



EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion

Estonia

Märt Masso and Merilen Laurimäe



Social Europe

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Directorate C — Social Affairs

Unit C.2 — Modernisation of social protection systems

Contact: Giulia Pagliani

E-mail: Giulia.PAGLIANI@ec.europa.eu

European Commission

B-1049 Brussels

European Social Policy Network (ESPN)

**ESPN Thematic Report on
National strategies to fight
homelessness and housing
exclusion**

Estonia

2019

Märt Masso and Merilen Laurimäe

The European Social Policy Network (ESPN) was established in July 2014 on the initiative of the European Commission to provide high-quality and timely independent information, advice, analysis and expertise on social policy issues in the European Union and neighbouring countries.

The ESPN brings together into a single network the work that used to be carried out by the European Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion, the Network for the Analytical Support on the Socio-Economic Impact of Social Protection Reforms (ASISP) and the MISSOC (Mutual Information Systems on Social Protection) secretariat.

The ESPN is managed by the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER) and APPLICA, together with the European Social Observatory (OSE).

For more information on the ESPN, see:

<http://ec.europa.eusocialmain.jsp?catId=1135&langId=en>

***Europe Direct is a service to help you find answers
to your questions about the European Union.***

Freephone number (*):

00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11

(*) The information given is free, as are most calls (though some operators, phone boxes or hotels may charge you).

LEGAL NOTICE

This document has been prepared for the European Commission, however it reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

More information on the European Union is available on the Internet (<http://www.europa.eu>).

© European Union, 2019

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged

Quoting this report: Masso, Märt and Laurimäe, Merilen (2019). ESPN Thematic Report on National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion – Estonia, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Brussels: European Commission.

Contents

SUMMARY	4
1 THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION.....	5
2. RELEVANT STRATEGIES AND POLICIES TACKLING HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION	7
3 ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT PATTERNS OF SERVICE PROVISION AND CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING ESTONIA'S RESPONSES TO HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION..	9
3.1 The main types of support services	9
3.2 Prevention services.....	9
3.3 The main service providers and their role.....	10
3.4 Effectiveness of existing measures	11
REFERENCES	13
ANNEX	15
Table A1: ETHOS Light categories defined as homeless in Estonia	15
Table A2: Latest available data on the number of homeless people in Estonia	16

Summary

The Ministry of Social Affairs has defined homeless people as those who have no legal relationship with any building or room qualifying as a living space (ownership, permanent contract, tenancy), and who do not have the income or social skills required to change their situation.

There are no valid and reliable survey or administrative statistics on the number of homeless people in Estonia. Information on the number of homeless people is mainly obtained from different services such as shelters, and is thus dependent on people meeting qualification criteria and taking up the services offered.

In 2017 (most recent data to date), the total number of people using shelters was 2,017, which was slightly lower than in 2016 (2,043). However, if restricted to homeless people the total number of users increased from 1,503 in 2016 to 1,546 in 2017. The majority of homeless people using shelters were men (about 87%), mainly aged 25-64. The average duration of stay was more than 90 days for about 30% of homeless people; but only 8.5% of the others who used shelters did so for more than 90 days. In 2017, the average duration of stay per person was 67 days.

At the end of the 2017, local authorities had 7,496 social and municipal dwellings and 994 places in social housing. In 2017, the total number of people using dwellings was 16,155 and the total number of those in safe houses was 831, of whom 161 used the service because of a lack of place of residence. At the end of 2017, approximately 90% of dwellings and 88% of beds in social housing units were occupied. However, there were waiting lists in 22 local government areas due to a lack of places (out of 213 local government areas in total).

There is no specific strategy for addressing homelessness in Estonia, but there are some broad strategies addressing poverty and social exclusion, most importantly the welfare development plan for 2016-2023 and the development plan for children and families 2012-2020. The explicit aim of these strategies is to prevent and reduce poverty and social exclusion, but indirectly this also helps to prevent homelessness and housing exclusion. Also, the long-term goals of the Estonian energy management development plan are related to preventing housing deprivation. The plan outlines the establishment of a state support fund for rented housing, promoting energy-efficient new dwellings and enhancing the use of land and planning.

The main types of support services are emergency shelters, day centres for homeless people, provision of dwellings, and safe houses for people who need a safe environment. The main prevention services are subsistence benefit, housing support and a debt counselling service. A re-entry service is provided to people released from prison.

The Social Welfare Act sets out general principles for the provision of social services, but the procedure for granting assistance is decided and organised by local government. Therefore, the quality and availability of the services varies between different local government areas. In 2016, the Social Welfare Act established the minimum requirements for services. and in 2018 a general guide to the quality of social services was developed in order to promote better and more consistent services across local authorities. However, the further development of quality guidelines for social services is necessary, in order to standardise service provision and quality. In addition, information about the existing services that are available is insufficient: it is important to improve this in order to be able to provide services proactively for those in need.

The exact number of homeless people is not known, and there is no specific strategy for addressing and reducing homelessness. Therefore, developing a strategic approach to address this challenge could be one of the main priorities for improvement.

1 The nature and extent of homelessness and housing exclusion

There are no reliable or valid survey or administrative statistics on the number of homeless people in Estonia. Information on the number of homeless people is mainly obtained through user data from different services such as shelters (*varjupaigateenus*), and thus the estimates depend on service take-up and compliance with admission criteria.

The Ministry of Social Affairs has defined homeless people as those who have no legal relationship (ownership, permanent contract, tenancy) with any building or room qualifying as a living space and who do not have the income or social skills required to change their situation (Ministry of Social Affairs 2009). Therefore, the homeless include people using shelter services. This definition overlaps with the first two ETHOS¹ Light categories (see Table A1 in the Annex)². However, data on people sleeping rough are not available in Estonia.

In 2016 the Social Welfare Act underwent several amendments, and as a result the concept of a shelter service also changed. According to the Act, shelter services consist of the former homelessness night shelters (*kodutute öömaja*) and the former shelter service for homeless people or other persons without a place of residence. The shelter service that was formerly for people who needed a safe environment is now the safe house service (*turvakoduteenus*). Therefore, the data before and after 2016 are not directly comparable.

The number of people using shelter services for homeless people because they lacked a place of residence increased overall between 2009 and 2015 (Table 1). However, the number fell between 2013 and 2015. There are no in-depth analyses of the extent to which the changes were related to changes in housing exclusion or to changes in service take-up and delivery.

Table 1: Number of people using shelter services in Estonia, 2009-2015

Reason	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Violence	443	636	535	519	523	570	564
Vagrancy	193	226	215	122	132	89	75
Neglect at home	142	160	185	139	116	158	136
Alcohol abuse	776	752	794	511	301	274	351
Drug abuse	103	103	122	116	84	80	69
Lack of place of residence	865	830	806	1,045	1,220	1,189	1,093
Release from prison	64	98	62	32	31	41	36
Other	400	424	360	278	269	216	166
Total	2,986	3,229	3,079	2,762	2,676	2,617	2,490

Source: Eesti Statistika (2014); H-veeb (2019).

Until 2016, in addition to the former shelter service, there was also the night shelter service. Night shelters were places where people who did not have a place to stay overnight could sleep and wash (Ministry of Social Affairs 2008). The number of people using the night shelters also increased overall between 2009 and 2015 (see Table 2). In 2015, about 87% of those using the night shelters were men. Since the exact number of people sleeping rough is not known, it is difficult to assess whether the number of people using the service increased because of the increase in the total number of homeless people (people sleeping rough) or because people were accessing the service more.

¹ European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion.

² The ETHOS typology is available at: <https://www.feantsa.org/en/toolkit/2005/04/01/ethos-typology-on-homelessness-and-housing-exclusion>.

Table 2: Number of people using night shelters in Estonia, 2009-2015

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Homeless	996	1,109	1,129	1,189	1,117	1,146	1,146
Men	841	933	941	1,011	968	988	995
Women	155	176	188	178	149	158	151
Other users	96	93	226	355	288	351	362
Men	71	74	183	298	244	301	318
Women	25	19	43	57	44	50	44
Total	1,092	1,202	1,355	1,544	1,405	1,497	1,508

Source: H-veeb (2019).

According to the Social Welfare Act, which entered into force in 2016, the aim of the (new) shelter service is to provide temporary overnight accommodation to adults who are unable to find an overnight stay elsewhere. Beds and washing facilities are provided (Ministry of Justice 2019b). Table 3 shows the number of persons using shelters by age group in 2016 and 2017 (most recent data available). The Table distinguishes between the homeless and other users (e.g. those released from prison). In 2017, the total number of persons using the shelters was 2,017, which was slightly lower than in 2016 (2,043) (see Table A2 in the Annex). However, if restricted to homeless people the total number of users rose from 1,503 in 2016 to 1,546 in 2017. The majority of homeless people using shelters were men (about 86% to 87%), mainly aged 25-64. However, a particularly vulnerable group seems to be persons aged 50-64, who represented 45% of the total homeless users of shelters in 2017.

Table 3: Number of people using the shelter service by age group in Estonia, 2016 and 2017

People using shelters	Total	2016				2017				
		18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	Total	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+
Total	2,043	60	887	862	234	2,017	57	914	840	206
Men	1,762	53	794	732	183	1,735	47	808	716	164
Women	281	7	93	130	51	282	10	106	124	42
Homeless	1,503	27	617	684	175	1,546	37	672	690	147
Men	1,303	27	558	580	138	1,345	33	602	586	124
Women	200	-	59	104	37	201	4	70	104	23
Other users	540	33	270	178	59	471	20	242	150	59
Men	459	26	236	152	45	390	14	206	130	40
Women	81	7	34	26	14	81	6	36	20	19

Source: Ministry of Social Affairs (2019c); H-veeb (2019)

The average duration of stay per person was longer for homeless people than other shelter users. The average duration was more than 90 days for about 30% of homeless people, but only 8.5% of other shelter users stayed more than 90 days (Table 4). About 76.2% of the other users stayed up to 7 days, but among the homeless it was only 41.2%. However, there were no major differences in the length of stay between the men and women. In 2017, the average duration of stay per person was 67 days among both men and women (Ministry of Social Affairs 2019c).

Table 4: Average length of stay in shelters per person in Estonia (% of service users), 2017

	Total number of persons	Up to 7 days %	8–30 days %	31–90 days %	91–180 days %	181–270 days %	Over 270 days %
Homeless	1,546	41.2	14.3	15.5	14.5	6.4	8.1
Men	1,345	41.0	14.4	15.5	15.1	6.5	7.5
Women	201	42.8	13.4	15.9	10.4	5.5	11.9
Other users	471	76.2	8.1	7.2	1.3	1.9	5.3
Men	390	75.4	8.2	7.4	1.3	2.1	5.6
Women	81	80.2	7.4	6.2	1.2	1.2	3.7

Source: H-veeb (2019).

Public housing and safe houses are also provided in Estonia. At the end of the 2017, local authorities had 7,496 social and municipal dwellings and 994 places in social housing. In 2017, the total number of people using local authority dwellings was 16,155; and the total number in safe houses was 831, of whom 161 used the service because they lacked a place of residence (Ministry of Social Affairs 2019a, 2019c). The main types of support services are described in more detail in Section 2.

There are no statistics on the number of people living in healthcare or penal institutions who have no housing arranged prior to release. However, there is a re-entry service for people living in penal institutions in Estonia, which was used by 129 people between 2015 and 2018 (Ministry of Justice 2019) (more information in next Section).

2. Relevant strategies and policies tackling homelessness and housing exclusion

There is no specific strategy addressing homelessness and housing exclusion in Estonia; but there are some broad strategies addressing poverty and social exclusion, and consequently designed to ensure suitable places for people to live.

The first broader strategy is the **welfare development plan for 2016-2023** (Ministry of Social Affairs 2016), aimed at improving people's ability to cope in economic terms, and giving access to various social protection measures designed to prevent poverty and reduce social inequalities. The strategy is aimed at improving and harmonising the availability of social services, including the shelter services discussed above.

The second broader strategy is the **Development Plan for Children and Families for 2012–2020** (Ministry of Social Affairs 2011), one aspect of which is to improve housing conditions by:

- implementing a programme for housing support for families with children;
- increasing the municipal rented housing fund;
- providing a state guarantee behind home loans taken out by young families.

The third broader strategy is the **energy management development plan 2030+**, three long-term goals of which are: 1) establishment of a state support fund for rented housing; 2) promoting energy-efficient new dwellings; and 3) enhancing the use of land and planning.

Although the energy management development plan sets out certain objectives in the field, there is no clear specific development plan for housing policy in Estonia that looks at the problems in a larger context. The goals in the plan were taken from the previous housing development strategy for 2008-2013, but in the new plan the focus shifted to the energy efficiency of housing. The problems of housing are handled in isolation from one another;

and responsibility is often delegated to local authorities, which have uneven capacity and resources to deal with the matter in hand.

Housing is supported via several schemes in Estonia.

First, housing costs are covered as a part of the subsistence benefit, which is a means-tested social assistance benefit that guarantees a minimum income to all residents after paying for minimum housing costs.

Second, local municipalities may provide social housing or subsidised housing. Housing provision is an obligation of local authorities – they are obliged to provide a dwelling to persons or families who are not able to afford it by themselves; and, where necessary, to allow renting of a social housing unit. However, the availability and quality of the services varies, as the services are financed and provided by local authorities, which have varying financial capabilities.

Third, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication provides several support measures, such as for the renewal of residential heating systems, for demolition of unused buildings, and for the reconstruction of apartment buildings. There is also housing renovation support for families with three and more children.

Expenditure on the **provision of dwellings, shelters, safe houses** and subsistence benefit are shown in Table 5. However, it is difficult to assess the adequacy of funding, since valid statistics for homelessness (the number of people sleeping rough) are not available.

Table 5: Expenditure on provision of dwellings, shelters, safe houses and subsistence benefit in Estonia (EUR), 2017

Type of service	Amount in EUR in 2017	Number of service users in 2017
Provision of dwelling	13,784,743	16,155
State	72,561	
Local government	13,648,095	
Shelter service	2,111,567	2,017
Local government	1,857,598	
Service user	215,517	
Safe house service	2,638,836	831
Local government	2,608,127	
Service user	23,232	
Subsistence benefit	18,304,537	25,360

Source: Ministry of Social Affairs (2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d).

EU funding has played an important role in enhancing responses to homelessness, housing exclusion and poverty in Estonia. For example, activities under the welfare development plan are partly implemented with funding from the European Structural Funds (European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund) (Ministry of Social Affairs 2016). From 2015, a re-entry service has been provided for people released from prison. The service offers both counselling (via a mentoring service) and **temporary housing**. The aim of mentoring is to increase participation in the labour market, use of social services and coping in general. According to the needs of the person, an action plan is prepared (Kriminaalpoliitika 2019). This service also helps to **prevent homelessness**. The interim evaluation of the re-entry service showed that users generally found the service had a positive effect and helped them to cope better (Solodov 2018). About 85% of the re-entry service is financed by the European Social Fund (Kriminaalpoliitika 2018).

The European Aid Fund, together with local authorities and third-sector organisations, provides food aid to people in difficulties, including subsistence benefit recipients and **night shelter users**. In 2016, more than 29,000 people received food aid (Ministry of Social Affairs 2016, 2018).

3 Analysis of the current patterns of service provision and challenges in implementing Estonia's responses to homelessness and housing exclusion

3.1 The main types of support services

Under the Social Welfare Act, there are 13 different social services provided by local authorities (Ministry of Justice 2019b). All these services help people to cope better with social risks.

Emergency social assistance (*vältimatu sotsiaalabi*) is provided to a person who is in a helpless situation and for as long as they remain so. Emergency social assistance provides food, clothes and **temporary accommodation** (Ministry of Justice 2019b). As already mentioned above in the first Section, there is a **shelter service** providing an emergency and temporary accommodation response for people without a place to live. At the end of 2017, there were 17 shelters with 621 places (H-veeb 2019), slightly fewer than at the end of 2016 (18 shelters and 625 places). The shelters also provide additional services such as social counselling, psychological counselling and a resocialisation service. In 2016, 72% of the shelters (13 shelters) provided social counselling, and 11% (2 shelters) provided psychological counselling and a resocialisation service. In 2017, 15 shelters provided social counselling and 3 shelters provided psychological counselling (Ministry of Social Affairs 2019c).

In addition to shelters there are also **day centres** for homeless people. Whereas shelters offer an overnight stay, day centres are open only during the day. For example, the Tallinn day centre (Tallinna Hoolekande Keskus) offers social counselling, food, showers, soap, second-hand clothes, books, magazines, TV and internet. The Tartu Day Centre offers social counselling, information about job vacancies, and retraining. In addition, it is possible to watch TV, wash, wash clothes, get a haircut, etc. (City of Tartu 2019).

One of the social services provided by local authorities is the **provision of dwellings** (*eluaseme tagamise teenus*). The main objective is the direct provision of dwellings for people and/or their families who are unable to obtain a dwelling for themselves because of their economic situation (Ministry of Justice 2019b). At the end of 2017, more than 9,100 families used the service, altogether a total of 16,155 people. About 22% of users were of retirement age (aged 63+) and 78% were younger than 63. About 11% had special needs due to disability or age (Ministry of Social Affairs 2019a).

There is also a **safe house service** (*turvakoduteenus*) in Estonia, organised by local authorities. The objective of the service is to provide temporary housing and basic assistance to children and adults who need a safe environment (Ministry of Justice 2019b). In 2017, 19.4% of those who used safe houses did so because of the lack of a place of residence, 11.4% because of vagrancy, 12.4% because of violence (domestic violence and other violence), 7.5% because of neglect at home, and 30.3% because of alcohol or drug abuse. Mothers with small children made up a large proportion of those who were in need of a dwelling. In 2017, 11.8% of safe house users moved to a dwelling offered by the local authority (Ministry of Social Affairs 2019b).

3.2 Prevention services

Subsistence benefit provides a guaranteed income level, designed to protect people from direct poverty. It is provided to people living alone, or to families, whose monthly net income after **housing expenses** (up to a certain limit) is below the subsistence level. The subsistence level is based on the minimum expenditure needed on foodstuffs, clothing, footwear and other goods and services that meet primary needs. Although the Social Welfare Act sets out general rules on how and which housing costs are covered, the upper limits to the components of housing costs vary between local authorities. The 'housing allowance' component of the subsistence benefit is, on the one hand, influenced by the

minimum size standards for dwellings stipulated in the Social Welfare Act and, on the other hand, by the limits on deductible housing costs established by local authorities.

Standards for dwelling size set by the Social Welfare Act are 18 m² for each member of the household plus 15 m² for the household as a whole. Accordingly, for a single person it is 33 m² and for a family of two it is 51 m². Any area in excess of these standards is taken into account when calculating housing allowance. For pensioners (recipients of any type of state pension) living alone in a dwelling, the socially justified standard is 51 m²: this is an exception to the general rule applying to single persons (33 m²), and apparently serves the purpose of maintaining a familiar home setting for people when they retire or become disabled.

The level of subsistence benefit is increased yearly, and has contributed to increasing the mean household income, especially for lower-income groups. In 2018 subsistence level was increased from 130 EUR to 140 EUR permonth, and to 150 EUR in 2019.

As a result of the national housing strategy and **housing support** for families with children, around 1,800 families experienced improved housing conditions between 2008 and 2013. Since 2014, housing support for families with children has been linked to the development plan for children and families.

The aim of the **debt counselling service** is to help solve debt problems and to avoid new debts. This service includes counselling and guidance, identifying people's financial situation and conducting negotiations with creditors (Ministry of Justice 2019b). This service also helps to prevent homelessness.

3.3 The main service providers and their role

The Social Welfare Act sets out general principles for the provision of social services. However, actual provision of services, benefits and other assistance is organised by the appropriate local authority, i.e. of the person's residence as recorded in the population register. If the person lives outside the person's residence entered in the population register, the provision of social services may be organised by the local government where the person is actually living (Ministry of Justice 2019b).

The shelter service is organised and mainly financed by local government. In 2017, local authorities financed about 88% of the expenditure on shelters. About 10% of the costs were financed by shelter users (Ministry of Social Affairs 2019c; H-veeb 2019).

The costs of providing dwellings are generally borne by the service user (rent, utilities). Other general costs, such as repair costs or adaption of a dwelling for a disabled person, are mainly covered by local government. In 2017, 99% of the other general costs were covered by local government, and 0.5% by central government (Ministry of Social Affairs 2019a).

The task of the Ministry of Social Affairs is to collect and analyse homelessness statistics (e.g. shelter service users).

The minimum dwelling standards are set by central government and local government. According to the Estonian constitution and the Local Government Organisation Act (Ministry of Justice 2013), local authorities are responsible for the organisation of housing and utilities within their administrative territory. The task of the state is to provide conditions in the housing market that will allow home-owners and tenants to solve their housing problems as independently as possible. This is done through legal regulations, institutional organisation and support measures.

The state also seeks to cooperate with various umbrella organisations for the purposes of developing the housing sector. The Dwelling Act sets out the powers of government in terms of regulating housing relationships: establishment of requirements for dwellings, determination of standards for dwellings and specifications for application thereof (Ministry of Justice 1999).

According to the Dwelling Act, local authorities are responsible for regulating housing relationships in their administrative territory. They are therefore responsible for establishing the procedure for keeping records of persons who have no dwelling or right to use a dwelling, and persons who need assistance in improving their living conditions. In addition, local authorities are responsible for establishing the procedure for the possession, use and disposal of dwellings in municipal ownership, including maintenance and repair rules; and for resolving other questions related to housing relationships that have been assigned to local governments by law.

Non-governmental organisations also contribute to the provision of services. For example, the previously mentioned Tallinna Hoolekande Keskus is a non-profit organisation that provides homeless people with a night shelter service and resocialisation services (day centre and accommodation centre) in Tallinn. There is also a non-profit organisation in Pärnu (MTÜ Pärnu Horisont), which supports different target groups and offers a number of services, such as an adult shelter and a day centre, an accommodation service, hot-food delivery, and social learning for long-term unemployed people. In the case of the re-entry service provided to people released from prison, different non-profit organisations (e.g. Lootuse küla) offer temporary housing. At the end of 2017, there were 17 institutions in Estonia that offered shelter services, 10 of which belonged to local government and 7 to the private sector (5 non-profit organisations, 1 foundation and 1 private limited company). At the end of 2016, there were 18 institutions in Estonia that offered shelters, 10 of which belonged to local authorities and 8 to the private sector. In 2016, about 38% of shelter service users used one that belonged to the private sector.

3.4 Effectiveness of existing measures

The availability and quality of the social services provided by local government vary from one local authority to another, due to their ability to organise, finance and control the provision of services. The conditions for receiving the service may also vary (Ministry of Social Affairs 2016). In 2016, the Social Welfare Act established minimum requirements for the services. This should standardise the quality of social services. However, the expectations and understanding of what service quality is sometimes differ (Ministry of Social Affairs 2016). In 2018, a general guide to the quality of social services was developed and there are also plans to develop service-based quality guidelines. However, this is a long-term process, because the instructions need to be tested with the service providers to identify control mechanisms that are best monitored by both the service provider and the supervisor (Sotsiaalkindlustusamet 2018; Johanson 2018).

According to the Social Welfare Act (Ministry of Justice 2019b) the main quality principles for social services are:

- person-centeredness
- empowering nature of the service
- orientation towards outcomes
- needs-based approach
- integral approach
- protection of a person's rights
- involvement
- competence and ethics of employees
- good work organisation and high-quality management of the organisation.

One of the gaps or weaknesses is that many local authority websites have no, or very little, information on the services available. It may also be confusingly presented in different places, making it difficult to find important information. Local authorities should therefore review their websites, and ensure that they explain which services are available and the conditions for accessing them, in order to provide better support those in need. This would also facilitate the counselling activities of social workers (Ploom and Uesoo 2018).

The situation and needs of homeless people are partly monitored by the municipal police service, which identifies the main locations of homeless people and tries to influence them to use different services. In addition, social workers can inform homeless people about the services available. But no one can force homeless people to use those services (Põldemaa 2015).

At the end of 2017, local authorities had a total of 7,496 social and municipal dwellings. There were also 994 places in social housing units (*sotsiaalmajutusüksus*). Approximately 90% of dwellings and 88% of beds in social housing units were occupied. However, there were waiting lists for public housing in 22 local governments due to a shortage of places (there are 213 local authorities in total). There were free places in 13 local authorities, but there were still waiting lists. There are different reasons for this mismatch – the location is not suitable, the size does not meet needs, etc. (Ministry of Social Affairs 2019a).

Subsistence benefit in Estonia is a state aid to people in need, but at times it is too low to prevent poverty. The welfare development plan states that the subsistence benefit level is not sufficient to guarantee an adequate income (Ministry of Social Affairs 2016).

In conclusion, the most important innovations related to the provision of homelessness services in the last five years have been: amendments to the Social Welfare Act and the development of a general guide to the quality of social services.

However, the main weaknesses and gaps in the approach to homelessness and housing exclusion are as follows.

- 1) The exact number of homeless people (people living on the street) is not known.
- 2) There is no specific strategy for addressing and reducing homelessness. There are only broader strategies for improving housing conditions and reducing poverty.
- 3) Services provided by local government have different levels of accessibility and quality.
- 4) Information about existing services is insufficient.

The main priorities for improvement are as follows.

- 1) The further development of quality guidelines for social services, to unify the provision and quality of social services.
- 2) Improved information about the services available to people, and proactive provision of services to those in need.
- 3) A specific strategy addressing homelessness, or making homelessness part of some broader strategy. At the moment, there are only broader strategies that address homelessness indirectly (e.g. by reducing poverty).
- 4) Addressing homelessness through the welfare development plan, which is not the case at the moment.

References

- City of Tartu (2019). Valdkonnad, varjupaigategenus ja kodutute päevakeskus. Available at: <https://www.tartu.ee/et/varjupaigategenus-ja-kodutute-paevakeskus>
- Eesti Statistika (2014). Eesti Statistika aastaraamat 2014, Statistical yearbook of Estonia 2014, Tallinn 2014. Available at: https://energiatalgud.ee/img_auth.php/b/be/Eesti_Statistika_Statistika_aastaraamat_2014_Tallinn_2014.pdf.
- H-veeb (2019). Hoolekandestatistika aruannete internetipõhine koondamine. Available at: <https://hveeb.sm.ee/index.php?tid=zTu67uJl00TzLjfOXXu7uJl0K9URdRz7pHsKOja>.
- Johanson, M. (2018). Sotsiaalteenuste kvaliteedijuhised ja EQUASS kvaliteedijuhtimissüsteemi uus meetodika. Sotsiaaltöö korraldus, 1/2018. Available at: https://www.tai.ee/images/ST1_2018_Johanson.pdf.
- Kriminaalpoliitika (2018). Tugiteenus vanglast vabanejatele (2018). Available at: https://www.kriminaalpoliitika.ee/sites/krimipoliitika/files/elfinder/dokumendid/TAT%20Tugiteenus%20vanglast%20vabanejatele_04.10.2018.pdf.
- Kriminaalpoliitika (2019). Reentry service, Justiitsministeeriumi kriminaalpoliitika osakonna võrgukodu. Available at: <https://www.kriminaalpoliitika.ee/et/reentry-service-0>.
- Ministry of Justice (1999). Eluruumidele esitatavate nõuete ja üüri arvestamise korra kinnitamine (1999). Vabariigi Valitsuse määrus, RT I 1999, 9, 138, vastu võetud 26.01.1999 nr 38, Riigi Teataja, Justiitsministeerium. Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/76911>.
- Ministry of Justice (2013). Kohaliku omavalitsuse korralduse seadus – KOKS [Local Government Organisation Act], RT I, 26.03.2013, 6, Riigi Teataja, Justiitsministeerium. Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/126032013006>.
- Ministry of Justice (2019a), TAT tugiteenus vanglast vabanejatele 2015-2018, Justiitsministeerium. Available at: <https://www.kriminaalpoliitika.ee/sites/krimipoliitika/files/elfinder/dokumendid/tugiteenus2015-2018.pdf>.
- Ministry of Justice (2019b). Sotsiaalhoolekande seadus [Social Welfare Act], RT I, 13.03.2019, 155, Riigi Teataja, Justiitsministeerium. Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/113032019155>.
- Ministry of Social Affairs (2008). Sotsiaalvaldkonna arengud 2000-2006, Sotsiaalministeeriumi toimetised nr 2/2008, Sotsiaalministeerium. Available at: https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Ministeerium_kontaktid/Statistika/Sotsiaalvaldkond/trendid2007-mai_1_.pdf.
- Ministry of Social Affairs (2009). Tervis, töö- ja sotsiaalelu 2000-2008, Sotsiaalministeerium, Tallinn 2009. Available at: http://rahvatervis.ut.ee/bitstream/1/1723/1/Sotsiaalministeerium2009_1.pdf.
- Ministry of Social Affairs (2011). Strategy of Children and Families 2012-2020 – Smart Parents, Great Children, Strong Families, Sotsiaalministeerium. Available at: https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Lapsed_ja_pered/lpa_fulltxt_eng_83a4_nobleed.pdf.
- Ministry of Social Affairs (2016). Welfare Development Plan 2016-2023, Sotsiaalministeerium. Available at: https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/eesmargid_ja_tegevused/welfare_development_plan_2016-2023.pdf
- Ministry of Social Affairs (2018). Euroopa abifond enim puudust kannatavate inimeste jaoks, Toiduabi jagamine, Sotsiaalministeerium. Available at: <https://www.sotsiaalministeerium.ee/et/toiduabi-jagamine-0>.

- Ministry of Social Affairs (2019a). Eluruumi tagamise teenus, Lühiülevaade 2016-2017, Sotsiaalministeerium. Available at: <https://www.sm.ee/et/sotsiaalvaldkond>.
- Ministry of Social Affairs (2019b). Turvakoduteenus, Lühiülevaade 2016-2017, Sotsiaalministeerium. Available at: <https://www.sm.ee/et/sotsiaalvaldkond>.
- Ministry of Social Affairs (2019c). Varjupaigategenus, Lühiülevaade 2016-2017, Sotsiaalministeerium. Available at: <https://www.sm.ee/et/sotsiaalvaldkond>.
- Ministry of Social Affairs (2019d). Toetuste statistika, toimetulekutoetus, lühiülevaade 2017. aasta, Sotsiaalministeerium. Available at: <https://www.sm.ee/et/toetuste-statistika>.
- Ploom, K. and Uuesoo, R. (2018). Sotsiaalteenuste tutvustamisest linna ja valla kodulehel, Sotsiaaltöö, 4/2018. Available at: https://www.tai.ee/images/Sotsiaaltöö_nr4_2018_32kuni34.pdf.
- Pöldemaa, K. (2015). Meil puudub riiklik strateegia vaesuse ja kodutuse vast. Pealinn. Available at: <http://www.pealinn.ee/poliitika/poldemaa-meil-puudub-riiklik-strateegia-vaesuse-ja-kodutuse-vastu-n155065>.
- Solodov, S. (2018). Tugiteenus vanglast vabanejatele. Toetuse andmise tingimuste 2017.aasta vahehindamise aruanne. Available at: https://www.kriminaalpoliitika.ee/sites/krimipoliitika/files/elfinder/dokumendid/tat_tu_giteenus_vanglast_vabanejatele_2017_aasta_vahehindamise_aruanne_0.pdf.
- Sotsiaalkindlustusamet (2018). Sotsiaalteenuste kvaliteedijuhis aitab kaasa paremate teenuste arendamisele. Available at: <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/et/uudised/sotsiaalteenuste-kvaliteedijuhis-aitab-kaasa-paremate-teenuste-arendamisele>.
- Tallinna Hoolekande Keskus, Teenused. Available at: <https://thk.ee/teenused/Viies>, M. (2013). Investeerides lastesse aitame neil välja rabeleda ebasoodsate olude ringist, Uurimus riigi poliitikast. EL sõltumatute ekspertide võrgustiksotsiaalse kaasatuse alal, Euroopa Liit, 2014.

Annex

Table A1: ETHOS Light categories defined as homeless in Estonia

Operational category		Living situation		Definition	Defined as homeless in Estonia
1	People living rough	1	Public space/ external space	Living on the streets or in public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters	Yes
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation	Yes (However, there also other shelter service users besides homeless; The homeless person is a person who has no legal relationship with any building or room qualifying as a living space (ownership, permanent contract, tenancy) and who do not have a necessary source of income or social skills to change their situation (Ministry of Social Affairs 2009).)
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homelessness hostels	Where the period of stay is time-limited and no long-term housing is provided	No
		4	Temporary accommodation		No
		5	Transitional supported accommodation		No
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation		No
4	People living in institutions	7	Healthcare institutions	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing No housing available prior to release	No
		8	Penal institutions		No
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9	Mobile homes	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence	No
		10	Non-conventional buildings		No
		11	Temporary structures		No
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	12	Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence	No

Table A2: Latest available data on the number of homeless people in Estonia

Operational category		Living situation		Most recent number	Period covered	Source
1	People living rough	1	Public space/ external space	No data	No data	
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	Total number of service users: 2017; Homeless service users: 1,546	2017	H-veeb (2019)
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homelessness hostels	No data	2017	Ministry of Social Affairs (2019b)
		4	Temporary accommodation	No data		
		5	Transitional supported accommodation	No data		
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation	Total number of safe house service users: 831 (reason lack of place of residence 161; reason vagrancy – 95 users)		
4	People living in institutions	7	Healthcare institutions	No data	2015-2018	Ministry of Justice (2019a)
		8	Penal institutions	Reentry service users (housing): 129		
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9	Mobile homes	No data		
		10	Non-conventional buildings	No data		
		11	Temporary structures	No data		
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	12	Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence	No data		

