

GREECE



POLICIES & STRATEGIES

National Strategy

Homelessness is framed within the wider context of social policies and addressed in an indirect and incoherent way. The economic crisis and dramatic rises in homelessness have brought the issue onto the policy agenda.

The 2012 National Reform Programme refers to the “establishment of an inter-ministerial working group to address the rapidly deteriorating homelessness problem”. Such a Committee was established in January 2012 with the aim of drafting a legislative proposal and an action plan. The committee is composed of several stakeholders including ministries, academics and NGOs. The Committee has developed the first legal recognition of homelessness and a definition. It has also drafted the Integrated National Plan to Combat Homelessness.

Following the introduction of the National Mechanism of Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Social Integration and Social Cohesion Policies¹ in 2016, a new National Strategy for the Homelessness has been announced by the Minister of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity in July 2018.

The main aims of the National Strategy² are to a) record homelessness through the creation of relevant indicators as well as reduction targets on an annual basis b) record and update the entire relevant legal framework and c) create a separate sub-mechanism to coordinate and the link all the relevant stakeholders.

On 02.01.2017 a decision was published by the General Secretariat of Welfare, setting up the Working Group for the Act “Creating Tools and Procedures for the recording of Homeless people”, financed by the “ESF 2014-2020”.

The Working Group has been established to focus on the

design of the methodology, the definition of procedures and the creation of tools for recording and monitoring of homeless people living on the street and structures for homelessness according to international methodologies. During 2017, a set of proposals on the improvement of the relevant legal framework was produced, however little progress has been made.

Governance

The jurisdictions and responsibilities with regard to homelessness policy are still dispersed among different public authorities nationally and locally.

At the level of central administration, the General Secretariat for Welfare, part of the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity, is the main body responsible for social policy. However, lots have still to be done in order for the aforementioned Mechanism to achieve a coordinating role in the monitoring and planning of social policies. At the moment, the General Directorate for Welfare controls and supervises the National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA), which is the main body with a mandate to coordinate social services.

In the future, the coordinating role may be assumed by a specific body, the Housing Policies Department, recently created within the Directorate of Combat Poverty, in the Ministry of Labor, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity³. Its main tasks are to design/ coordinate relevant policies and involved stakeholders, highlight figures and statistics, maximize the benefit of the relevant use of public property etc.

Following the bill⁴ introduced on housing allowance for 600,000 households under poverty, a housing allowance - based on income and property criteria - will be given to households paying rent or a mortgage loan ranging from 70 to 210 euros depending on the marital status. It is estimated that the allowance will be given to approximately 600,000 households and the amount allocated will be 600 million.

¹ http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=104673

² <https://government.gov.gr/vasiki-pilones-tis-ethnikis-stratigikis-gia-tous-astegous>

³ <https://aplo.yeka.gr/Pages/KoinwnikhAllhleggyh/KatapolemshhFtwxeias/KoinwnikesPolitikesStegashs.aspx>

⁴ Law 4472, National Gazette 74A/2017

The implementation of the “Housing and Reintegration” (a state-run project promoting supported apartments scheme under the Housing-first approach, initially funded by the 2014 surplus) has not yet come to an end, since it is extended till 02.2019. The project’s evaluation was officially published in July 2018,⁵ however it may not be considered as the final one since the project is still on going.

Following the “Housing and Reintegration” project, a new one, called “Housing and Labor for Homeless”⁶ is about to start its implementation. More focused to the labor integration, it is addressed to cities with a population higher than 100,000 inhabitants; however, it does not allow NGOs to play the role of implementing partner.

Additionally there is a plan to create a pool of non-profit low-cost housing stock using the vacant public property and private stock (intermediation and incentives, use leases, tax exceptions etc, exchange use with debts) to be used by social welfare programmes. This plan has not been yet implemented.

Minimum Income Scheme is implemented at National Level since February 2017. Access to homeless is specifically protected and facilitated by provisions such as special Tax Register Number or accepting certificate of homelessness by Day Centers or other public social services.

At local level, according to a new governance structure, local authorities have started to become the operational units for many social services (public space regulation, support for homeless and financially vulnerable people, recognition of beneficiaries for housing assistance etc.). However, the new provisions have not yet been fully implemented, while many vital issues (administrative, financial, coordination) are still pending.

In June 2017, the Deputy Minister of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity announced the launch of 20 new operational units, aiming to combat homelessness all over Greece (10 Day Centers/ 10 Dormitories)⁷. Till now not all the units are operational

(e.g relevant calls regarding the main cities of Volos and Larisa were announced in the middle of August 2018)⁸. This is the first time that Municipalities, even indirectly, are engaged in operational plans targeting homelessness. The projects are financed by Structural Funds 2014-2020, under the specific axe 9, where homelessness is directly recognised as a social issue that there is a need to be addressed.

KEY STATISTICS

Till now, there is no official and proven data-collection strategy on homelessness in Greece. A study on homelessness was conducted in 2009 by the Ministry of Health. It reported that the total number of homeless people was 7,720. This excluded immigrants and travellers. Within the total were an estimated 1,800 rough sleepers and 970 people in hostels and shelters. These figures are challenged both by the Ministry itself and other social partners due to methodological constraints.

However, as a part of the aforementioned strategy, the first counting for homeless people took place in May 2018. Supported by European Social Fund, this pilot activity was designed by Panteion University and the Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity, while homeless people were counted through streetwork approach in seven main Greek cities (Athens, Piraeus, Nea Ionia, Thessaloniki, Ioannina, Trikala (Thessaly), Iraklion (Creta), and in two phases: Phase A, night count and Phase B: day count via the existing programmes and structures supporting homeless people.

The activity, implemented by the Cities’ social services, national bodies and more than 15 NGOs and highly expertised stakeholders, has not yet been evaluated. However, according to the initial figures, 691 persons living in the street (353 or 51% in Athens) were counted, while 516 persons were living in shelters and 438 in apartments.

317 out of the 691 people living in the streets accepted to complete a brief questionnaire. The majority of them used to reside in their own or rented house or be hosted

⁵http://www.eiead.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=294&Itemid=219&lang=el

⁶http://www.eiead.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=452&Itemid=227&lang=el

⁷ <https://www.ypakp.gr/uploads/docs/10505.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.espa.gr/el/Pages/ProclamationsFS.aspx?item=4002/>
<https://www.espa.gr/el/Pages/ProclamationsFS.aspx?item=4001>

by a family member. Greek men, aged 18-44, using mainly services like soup kitchens and sometimes getting public benefits; this seems to be the profile of the homeless in Greece according to the initial results.⁹

The City of Athens published in May 2016 a piece of research, funded by EEA grants, according to which, in a sample of 451 persons that were sleeping roughly in the city of Athens in 2015, 62% where of Greek origin, 85% were male, and aged between 35-55 years old. 71% of them became homeless in the last five years due to crisis¹⁰.

Especially for the centres of main cities in Attica (Athens and Piraeus), such a profile is also validated by street-work findings, with the additional comment that they mostly not seem to be drug or alcohol addicted.

Following this research, City of Athens organised in December 2017 a pilot count in the historical centre, assisted by public bodies and NGOs, as well as Bloomberg Associates designing the activity¹¹. 182 homeless persons were counted.

The latest research that was published in 2015 estimates 17,720 people sleeping rough in the prefecture of Attica while those experiencing various forms of homelessness as they are described at ETHOS typology reach up to 500,000 persons¹².

Census in 2011 from the Greek Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) indicates 25% increase of homeless from 2009 to 2011. However, reliability is highly questionable due to methodological limitations. Currently, ELSTAT can only provide rough estimations based on the unemployment and poverty rates and on its surveys of living conditions.

According to the latest figures published (June 2018)¹³, related to the income 2016, 29.1% of the population resides in houses with less space than it needs. 21.5% cannot afford heating during the winter, while 55.2% can roughly pay its rent or housing loans and another 36% cannot afford its monthly bills. 21.1 out of the 100

Greeks are materially deprived people, placing Greece at the second position among the EU countries (EU average 6.7%/ Eurozone 5,8%).

Specific groups

Ex prisoners: According to the Correctional Code (a.82 par.1), the opening of hostels is provided in order to offer temporary accommodation to those prisoners who are homeless after their release. The “EPANODOS” institution is a private legal entity working under the surveillance of the Ministry of Justice, having the mandate to provide those services.

“EPANODOS” usually offers a few days accommodation on a temporary basis to selected hotels in Athens. In January 2018, “EPANODOS” launched the operation of a shelter, financed by the Hellenic Parliament¹⁴. However, according to data, almost 95% of the discharged migrants from the Young Offenders Prison have no housing solution.

Unaccompanied minors: Following the latest (15.07.2018) figures by the National Centre for Social Solidarity (NCSR)¹⁵, 1,191 places for unaccompanied minors are available in shelters and apartments all over Greece. However, a huge number of 2,485 minors are still waiting, while 538 of them are reported as homeless and another 308 (a total almost of 1/3) have somehow “disappeared”.

Abused women – victims of trafficking: General Secretariat for Gender Equality is responsible for the operation of 19 shelters all over Greece, while National Center for Social Solidarity is also running two shelters in Athens¹⁶. Cases of single refugee women with children may also be hosted to these premises.

Refugees – people receiving international protection: Since 2016 and by the end of August 2018, with EU funding and support, UNHCR had created 25,492 places in a housing and accommodation programme (ESTIA). These places were in 4,235 apartments and 25 buildings, in 14 cities and 7 islands across Greece.¹⁷ This accommodation scheme is implemented through 18

⁹ Available at <https://government.gov.gr/vasiki-pilones-tis-ethnikis-stratigikis-gia-tous-astegous/>

¹⁰ <https://www.cityofathens.gr/node/28429>

¹¹ <http://www.cityofathens.gr/node/30955>

¹² <http://ineobservatory.gr/publication/kinoniki-episfalia-ke-ellipsi-stegis-stin-athina-diadromes-apoklismou-ke-entaxis/>

¹³ <http://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/a08ebe8c-c675-4a06-a0db-397d180ef7f6>

¹⁴ <http://epanodos.org.gr/web/guest/ekdeloseis>

¹⁵ <http://ekka.org.gr/index.php/2018-05-08-09-50-30/15-2018-05-16-08-31-59>

¹⁶ <http://www.isotita.gr/emfyli-via> (in greek)

¹⁷ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/65643>

partnerships with 8 national and international NGOs and 10 municipalities.

By September 2018, 32,189 migrants or people seeking for international protection used to reside in 34 open reception facilities or reception and identification centers all over Greece¹⁸. Out of them, around 18,000 people, including families and children, disabled, singles were blocked on Greek islands that had a capacity to accommodate in camps or detention facilities, mostly under extremely humiliating and harsh conditions¹⁹.

Roma: Following the EU policy on Roma Integration,²⁰ Greece had adopted its National Strategy, where resolving the housing issue (almost 50% of the population used to live into barracks) was identified as one of the main priorities²¹. Regional policies were also designed. Since 2015 the National Center for Social Solidarity acted as the main body for the monitoring and evaluation of the National strategy²².

Under the Law 4430,²³ a Secretariat for the social integration of Roma, has officially launched as a part of the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity. One of its main duties is to design, coordinate and monitor all the state policies (including housing) related to Roma population. The new Secretariat also became the focal point for Roma integration.

On February 2018 a ministerial decision related to the resettlement procedures of vulnerable groups (including Roma) was published²⁴ following a relevant law. The Secretariat designs the resettlement strategy, while the local authorities are responsible for the facilities, as well as to provide all the necessary supporting services.

371 Roma settlements were counted all over Greece; in 74 of them people used to reside under extremely miserable conditions. 181 of them, where barracks and

houses are mixed, are considered as “mixed settlements”, while the rest 116 are considered as neighbourhoods into downgraded areas near the edge of the city suburbs.²⁵

The program, called “Integration and Empowerment of Roma people” will be financed by ESF, EEA Grants and public funds. The intervention had to start from a camp located near Amfissa, a small city in central Greece,²⁶ while the plan for 2018 is to start the process in 29 camps/ settlements. However, in June 2018, following a clash, a 13-year old Roma girl was murdered by a non-Roma citizen near the camp. Since then, there has been no improvement to any kind of intervention to the area.

Victims of racist violence: Racist Violence Recording Network mentions in its latest report a rise of violent assaults against migrants and refugees²⁷. Some of these cases are related to shelters or housing issues. In a recent case, the Mayor of a small city near Thessaloniki was found guilty for violation of the anti-racist law, in order to stop the settlement of a refugee group in the area²⁸.

INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

The activation of the electronic auctions (CMD 41756/26.5.2017, L. 4472/2017) along with the expiration of the protection of the main house, have increased the fears for further increase of homelessness in Greece.

There is an empirical estimation of rapid increase of mostly invisible homeless. This rapid increase is a result of the financial, economic and social crisis. Growing unemployment and falling income levels have increased vulnerability to homelessness as more people are unable to meet housing costs. Austerity measures and cuts have had a major impact on service capacity at

¹⁸ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/66038>

¹⁹ <https://refugees.gr/press-release-about-the-conditions-at-moria>, <https://msf.gr/magazine/se-katastasi-ektaktis-anagkis-o-kataylismos-sti-moria-ayxanontai-oi-apopeires-aytoktonias>, <https://www.amnesty.gr/news/press/article/21553/se-mayri-trypa-ton-anthropinon-dikaiomaton-metatrepontai-ta-nisia-toy>

²⁰ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52012DC0226&from=en>

²¹ http://www.esfhellas.gr/elibrary/stratigiki_roma_el.pdf, page 4

²² http://www.roma-ekka.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Mixanismos-Parakolouthisis-Roma_12.2015.pdf

²³ Official Gazette 205 A/ 31.10.2016

²⁴ Official gazette 412 B/ 12.02.2018

²⁵ <https://www.ypakp.gr/uploads/docs/11301.pdf>,

<https://www.cnn.gr/news/ellada/story/127230/anoigei-o-dromos-gia-eyreies-metegkatastaseis-kataylismou-roma-se-oli-ti-xora>

²⁶ <https://www.amna.gr/ota/article/259836/Prochora-to-programma-prosorinis-metegkatastasis-Roma-apo-tous-375-kataulismous>

²⁷ http://rvrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Report_2017eng.pdf, page 5

²⁸ <https://racistcrimeswatch.wordpress.com/2018/09/17/1-659/>

a time of growing demand.

The auctions have to be announced through the portal www.eauction.gr. On 06.06.2018, 11,547 auctions had been announced²⁹, while, on 30.09.2018 the total number had been increased to 19,087. During this 12-week period (August not included) 7,540 auctions were announced; in other words, 628 auctions/ week or 125 per day.

CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

According to a 2012 study on the mentally ill homeless people in the Athens area, although the prevalence of psychiatric disorders among homeless people is higher³⁰, the vast majority among them were lacking any current psychiatric care³¹.

The group of homeless mentally ill people not receiving psychiatric care face more barriers in housing.

They face barriers in their access to protected housing services and psychosocial rehabilitation units, as the latter give priority to the deinstitutionalisation of long-term hospitalised patients of psychiatric hospitals.

They also face barriers in their access to social homeless structures, as the provisions of their internal regulations exclude people with severe mental disorders who have behavioural problems.

However, there is a fruitful recent development. The Ministry of Health has already drafted a Circular which gives access (up to a percentage) to mentally ill people referred by social and health services into protected housing and psychosocial rehabilitation units. Hopefully this will facilitate the access of homeless mentally ill people to protected housing services. "The planning of a mental healthcare delivery parallel to the existing social

welfare system is needed to serve the unmet mental health needs of this population"³².

No statistical evidence has been gathered but it is clear that homelessness amongst immigrants is a major issue in Greece. Policy responses and infrastructure are inadequate to cope with levels of migration. The crisis has worsened the situation and there are increasing reports of coercive action by police towards homeless immigrants as well as violence perpetrated by citizens.

What has radically increased is the invisible homeless population. Those who are staying in apartments without heating or electricity or those who are experiencing the risk of eviction or they are evicted. Unfortunately, no solid figures are available.

A new group of homeless population has been noticed mainly in Athens and Thessaloniki, which consists of undocumented third country nationals who are not benefiting from any type of housing assistance. There are no accurate reports as to this population size, but numbers seem to be significant.

Additionally, a change in urban landscape has been noticed due to the expansion of Airbnb rentals, especially in main urban centers and tourist areas, which are not regulated as they should be³³. Due to high prices of rent and unavailability of apartments, local populations are forced to look for alternative accommodation arrangements. Unless regulations are enforced, the situation will deteriorate mostly for the most vulnerable populations.

At the end of 2016,³⁴ more than 1,000,000 clients (households and small companies), had debts valued of about 200 million Euros. Up until now, these clients had not suffered electricity cuts. At the end of 2017, a new bill was introduced³⁵ in order to support low income clients who have or will suffer electricity cuts until 30.06.2018. During this period, 1,641 households used this bill to pay their debts. The extension of this period up to 30.09.18 was recently announced³⁶.

²⁹ <http://www.in.gr/2018/06/06/economy/oikonomikes-eidiseis/zontaneyei-ksana-o-efialtis-ton-pleistirasmon/>

³⁰ Madianos MG, Chondraki P, Papadimitriou GN. (2013), "Prevalence of psychiatric disorders among homeless people in Athens area: a cross-sectional study", *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol.* 2013 Aug;48(8):1225-34. doi: 10.1007/s00127-013-0674-2. Epub 2013 Mar 19.

³¹ Chondraki P, Madianos MG, Dragioti E, Papadimitriou GN (2014). *Homeless mentally ill in Athens area: a cross-sectional study on unmet needs and help-seeking.* *Int. J. Soc. Psychiatry.* 2014 Sep., 60(6):544-53. doi: 10.1177/0020764013503150. Epub 2013 Oct 1.

³² *ibid.*

³³ <https://thepressproject.gr/article/134669/Erotisi-45-bouleuton-tou-SURIZA-gia-metra-kata-tou-AirBnb>

³⁴ https://www.energia.gr/photos/articlefiles2/assets_large_t_420_5518666_2_type13145.jpg

³⁵ Law 4508, article 36, Official Gazette 200A, 22.12.2017

³⁶ <https://www.inboxnews.gr/ellada/epanasyndesi-revmatos-ta-nea-metra-poiou-dikaioyntai>

REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Positive

The National Strategy can become the most important tool to prevent and avoid homelessness. Following the legal recognition of homeless in 2012, as well as other provisions like law 4368/21-2-2016 art 33 about free access to public health facilities, law 4389 art 235, and ministerial Decision (National Gazette 2089/B/7-7-2016 on releasing homeless from financial penalty for not submitting timely income tax form), it is expected to improve the situation of homeless persons in Greece.

An increased interest in establishing long-term services (Housing led approach, Social Housing) in order to respond to the current crisis: in Greece, the current focus is on the establishment of services to meet the basic needs of homeless people (hostels/day centres/food distribution etc). The discussion is now on for long-term housing solutions.

People face increasing difficulty meeting housing costs. Overall, there is an erosion of housing security and a reduction in the possibility of homeless people to access housing in the context of the crisis. New measures that have been announced include Housing First and housing-led interventions but these are at a pilot phase, and are still being discussed.

Since February 2018, homeless people are not excluded from receiving unemployment benefits because of bureaucratic restrictions related to their address³⁷. According to the new regulations, a paper issued by a City's or an NGO's social services could be accepted as a certificate for the homeless' address. Under a recent Ministerial decision NGOs are excluded from this process; they just refer homeless to the Cities social services.

As regards the housing allowance, its implementation is about to start in January 2019. However, according to the relevant (15.06.2018) ministerial decision setting the

criteria,³⁸ the recipient of the allowance and the adult members of the household have to legally reside in Greece for the last five years. This last provision excludes all populations (mainly refugees and asylum seekers) who arrived in Greece after 2015.

Regarding the ESTIA programme, it is expected to be taken over by the Ministry of Migration Policy by 2020. No programme or allowances have yet been planned for those who have received a positive asylum decision. From the people who currently benefit from the ESTIA programme, approximately 5,000 of them are recognised refugees and/or beneficiaries of international protection, who gradually would have to leave from the rented apartments and the support provided under the ESTIA program, having no housing alternative.

The legal framework regulating the assistance to trafficking victims is rather satisfactory. However, there are no shelters available for victims without a mental health certification. Additionally, no shelters exist for men, victims of sexual or labour trafficking.³⁹ Regarding third country nationals, a specific one-year permit of stay is provided. However, the average period that such a case may be active exceeds three years, mostly reaching a five year period.

Negative

Greece continues to be subject to enhanced surveillance under Article 2(1) of Regulation (EU) No 472/2013 for an additional period of six months, commencing on 21 August 2018.⁴⁰ Surplus which might be invested in the social sector cannot address the needs of the vulnerable. Government tries to bridge the gap using EU funds. However, following a Strategy without access to own funding is rarely effective.

The current crisis and austerity measures mean that more people are at risk of homelessness and services are less well-equipped to respond.

A number of coercive measures/restrictions have been introduced which have a legal basis and can act as tools for criminalising the homeless: the banning and

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<http://www.oaed.gr/documents/10195/1214556/DELTIO+TYPOY+28022018.pdf/51b05cec-f574-47f1-8165-62a9200e37d7>

³⁸ <http://www.nomotelia.gr/photos/File/2282b.pdf>, Official Gazette 2282 B

³⁹ In case they cannot testify, a temporary stay to a hotel paid by the Police for 1-2 days is provided

⁴⁰ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2018:211:FULL&from=EN>

criminalisation of begging (Penal Code article 407);
sanitary/public health administrative provisions;
occupancy of private spaces (civil law, and penal
provisions/Penal Code article 382).

All laws that have been introduced are based on strict
income criterion related to the risk of poverty line that
due to the crisis is reducing annually. The cost of living
has not been adjusted accordingly.

National Supplement at low pensions (EKAS) has in
practical terms been reduced, while it will finally be
withdrawn in 2019.

