of the severely disadvantaged partner families, and on the improvement of relationships between Roma and non-Roma. ●



## NOTES

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