

# HOMELESSNESS IN CZECH REPUBLIC

## KEY STATISTICS

There is no national/regional homeless data-collection strategy. Several cities and regions carry out surveys. There is no uniform methodology and data is not comparable. Key sources of data include the following:

The national register of social services provides information on the number of places in services.

**2013:** 215 long-term shelters with 6,661 beds.

**2016:** 214 shelters plus 67 night shelters with 431 beds. Over the course of the year, the number of night shelters rose to 75.

**2017:** 216 long-term homeless shelters and 75 short-term shelters in the Czech Republic.

In **2016**, the homeless shelters were utilized by a total of **5,355** users, of which **1,777** were minors. A total of **4,870** requests were declined. In the case of the short-term shelters, **1,086** requests were declined.

The 2011 population census included the first official national data on the number of people using homeless services. According to the 2011 census, there are **11,496** homeless people in the Czech Republic. This covers people using accommodation facilities for homeless people (i.e. asylum shelters) (ETHOS 3.1) and night shelters (ETHOS 2.1) on census night. It is important to note that experts consider that the real number is much greater.

As part of the preparatory work for the new “Concept of Preventing and Tackling Homelessness Issues” (see below) an Expert Group gathered all available homeless statistics and made a qualified estimation on the number and distribution of homeless people in the Czech Republic. Their definition included the following categories:

- Visible homeless: ETHOS 1.1, 2.1, 8.2 and partially 8.1
- Hidden homeless: ETHOS 3.1, 4.1, 7.1.

<sup>i</sup> In 2015, an online questionnaire survey was carried out in municipalities with extended competence (MEC); 227 MECs were asked to participate, of which 97.4% returned a filled out questionnaire.

<sup>ii</sup> Municipality with extended competence (MEC)

### Key pull-out statistics

100,000 people are estimated to be homeless or at risk of homelessness  
37% of children live in housing deprivation

The Expert Group considered the number of homeless people to be at least **three times higher** than the census figures (approx. 30,000 people – obvious homeless: ETHOS 1.1, 2.1, 8.2 and partially (8.1) or hidden homeless: ETHOS 3.1, 4.1, 7.1). The estimated number of people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness was **100,000**.

## INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

Ministry of Labour and Social Services (MoLSA, 2016) – Evaluation of survey addressing homelessness by municipalities with extended competence (MEC)<sup>i</sup>.

- MEC<sup>ii</sup>/ administrative districts estimate that there are almost **119,000** people at risk of housing loss in the territory of the Czech Republic.

- The number of people without homes has been estimated to be **68,500**; of which 74.4% are male and 23.6% female; 11.9% are under 18 and 10.3% are over 65. There is a total of **187,500** people who have experienced housing exclusion in the Czech Republic.

## CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

Development trends point to a significant increase in the number of people exposed to the loss of their home (or more precisely high numbers of people in all categories of European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS)) and the deepening of problems of such households.

At present, single mothers who are at risk of losing their housing, and who make up the majority population in

homeless shelters for single women and mothers with children are a major issue.

An analysis of the impacts of insufficient housing on school and other related problems of children in the Czech Republic (MEDIAN, 2017) states that approximately **37%** of Czech children live in households that suffer from some housing problems (insufficient heating, humidity and leakage, lack of space, noise, dirt and vandalism in the child's surroundings).

The quality of housing is significantly related to children (7-12 years old) experiencing severe problems in school, along with health and communication problems.

## POLICIES & STRATEGIES

### National Strategy

The "Concept of Preventing and Tackling Homelessness Issues in the Czech Republic until 2020" was adopted by the government in August 2013. In order to develop the Concept, an Expert Group was created, attached to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) Commission for Social Inclusion. NGOs working on homelessness, experts from relevant ministries and academics are represented in the group. Since the Concept's adoption, the Expert Group supervises and monitors the implementation of particular measures.

The whole system of proposed solutions in the Concept is based on the definition of four trajectories describing routes into homelessness. These trajectories are defined as:

1. Long-term (people who are born into and/or grow up in homelessness);
2. Short-term (people who find themselves temporarily in difficult situations such as debt, unemployment, etc.);
3. Health (people who face specific challenges due to health factors);
4. Own choice (people who become homeless through their own choice).

The strategy is also based on economic analysis of the costs of homelessness and of various solutions.

A Consensus Conference on Homelessness was held in November 2014. Conclusions from the Conference were published by the end of 2014 and are available on the

conference's website. The conference was one of Concept's priorities for 2014.

The City of Prague has also adopted its own local homelessness strategy.

The Czech Republic has dealt with the explosion of low cost hostels often by exploiting the most vulnerable people in society by charging high prices for sub-standard and often insanitary accommodation. Social housing experts state that in the Czech Republic, according to statistics, there are 18,000 people living on the streets or in these hostels; and there are another 17,000 people living in inadequate housing. There are also people who need social allowances for housing and others who have high housing costs resulting in insufficient money for food or medicines and so on. It is therefore possible to speak of one million people in the Czech Republic who are in need of social housing.

In 2015, the Czech Parliament approved the "Social Housing Concept of Czech Republic 2015-2025". The goal of the Concept is a wider offer of housing for people threatened by loss of housing or social exclusion and for people who spend a high percentage of their income on housing. Furthermore, the concept aims to create a new social housing system intended to target people who fulfil certain strict criteria, to avoid the waste of public money. The basic principles should be to ensure and maintain long-term quality standards and spatially non-segregated social rental housing through a set of tools of housing and social policies. The system should be linked to the execution of social work, provision of housing allowance and it should augment the social services system (specifically shelters), as per the Act on Social Services. The Concept sets the basis for the Act on Social Housing, prepared in 2016, and it is expected to take effect in 2017, but stark differences in stakeholder interests make the preparation considerably complicated. The bill is currently in the legislative process at the government level (4Q/2016). According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the law might affect a maximum of 350,000 people.

The existing social housing support provided by the Ministry of Regional Development is carried out under the sub-programme entitled "Support for the construction of subsidized housing" within the "Housing support" programme. The funds earmarked for the implementation of the entire "Housing support" programme equal to CZK 450 million, of which around CZK 200 million is earmarked for the implementation of the sub-programme entitled "Support for the construction of subsidized housing" (National Social Report 2014 – The Czech Republic).

The Government of the Czech Republic approved on 8 March 2017 a bill on social housing and housing allowance (Government of the Czech Republic, 2017).

Subsequently, the bill was submitted by the government to the Chamber of Deputies on 21 March 2017. However, the discussion was interrupted because of the obstructions of some political parties and disputes within the government coalition. Therefore, the bill was not discussed.

October 2017 is going to bring parliamentary elections; there will be a new government/coalition formed, and so we will see to what extent the subject of social housing will be prioritized or sidelined. According to the election programmes of political parties, they all should want to address social housing.

Amendment to the Act on Assistance in Material Need (Act No. 111/2006 Coll.) – Section 33 (d) provides municipalities with the possibility to declare a so-called area with an increased occurrence of socially undesirable phenomena. Declaration of such an area would mean that the households would no longer be entitled to a housing allowance, which is one of the benefits in the system of material assistance, which helps low-income households to cover their housing costs. The measures are currently being announced (10/2017) in municipalities, so at this moment it is not possible to assess the impact on people experiencing a form of housing exclusion. A legal action against the measure is to be taken to the Constitutional Court.

Section 34 of this law amendment reduces the maximum amount of justified housing costs from 90% to 80% of normative housing costs; the beneficiaries of the housing allowance will thus receive less money to cover their housing expenses.

Currently, the MoLSA roof project "Social Housing – Methodological and Information Support in the Social Agenda" is being implemented, with 16 participating municipalities in the Czech Republic. Within the project, these municipalities create local concepts of social housing and pilot elements of the social housing system; the staff of participating towns took part in internships abroad; several methodological documents are developed as part of the project – Methodology of Social Work, methodology Models of Social Housing; the establishment of the Contact Centre, which serves as a consulting support to municipalities in the implementation of social housing.

There have been some interesting projects concerning the creation of local concepts of social housing implemented in big cities:

**Brno** – Rapid Re-Housing Project – 50 households with children who were exposed to housing exclusion were moved to flats owned by the City of Brno; families are being supported by intensive social work.

**Ostrava** – creation of the social housing concept and its pilot verification; 100 households exposed to a loss of housing will be granted a flat, plus the households will be supported by comprehensive social work. Also, the city is going to offer 5 emergency flats designated for the households that find themselves in a vulnerable situation (e.g. domestic violence). A concept of social housing aimed at creating a system of social housing is under way.

### Budget evolution

There is a lack of sustainable funding for homeless services. The current system of annual calls for proposals co-managed by regional and national authorities means that homeless services are reliant on unstable funding sources. Drops in funding levels since 2012 have meant that some services have closed. The role of EU Structural Funds is limited because of the strong administrative burden on service providers, which makes them unmanageable for some NGOs. A change of funding system has been partially set up since 2015. Regional offices hold the main role in financing services and new funding criteria are developing. Funding for social services in the form of compensatory payment was put into practice. Monitoring of the funding of social services as services of general economic interest is now based on EU regulations.

## REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

### Positive

- Adoption of the Concept
- Preparatory work on the Social Housing Strategy and Social Housing Act
- Increasing number of relevant stakeholders (researchers, experts)
- Visibility of the homelessness issue in the media
- Consensus Conference on homelessness
- The ministry funded project “Social Housing – Methodological and Information Support in the Social Agenda”; 16 municipalities involved; they create local concepts of social housing and implement the pilot housing projects for people exposed to exclusion from housing
  - Brno – Housing First Project, focused on individuals and their settling in
  - Ostrava – 100 social flats for people exposed to exclusion from housing, 5 emergency flats for households in an emergency situation (e.g. domestic violence)
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### Negative

A range of measures exists that regulate behaviour in public space with the imposition of fines at local level. The regulations concern “undesirable behaviour” such as begging, alcohol consumption and damage to property or equipment. These measures are generally enforced by city police or in some cases by private security companies regulating semi-public spaces such as shopping centres. They disproportionately affect homeless people compared to the general population.

- Non-adoption of the Social Housing Act
- Adoption of the Act on Assistance in Material Need
- Non-adoption of the amendment to the Social Services Act that was supposed to bring social and therapeutic activities and food and material assistance in homeless shelters

## REFERENCES

MEDIAN s.r.o. 2017. Analysis of impacts of insufficient housing on school and other problems of children in the Czech Republic. Technology Agency of the Czech Republic (TACR).

MoLSA. 2016. Assessment of survey on addressing homelessness in municipalities with extended competence. MoLSA