



# HOMELESSNESS IN ROMANIA

## KEY STATISTICS

There is no national homelessness data collection strategy and very little data is available. Only general social inclusion indicators are available at national level.

A study conducted in 2004 by the Research Institute for Quality of Life and the National Institute of Statistics, estimated the number of roofless people in Romania at 14,000 -15,000 persons.

Between 1 January and 31 December 2011, 113,495 'marginalised persons' were registered with the authorities of which:

- 41,085 did not own or rent a place to live
- 161,806 lived in inadequate conditions
- 10,604 were older people without legal guardians or care givers

According to Eurostat, in 2011, 17.1% of the EU-28 population lived in overcrowded dwellings with the highest overcrowding rates registered in Romania (54.2%).

Since 2011, the national census has included homelessness. The latest census reveals that 165,000 people were registered as living in 'collective' housing spaces or that they were homeless.

Other official estimates, exclusively from administrative sources (Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, 2008), suggest a lower figure of about 4,000 homeless people in 2008, whilst a Save the Children research in 2009 (based on the capture-recapture method) in the cities of Bucharest, Braşov, and Constanţa identified around 1,400 children and young people (up to 35 years old) were experiencing homelessness. A similar research undertaken by the Save the Children research in 2014, in Bucharest and based on the same method, estimated over 1,100 children and young people in Bucharest.

The 2016 European Housing Exclusion Index ranks Romania in 24<sup>th</sup> position overall out of the 28 EU countries. Moreover, Romania is ranked in last position in respect of 'overcrowding' (52.3% against the EU average of 16.9%) as well as 'severe housing deprivation' (21.5% against the EU average of 5.1%)

The Strategic Action Plan for 2015-2020 within the framework of the National Strategy for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction for 2015-2020, contains a specific objective to estimate the number of homeless people and monitoring its dynamics. This includes:

- evaluating the number of homeless people at the national level and the main localities, based on a reliable set of data
- setting up a classification of homeless people according to the chronology of this state/status (the time frame on which the person was homeless), its causes and effects and specific intervention needs
- setting up a system for the continuous registering and monitoring of homeless people in partnership with public institutions, NGOs, statistics and research institutes etc., including dedicated indicators in social inclusion monitoring systems at national and local level

At present, the above objective appears not to have yet been properly implemented.

## INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

The comments paper produced for the 2013 Peer Review in Denmark indicates a significant rise in homelessness in Romania. Although not all of the stated 41,085 'marginalised persons' who did not own or rent a place to live' would have been experiencing 'rooflessness', the remainder are likely to be suffering 'houselessness'. Compared to the 2004 study – an estimated 14,000-15,000 roofless persons – the 2011 figure of 113,495 marginalised persons experiencing rooflessness or houselessness means that the earlier study was extraordinarily inaccurate or there has been a steady and dramatic rise in homelessness in Romania. The number of families, particularly one-parent families experiencing homelessness is growing.

## CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

Census data is consistent with previous research reported by the National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction (MLFSPE /WB) when defining the profile of homeless people. More than 95% live in urban areas with 33% living in Bucharest. Men make up 76% of the homeless population with 76% of that number being of an active age. Children make up 10% of the homeless population. The

number of unmarried, widow(er)s and divorcees is considerably higher compared to the general population.

## POLICIES & STRATEGIES

### National Strategy

There is no national integration strategy in Romania. Homelessness has always been referred to as a general priority in anti-poverty policies because homeless people are considered a vulnerable group. Following a Government decision (197/2006), a National Interest Programme (NIP) was launched with the aim of combating the social exclusion of homeless people by creating emergency social centres. The programme sets out a range of aims, objectives and indicators for a six-year period. Six national interest programmes have been developed concerning different vulnerable groups. Their aim is to promote the social inclusion of vulnerable groups as part of broader anti-poverty policy (as described in the National Reform Programme).

In addition, the Romanian Government has provided a definition of homelessness through Law 292/2011 on the national system of social assistance, which amended Law 47/2006. The definition of a homeless person is 'someone represented in a social category formed by single people or families who, because of singular or cumulated reasons (social, medical, financial, economic or legal) or because of force majeure, lives on the streets or with friends or acquaintances and is unable to sustain a rented house or is threatened with eviction, or lives in institutions or prisons and is due to be released within two months and lacks a domicile or residence.' In 2005, the Government committed to implementing a three-year national programme for the counties and municipality of Bucharest that would establish 50 shelters for homeless people. The programme was to be funded by the state and implemented through the National Interest Programme. By the end of November 2011, 55 centres had been established. However, adult services for people who have lost their homes are only being provided in 19 of the 41 counties and in only 26 cities. Not all of these services provide shelter, with many simply offering information and advice - it is unclear how many of these services still operate in 2014. NGO service providers consider that the supply is insufficient to meet the demand.

The Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection (MLFSP) is responsible for developing and implementing social policies and programmes as well as monitoring and assessing policy implementation. Other ministries involved in social policy are the Romanian Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing, the National Disability Authority, the National Employment Agency and the Ministry of Economy and Finance. The Romanian Ministry of European Affairs monitors the implementation of the National Reform Programme (NRP) at the national level and coordinates the elaboration of the annual Action Plan for implementing it. The implementation of measures for poverty mitigation will be monitored by the

MLFSP, based on information received from the implementing institutions.

Formal responsibility for coordinating these policies is spread across the Ministry of Regional Development and the Public Administration who are responsible for social housing and the MLFSPE who is responsible for homelessness. Policy implementation is the responsibility of the local authorities.

## REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

### Positive

This is very difficult to quantify as there is no specific strategy to fight homelessness, instead this group is included in the cluster of people who are defined as experiencing 'social exclusion'.

### Negative

Social housing policy:

Homelessness per se, is not a priority group for social housing. Around 28,000 to 29,000 state-owned dwellings are officially registered as social housing units, while the number of applications received by urban local authorities exceeds 67,000. These same authorities estimate that the need is for 55,000 to 60,000 units (Strategy on social inclusion and poverty reduction, WB 2014)

State intervention has many shortcomings:

- Some abandoned children are overlooked by childcare agencies
- Post-institutionalised children are not being adequately helped on leaving child care institutions
- Hospitals have a very low capacity for treating mental illness
- Except for emergency treatment, homeless people are not eligible for hospital/medical treatment
- Domestic violence is not properly addressed with many women forced to leave their homes to escape an abuser
- Persons leaving penal institutions are not adequately helped on their release from prison
- Persons leaving hospitals (physical and mental facilities) are similarly not properly assisted on their discharge from medical care
- Alcohol/substance abusers have a very limited choice of treatments
- Evictions from social housing/former nationalised houses occurs without support following eviction.