

# HOMELESSNESS IN GREECE

## KEY STATISTICS

The JMD published on 02.01.2017 a decision setting up the Working Group for the Act "Creating Tools and Procedures for the recording of Homeless people", of GS of Welfare, 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 homeless, according to international methodologies.

There will be a pilot at national level led by the Ministry of Labor, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity in collaboration with the University of Panteion and other public and civil society agencies. The pilot count at national level is expected to be launched in March 2018 in six cities/towns: Athens, Piraeus, Nea Ionia, Thessaloniki, Ioannina, Iraklieion (Crete) and in two phases: Phase A, night count and Phase B: day count via the existing programmes and structures supporting homeless people. This count is supported by European Social Fund and is aiming at the creation of framework and tools to measure homelessness.

For the first time ever in Greece, a pilot head count of homeless people in the streets of the historic center of Athens was done by the municipality of Athens in collaboration with Bloomberg Associates and volunteers from the NGO sector. 182 people sleeping rough in the historic center of the capital city of Greece were counted on the night of 7<sup>th</sup> December 2017.

There is no official 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.

The United Nations Human Rights Council reports that "there are 21,216 cases of people who live, in various forms, outside the home" in Greece.

NGOs estimate that there are 15,000 people in the Attica region, which includes Athens, where homelessness is concentrated. This includes all ETHOS categories.

Census in 2011 from the Greek Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) indicates 25% increase of homeless from 2009 till 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 published November 2016 materially deprived people reach almost 40% of the population while those living at risk of poverty or social exclusion (where homeless are included) reached 35,7 in 2015 (3,8 million people).

The latest research that was published in 2015 estimates 17.000 people sleeping roughly in the prefecture of Attica while those experiencing various forms of homelessness as they are described at ETHOS typology reach up to 500.000 persons<sup>1</sup>.

The municipality of Athens has published in May 2016 a 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

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ineobservatory.gr/publication/kinoniki-episfalia-ke-ellipsi-stegis-stin-athina-diadromes-apoklismou-ke-entaxis/>

them have become homeless the last five years due to crisis<sup>2</sup>.

## 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 a time of growing demand.

## CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

According to a 2014 study on the mentally ill homeless people in Athens area<sup>3</sup>, the sample (254 people) was predominantly male (74%) with mean age of 51 years, being in their majority homeless for over 25 months. 34.3% of them were sleeping rough. Overall, 56.7% of the sample met the criteria for a current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) psychiatric disorder with 20.8% comorbidity. Only 36.2% of the identified psychiatric cases had any recent psychiatric care, while 44.4% were taking non-prescribed medication and 20.2% have been hospitalized in the last year. On the

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cityofathens.gr/node/28429>

<sup>3</sup> 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.

contrary, 70% of alcohol- and drug-dependent persons have been treated in a psychiatric agency, while 60.0% of them participated in rehabilitation program the last year. Logistic regression analysis revealed that being older, more educated with longer duration of homelessness, recognizing the suffering from a psychiatric problem as well as being diagnosed as 'psychotic' increased the likelihood to seek help.

The vast majority of the homeless mentally ill persons were lacking any current psychiatric care. The planning of a mental health-care delivery parallel to the existing social welfare system is needed to serve the unmet mental health needs of this population.

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. Additionally, the increased influx of refugees and asylum seekers the past year that are living at camps all over Greece where the conditions are similar to the ones of sleeping roughly (lack of heating, privacy, hygiene etc). While the figure is dynamic and daily changing, depending on the entries, on the 13th of December 2017, according to the official registers, 14,792 people, including families and children, disabled, singles were blocked on Greek islands that had a capacity to accommodate in camps or detention facilities, under humiliating conditions<sup>4</sup>.

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 but estimates are available.

According to the National Company of Electricity at the beginning of the last year 350.000 clients had debts valued

<sup>4</sup> <http://mindigital.gr/index.php/%CF%80%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%83%CF%86%CF%85%CE%B3%CE%B9%CE%BA%CF%8C-%CE%B6%CE%AE%CF%84%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%B1-refugee-crisis/1788-national-situational-picture-regarding-the-islands-at-eastern-aegean-sea-13-12-2017>

of 1 billion Euros. It is not clearly indicated whether all these clients have suffered electricity cuts. The figure responds to the ones that have applied to regulate their debts using the relief programmes that the organization has introduced to cover part of the debt.

## 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”. A Committee on Homelessness 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 also drafted the Integrated National Plan to Combat Homelessness.

Since 2016 a new committee has been reactivated to draft the Integrated National Plan to Combat Homelessness as part of the Strategy for Social Policy and Social Cohesion. However very little progress has been made since then.

### Governance

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

At the level of central administration, the General Secretariat for Welfare is the main body responsible for social policy. This was recently transferred from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry of Labour (March 2012). The latter has been contemplating the development of a new Welfare Body that may have a coordinating role in the planning and monitoring 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.

Currently is under process the creation of the housing department within the Directorate of Combat Poverty, in the Ministry of Labor, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity.

A new bill was introduced on housing allowance for 600.000 households under poverty (9.600 individual income) ~1000 euro/year (600.000 mil) to be implemented in 2019 (law 4472/2017).

Supported appartments scheme (Housing-first approach) based on experience from Housing and Reintegration, a programme that was initially funded by the 2014 surplus.

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. Not 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 (financial, administrative, coordination) are still pending. 11 Municipalities, in cooperation with NGOs, have integrated homeless services into their plans and created Day centres and Night Shelters. The programme was initially co-financed by the EU under the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) Thematic Priority Axis 4: “Complete Integration of all Human Resources into a Society of Equal Opportunities”. Although this is not directly aimed at homeless people, this is the first time that Municipalities, even indirectly, are engaged in operational plans targeting homelessness. It is now continuing under Structural Funds 2014-2020 under the

specific axe 9 where homelessness is directly recognized as a social issue that there is a need to be addressed.

### Targeted prevention

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 legal entity under private law and with the authorisation of the Ministry of Justice and has the mandate to provide those services. However, according to data, almost the 95% of the discharged migrants from the Young Offenders Prison have no housing solution.

## REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

### Positive

The legal recognition of homelessness (a. 29 L.4052/12).

National Strategy of Social Inclusion where homeless people are clearly a targeted group for intervention. A committee to further elaborate further the details has been established since May 2016.

Law 4368/21-2-2016 article 33 about free access to public health facilities.

Law 4389, article 235 and Common Ministerial Decision (National Gazette 2089/B/7-7-2016) introduction of MGI and releasing homeless from financial penalty for not submitting timely income tax form.

Law 4472, article 3 on housing allowances from 2019 onwards.

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.

### Negative

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

Homeless people are excluded from receiving unemployment benefits because of bureaucratic restrictions (demand for the provision of a document/certificate from the Tax Office, public utilities bill or a land-line telephone bill or a copy of an official tenancy agreement).

A number of coercive measures/restrictions have been introduced which have a legal basis and can act as tools for criminalizing the homeless: the banning and 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 (2012 – 15,073 euros per family of four while 2015 is below 10,000 per family of four). Costs of living has not been adjusted accordingly.

National Supplement at low pensions (EKAS) is scheduled to be reduced the following year (2017) and finally withdrawn in 2019.

