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National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion

Lithuania

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

Lithuania

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Summary

Even if the Law on the Declaration of Residence provides a definition of a homeless person, national strategic documents do not refer to any official definition of homelessness. Existing definitions of homelessness are solely used for administrative and statistical purposes, and cover only some of the ETHOS Light categories of homelessness. While the exact number of homeless people is not known, Statistics Lithuania recorded around 4,400 homeless people in Lithuania in 2017 (i.e. around 1.6 homeless persons per thousand inhabitants). Only about a fifth of the recorded homeless people are female. The highest numbers of homeless people are in the three largest cities. Homeless people are one of the most stigmatised groups, facing a high level of discrimination on the rental and labour markets, as well as in other spheres of life and in access to essential services.

There is no specific integrated strategy for tackling homelessness in Lithuania. The Action Plan for Increasing Social Inclusion in 2014-2020 mentions homelessness only once, with no specific means for resolving the homelessness problem. The general housing strategy and action plans (e.g. for the expansion of access to social housing in 2015-2020) contain goals that are indirectly linked to homelessness.

The main actors in the sphere of homelessness response are the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, municipalities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The ministry does not carry out any programme intended solely for the homeless, but runs several general programmes for developing social services and housing infrastructure. Municipalities provide shelter and social housing, compensation to help with the rent or the purchase of housing, and other social services. There are big disparities in the development of general and specific services oriented towards homeless people across municipalities. NGOs cover only around 12% of people living in shelter accommodation.

Shelter accommodation can be characterised as a low-intensity service that does not provide a sustainable long-term solution to the problem of homelessness. As a result, people who leave shelters often end up on the street again. The heterogeneous characteristics and needs of homeless people are not reflected in the provision of services, except for the provision by crisis centres of specialised services for mothers with children. Flexible and complex solutions to homelessness and housing exclusion should include such services as addiction treatment, development of social and working skills, day centres for the homeless, the provision of healthcare and transportation, debt prevention and relief, social and psychological counselling and support, etc. New models of service provision should be developed, such as housing-led services, supported housing, and Housing First services.

Access to social housing and to rent assistance is very low, and the number of evictions from social housing is increasing. For example, waiting lists for social housing are from around 3 to 12 years, depending on the municipality; only about 8.4% of all people waiting for social housing received rent assistance in 2018. New amendments to the Law on Assistance for Housing Purchase or Rent, which will come into force in September 2019, should help extend the currently low level of assistance for rent and credits for housing for supported groups in Lithuania. While costly, social housing remains the preferred option, and is safer than rent assistance on the private market. Hence, access to social housing should be further expanded by municipalities, alongside an improvement in the provision of rent assistance and the increased subletting of private rented housing by municipalities. Furthermore, counselling services for the prevention of debt accumulation and mechanisms for debt relief should be developed by municipalities to prevent evictions.

Social protection funding in the sphere of housing is very low in Lithuania compared to the EU average. This results in low accessibility to social housing and limits the scope and effectiveness of services provided for homeless people. Inadequate funding for social housing and homelessness-related services can be expected to become even more problematic in the future, as homelessness in Lithuania is set to increase.

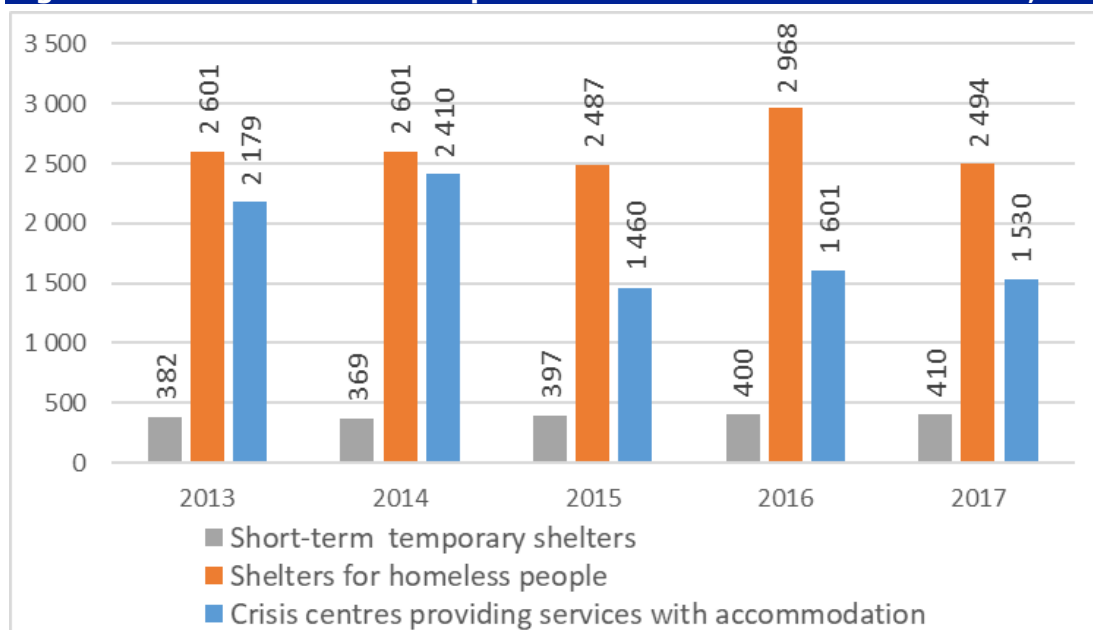
1 The nature and extent of homelessness and housing exclusion

As defined in the Law on the Declaration of Residence: 'a person is homeless if he/she does not own accommodation or a building or have any other right to use such accommodation or building, and resides in temporary accommodation or public places'.¹ National strategic documents do not refer to any official definition of homelessness. They make almost no mention of homelessness at all. The Action Plan for Increasing Social Inclusion in 2014-2020 mentions homelessness only once, but does not define it.²

However, Statistics Lithuania does collect data on homelessness within the framework of the general population census once a decade. 'In 2011, the census instructions defined homeless people as those who have no permanent place of residence and no money to rent or buy at least a basic lodging, and for this reason they live on the streets, in places not intended for human habitation, in institutions for temporary living (night shelters, crisis centres and shelters for mothers and children' (FEANTSA, 2016). Hence only a few of the ETHOS Light categories of homelessness (i.e. 1.1, 2.2, 3.4, 3.6, see Table A1 in the Annex) are used in statistics on homelessness.

The exact number of homeless people is not known, as a proportion of them, for various reasons, do not have personal documents, and do not use shelter accommodation or other public services and facilities. Statistics Lithuania recorded 4,400 homeless people in Lithuania in 2017 (see Figure 1 and Table A2 in the Annex). This number included 2,500 persons living in shelters for homeless people (ETHOS Light 3.4), with 40.7% staying there for more than six months. Furthermore, 1,500 persons were living in crisis centres and shelters for mothers and children (ETHOS Light 3.6); 410 persons were staying in short-term shelters (ETHOS Light 2.2). About a fifth of the recorded homeless population is female.

Figure 1: Number of homeless persons in shelters and crisis centres, 2013-2017



Source: Statistics Lithuania (2016; 2019b).

¹ Lietuvos Respublikos Gyvenamosios vietos deklaravimo įstatymas. 2017 m. gruodžio 21 d. Nr. XIII-961. Vilnius [The Law on the Declaration of Residence in the Republic of Lithuania, 21 December 2017, No. XIII-961. Vilnius]. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/2af334f0e71911e7b4d1bdd5f1a9ff0e>

² Socialinės įtraukties didinimo 2014-2020 m. veiksmų planas. 2013. Patvirtinta Lietuvos Respublikos socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministro 2013 m. spalio 22 d. įsakymu Nr. A1-588 [The Action Plan for Increasing Social Inclusion in 2014-2020, approved by the Minister of Social Security and Labour, 22 October 2013, No. A1-558].

The relatively low level of homelessness in Lithuania (around 1.6 homeless persons per thousand inhabitants in 2017) can be explained by several factors. The high proportion of home ownership is a major one: in 2017, around 90% of the Lithuanian population lived in the property they owned, compared to only around 70% on average in the EU and about 80% in Latvia and Estonia (Eurostat, 2019a).

Moreover, around 80% of people below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold owned their property in 2017, compared to around 50% on average in the EU and 70-75% in Estonia and Latvia (ibid.). The high level of home ownership in Lithuania is largely due to the right granted to Lithuanian citizens in the early 1990s, after the restoration of the country's independence, to the restitution of property in the form of real estate, and to the privatisation of residential property. After the mass privatisation of housing, private natural persons own 96.6% of conventional dwellings, while only 1.4% of this accommodation belongs to the state or municipalities (Statistics Lithuania, 2019a). According to the 2011 census data, almost 98.9% of all recorded dwellings in Lithuania were traditional types of homes (in individual low-rise houses and in apartment blocks). Only 0.02% were unconventional dwellings (temporary lodging not intended for year-round use: garden houses, cabins, etc.) (Statistics Lithuania, 2013). Other factors behind the homelessness statistics may include low levels of immigration and high levels of emigration (and depopulation in general), which keeps rents and property prices at a relatively low level, except for in the major cities.

Nevertheless, homelessness has been increasing over the past decade. The number of those who living in shelters for the homeless increased steadily from around 1,500 in 2003 to almost 3,000 in 2016, but decreased to 2,500 in 2017 (Statistics Lithuania, 2019a). A quite different situation is observed in terms of the number of people residing in crisis centres and shelters for mothers and children who have experienced domestic violence. Here, the numbers peaked in 2014 and steadily decreased in the period 2015-2017. There was a big drop in the number of users of crisis centres that targeted mothers with children (Figure 1). One reason is that, since 2015 these centres have no longer provided short-term emergency accommodation: that is now provided by short-term overnight shelters. Moreover, consultations with service providers highlight the fact that women now avoid using the services of crisis centres, because amendments to the legislation in 2014 mean that going there triggers legal processes against their abusive partners; on the other hand, thanks to the same amendments, the abusive partner is obliged to leave the accommodation, rather than the victim (ELTA, 2014).

Homeless people do not form a single homogeneous social group. Research conducted in Lithuania has revealed the main individual reasons for homelessness to be alcoholism, violence and conflicts in the family, unemployment, poverty, material shortages, property and financial obligations, young people leaving foster homes, and those returning from detention facilities. Other reasons include divorce, loss of housing due to debt or deception, natural disasters and fire (Ivanauskienė and Gončiarova, 2017; Kocai, 2008).

Urban areas usually have the highest rates of homelessness – the largest numbers of homeless people living in night shelters are to be found in the three biggest cities. The largest number of homeless people living in night shelters in 2017 was in the district of Kaunas (the second biggest city) – 631 people. In the district of Vilnius, there were 463 homeless people. Also in 2017, the largest number of persons living in crisis centres and shelters for mothers and children (528 people) was in the Vilnius district.

That same year, there were 1,015 homeless people who had resided in night shelters for more than six months. This number varies slightly over time, but the trend for homeless people to stay in night shelters for more than six months persists.

Poor people in general, and homeless people in particular, are heavily stigmatised in Lithuania. It is often thought that homeless people have consciously chosen that way of life ('Kurk Lietuvai' project, 2019). Homeless people face discrimination on the rental and labour markets, in other spheres of life and in access to essential services. Research carried out in 2016 revealed that people who have difficulty in accessing housing are also

heavily stigmatised: in a number of municipalities, around two-thirds of respondents disapproved of having social housing apartments in their apartment blocks, expressing fear and prejudice towards the people occupying them (Lapienytė, 2018).

2 Relevant strategies and policies to tackle homelessness and housing exclusion

There is no specific strategy in Lithuania which aims at preventing and tackling homelessness in an integrated manner, i.e. which addresses the complex interplay of the underlying causes of homelessness mentioned in the previous section. Strategic documents make almost no mention of homelessness at all. The Action Plan for Increasing Social Inclusion in 2014-2020 mentions homelessness only once: 'Particularly difficult are the most socially vulnerable groups, such as the disabled, people with addictions, members of the Roma community, people out of prison, homeless people, etc.'³ However, there is no definition of homelessness and no means of resolving the homelessness problem indicated in the action plan.

The Ministry of Social Security and Labour has the main responsibility for issues relating to homelessness, as well as for coordinating government policies regarding state assistance for housing acquisition or rent. The Ministry of Social Security and Labour forms the housing support policy, organises, coordinates and controls its implementation, and assigns the funding for current social support programmes to the municipalities. The ministry does not carry out any programme intended solely for the homeless as a target group (SADM, 2019). However, it administers a special programme for the development of service infrastructure. There are 10 projects aimed at the creation or modernisation of shelter accommodation. The projects' funding amounts to €4.3 million from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), €1 million of municipal funds and €113,000 from the national budget. It is planned that 451 places in shelter accommodation will be created for homeless people (ibid.).

The municipalities provide individuals and families with social housing, or with partial assistance with costs related to the rent or purchase of housing, and other social services. Under the Constitution, municipalities are autonomous in respect to the development of local policy and service provision. Hence, there are regional disparities in the quality and infrastructure of social services and housing support. For example, the capital city, Vilnius, adopted a programme on homelessness for the period 2013-2018, which covered accommodation and reintegration.⁴ The Vilnius municipality's programme on homelessness took an approach of service development: providing more resources for social work on streets, increasing the number of places in shelters for the homeless, optimising food delivery, developing networks of hygiene and medical services, and improving their accessibility. Besides this, the programme's main objectives stated the intentions of developing social and working competences by expanding day service centres, and of seeking to create a more balanced, unbiased attitude toward the homeless on the part of the community.

While homelessness is not at the centre of national social policy, there is a housing strategy, with goals that are indirectly linked to homelessness, such as the expansion of housing options to all social groups (FEANTSA, 2016). In 2015, an action plan for the

³ Socialinės įtraukties didinimo 2014-2020 m. veiksmų planas. 2013. Patvirtinta Lietuvos Respublikos socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministro 2013 m. spalio 22 d. įsakymu Nr. A1-588 [The Action Plan for Increasing Social Inclusion in 2014-2020, approved by the Minister of Social Security and Labour, 22 October 2013, No. A1-558].

⁴ Vilniaus miesto savivaldybės taryba, Socialinės rizikos asmenų, neturinčių nuolatinės gyvenamosios vietos, ir elgetaujančiųjų 2013-2018 metų integracijos ir socialinės pagalbos programa. Patvirtinta 2013 m. liepos 24 d. sprendimu No. 1-1390 [Vilnius City Council Programme for Integration and Social Assistance for Persons at Risk of Social Exclusion without Permanent Residence and for Beginners in 2013-2018, approved by decision on 24 July 2013, No. 1-1390].

development/expansion of access to social housing for 2015-2020 was approved.⁵ This action plan established that the ERDF would be used to develop municipal social housing. Municipal social housing is being developed by constructing new residential houses; by reconstructing or refurbishing residential buildings owned by the municipalities; and by having the municipalities buy up houses and individual apartments. The final aim is to increase the opportunities for persons and families who have a right to rent social housing and who are registered on municipal lists as in need of housing support.⁶ For the period 2014–2020, €58.7 million were set aside for projects to expand social housing, of which €49.9 million comes from the ERDF and €8.8 million from municipalities' resources.⁷ Some 778 dwellings were purchased in 2018.

Nevertheless, the accessibility of social housing remains very low. According to data from the Housing Support Department of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour for April 2018, there were around 11,000 persons and families waiting for social housing. In any case, the number of households waiting for social housing fell from more than 32,000 in 2014 to 10,500 in 2017. This number decreased dramatically in 2016 after the waiting list was revised and the duty to declare assets and income was enforced. Nevertheless, waiting lists for social housing are still from around 3 to 12 years, depending on the municipality (SADM, 2019). The average time that people have to wait for social housing in the biggest cities (Vilnius and Kaunas) is about 10-15 years (FEANTSA, 2016). Social housing was rented to around 1,200 families in 2018, which was 16.6% more than in 2017, but still only accounted for around 11% of the households on the waiting lists for social housing (SADM, 2019).

Since 2015, as a means of expanding access to social housing and providing social housing to more people while using fewer financial resources, individuals and families waiting for social housing may rent housing from private individuals and make use of the assistance in covering costs related to rent and mortgages. While this form of state support has been on the increase since 2015, it is mostly used by people living in the capital Vilnius and other major cities. In 2018, 685 persons⁸ and families received partially refunded credits for housing, and 661 persons⁹ and families received housing subsidies. Rent assistance was used by only 0.3% of people waiting for social housing in 2015. This number has grown steadily, to reach 8.4% of all people waiting for social housing in 2018 (SADM, 2019). One of the reasons why so many people cannot use rent assistance is that most of the housing is rented illegally. To address this, a law permitting municipalities to rent dwellings from private or legal persons and then sublet them to people in need came into force in January 2019.

The programme of the current government also envisages the introduction of measures to support young families outside Lithuania's major cities in buying their first accommodation. Special subsidised credits were provided for 165 young families in 2018. Still, this measure is symbolic in its scope and coverage, and has been fiercely debated

⁵ Savivaldybių socialinio būsto fondo plėtros 2015–2020 m. veiksmų planas. Patvirtintas Lietuvos Respublikos socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministro įsakymu 2015 m. balandžio 9 d. Nr. A1-192. [The Action Plan for Development of Municipal Social Housing Fund in 2015–2020. Approved by order of the Minister of Social Security and Labor of the Republic of Lithuania on 9 April 2015, No. A1-192]. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/0fe23220dfbe11e4840fd0ad0e2e216c?jfwid=q86m1vvaz>

⁶ Savivaldybių socialinio būsto fondo plėtros 2015–2020 m. veiksmų planas. Patvirtintas Lietuvos Respublikos socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministro įsakymu 2015 m. balandžio 9 d. Nr. A1-192. [The Action Plan for Development of Municipal Social Housing Fund in 2015–2020. Approved by order of the Minister of Social Security and Labor of the Republic of Lithuania on 9 April 2015, No. A1-192]. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/0fe23220dfbe11e4840fd0ad0e2e216c?jfwid=q86m1vvaz>

⁷ 2014–2020 metų Europos Sąjungos fondų investicijų veiksmų programos 8 prioriteto „Socialinės įtraukties didinimas ir kova su skurdu“ įgyvendinimo priemonei Nr. 08.1.2-CPVA-R-408 „Socialinio būsto fondo plėtra“ [The 2014–2020 EU Operational Programme for Investments of EU Funds priority No. 8 'Increasing Social Inclusion and Combating Poverty' implementing measure No. 08.1.2-CPMA-R-408 'Social housing development fund'].

⁸ Individuals living alone.

⁹ Individuals living alone.

and criticised, as it is more difficult for young families to purchase housing in the major cities, due to high housing prices.

Despite the previously established housing support measures and the new ones, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour admits in its annual report that the existing legislation on housing support does not effectively ensure people's rights to housing (SADM, 2019). Hence there are some new amendments to the law, which will come into force in September 2019.¹⁰ The amendments are aimed at improving the system of providing housing in a number of ways. First, by improving the financing for rent assistance: 70-80% of the rent cost will be reimbursed to municipalities from the national budget. Moreover, access to housing support is extended by setting a higher level of means testing for all types of families. Moreover, for those seeking compensations on housing mortgages, up to 15% of the partially refunded credits can be used to cover the cost of land. Municipalities will be obliged to reduce rents for social housing or provide social housing at no cost if a family's income is below a defined threshold. These new measures should help extend the currently low level of housing support coverage in Lithuania.

There is no specific budget allocated to homelessness interventions. The Ministry of Social Security and Labour is planning to allocate €3.166 million for housing support in 2019. Funds allocated to housing programmes and housing policy implementation agencies are managed by the Ministry of Finance. Social services are financed by municipal funds, specific grants to municipalities, and fees for social services (FEANTSA, 2016). The projects to expand social housing are funded through the ERDF and municipal funds. Nevertheless, based on the most recent statistics, Lithuania allocated only 0.1% of GDP to housing, as classified by the European System of Integrated Social Protection Statistics (ESSPROS) in 2016 (Eurostat, 2019b). That same year, the figure was at 0.5% on average in the EU. Spending on means-tested rent benefits has increased substantially in Lithuania since 2007 (see Table 1). Still, in Lithuania it accounts for only around €12 per inhabitant, compared to €154 on average in the EU (in purchasing power standards – PPS). Means-tested social housing registers a similar expenditure level. Spending on social housing has increased substantially since 2007, but is still only around €12 per inhabitant, compared to €54 on average (PPS) in the EU (see Table 2).

Table 1: Expenditure on rent benefits (means tested) in housing function in PPS per inhabitant in Lithuania and in the EU, 2007-2016 (€)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU-28	:	121.8	126.2	134.6	137.7	146.6	146.4	152.0	160.4	153.7
EU-15	145.4	144.9	149.2	158.9	161.9	171.5	171.2	177.1	186.4	178.4
Lithuania	0.3	0.2	0.2	3.8	4.4	5.6	5.8	9.4	12.1	12.3

Source: Eurostat: Tables by benefits - housing function (spr_exp_fho).

Table 2: Expenditure on social housing (means-tested) in housing function in PPS per inhabitant in Lithuania and in the EU, 2007-2016 (€)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU-28	:	37.5	40.1	45.2	47.9	52.8	51.6	55.0	60.6	53.8
EU-15	44.9	45.0	47.8	53.6	56.7	62.2	60.6	64.4	70.8	62.7
Lithuania	0.3	0.2	0.2	3.8	4.4	5.6	5.8	9.4	12.1	12.2

Source: Eurostat: Tables by benefits - housing function (spr_exp_fho).

There is no more detailed information on social service expenditure on the homeless. Analysis of social service plans reveals that there are big disparities in the level of

¹⁰ Paramos būstui įsigyti ar išsinuomoti įstatymo Nr. XII-1215 pakeitimo nauja redakcija [Amendment to the Law No. XII-1215 on the Law on State Support for the Acquisition or Rent of Housing]. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/673dbcc230f911e9a505bd13c24940c9>

development of both the network of the general social services and the specific services addressing the issues of homelessness and housing exclusion.¹¹

Finally, as there is no specific strategy for tackling homelessness in Lithuania, the monitoring of homelessness and related indicators is conducted on an ad-hoc basis. These are mostly monitored through the outcomes of specific programmes and action plans, such as numbers of service recipients, funds spent, and other outcome indicators. There is a lack of monitoring of the overarching and context indicators, such as the number of homeless people, housing cost overburden, overcrowding, severe housing deprivation, arrears on mortgage or rent payments.¹² None of these indicators is monitored within the Action Plan for Increasing Social Inclusion in 2014-2020.¹³

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

National legislation (Law on Social Services and Catalogue of Social Services) provides a description of **services, which are provided in case of homelessness**:¹⁴

- *Provision of short-term temporary shelter* is defined as a service provided to homeless people, people with addictions or in other critical situations when there is a threat to the person's health or life. People can stay in a short-term shelter for no more than three nights. Services available include the provision of information, mediation and representation, access to basic facilities for personal hygiene and access to healthcare.
- *Provision of shelter for the homeless and accommodation at crisis centres* is a service for homeless people and victims of violence, with the aim of restoring their independent living and social connections, and helping them to reintegrate into society. The duration of service provisions is in general up to six months, but it can be extended. There is a wide spectrum of services provided in shelters and crisis centres, including social and psychological support, employment consulting, skill-building, access to healthcare, etc. Services are provided following an individual assessment.¹⁵

All these services are provided following a needs assessment and after making an individual assistance plan. Moreover, recommendations for service provision for homeless people were issued by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour in 2017. Recommendations highlight personalised assistance, and also requirements and standards for service providers, etc.¹⁶ Broad cooperation between the providers of shelter

¹¹ Annually municipalities prepare and openly publish social service plans. (LR Vyriausybės nutarimas dėl socialinių paslaugų planavimo metodikos patvirtinimo 2006 m. lapkričio 15 d. Nr. 1132 [Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on approval of methodology for social service planning, 15 November 2006, No. 1132]).

¹² The aforementioned indicators are available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

¹³ Socialinės įtraukties didinimo 2014-2020 m. veikslių planas. 2013. Patvirtinta Lietuvos Respublikos socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministro 2013 m. spalio 22 d. įsakymu Nr. A1-588 [The Action Plan for Increasing Social Inclusion in 2014-2020, approved by the Minister of Social Security and Labour order, 22 October 2013, No. A1-558].

¹⁴ For statistics, see Section 1.

¹⁵ LR Socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministro įsakymas dėl socialinių paslaugų katalogo patvirtinimo. 2006 m. balandžio 5 d. Nr. A1-93 [An order of the Minister of the Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania on the Social Services Directory Confirmation, 5 April 2006, No. A1-93]. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.274453/CeGwMtBhSN>

¹⁶ LR Socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministro įsakymas. Dėl apgyvendinimo nakvynės namuose ir laikino apnakvadinimo paslaugų teikimo rekomendacijų patvirtinimo. 2017 m. gegužės 10 d. Nr. A1-234 [An order of the Minister of the Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania on the Accommodation in Shelters and Temporary Housing Services Guidelines Approval, 10 May 2017, No. A1-234]. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/3ac70042368511e79f4996496b137f39?ifwid=wny8rl1pt>

accommodation and the providers of legal services, healthcare, education, employment services, self-help groups, etc. is envisaged. If shelters for homeless people cannot provide the required assistance (e.g. for people with disabilities), they are obliged to report such cases to the municipal administration, which is responsible for directing the person to an appropriate service.

In accordance with the above descriptions, the provision of shelter to homeless people seems to be high-intensity specialised support. Nevertheless, the low number of personnel working in these facilities, the low level of financing and the duration of the services (e.g. in 2017, only 40% of people stayed in shelter housing for longer than six months) mean that they do not provide a comprehensive answer to the problem of homelessness. This is confirmed by research findings: ‘...provision of shelter for the homeless, which is one of the main services to homeless people, reveals that pretty short-term social policy measures oriented towards the control of the homeless are applied in the country instead of looking for long-term solutions oriented towards homeless persons and their problems’ (Indriliūnaitė, 2013).

In some municipalities, there are also day centres for homeless people, where they can stay during the day, make food, attend courses, and receive other social services. Moreover, elderly homeless people or those with disabilities can receive services at residential care homes (e.g. elderly homes) or at psycho-social rehabilitation centres. However, there is no statistical information on the number of homeless people using these services.

Services related to the prevention of homelessness and housing exclusion are of limited scope (FEANTSA, 2016). One measure aimed at preventing home evictions and indebtedness is the provision of financial compensation to help with the cost of utilities for low-income citizens.¹⁷ It is also envisaged by law that municipalities have discretion in providing debt relief to recipients of social assistance. Nevertheless, analysis of the situation in different municipalities reveals that the number of evictions from social housing is on the increase.¹⁸ At the municipal level, the provision of counselling services for people in debt is underdeveloped or non-existent. Moreover, the financial indebtedness of homeless people encourages them to remain outside the legal labour market, since wages and income other than social assistance are subject to heavy deductions for debt repayment (Indriliūnaitė, 2013).

Rapid Re-housing support includes the provision of emergency/temporary accommodation in the event of natural disaster, etc. – i.e. the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania (18 July 2000 No. VIII-1864) provides that alternative accommodation should be secured if the buildings owned by the central state, municipalities or legal persons are brought into a condition of dilapidation or rendered unfit for habitation due to natural disaster, fire, technical wear and tear, etc.

Housing-led services in Lithuania are little developed. One example of a housing-led service is support for young people leaving foster institutions. Young people leaving children’s homes are guaranteed a lump-sum benefit of around €2,800 for housing, and the support of a social worker to help with buying or renting housing.¹⁹ Moreover, since 2014, the Law on State Support for the Acquisition or Rent of Housing and for the

¹⁷ LR Piniginės socialinės paramos nepasiturintiems gyventojams įstatymas. 2003 m. liepos 1 d., Nr. IX-1675. [The Law on Cash Social Assistance to the Poor Residents of the Republic of Lithuania, 1 July 2003, No. IX-1675]. <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.3EEE59417F13/hKnJngEkqu>

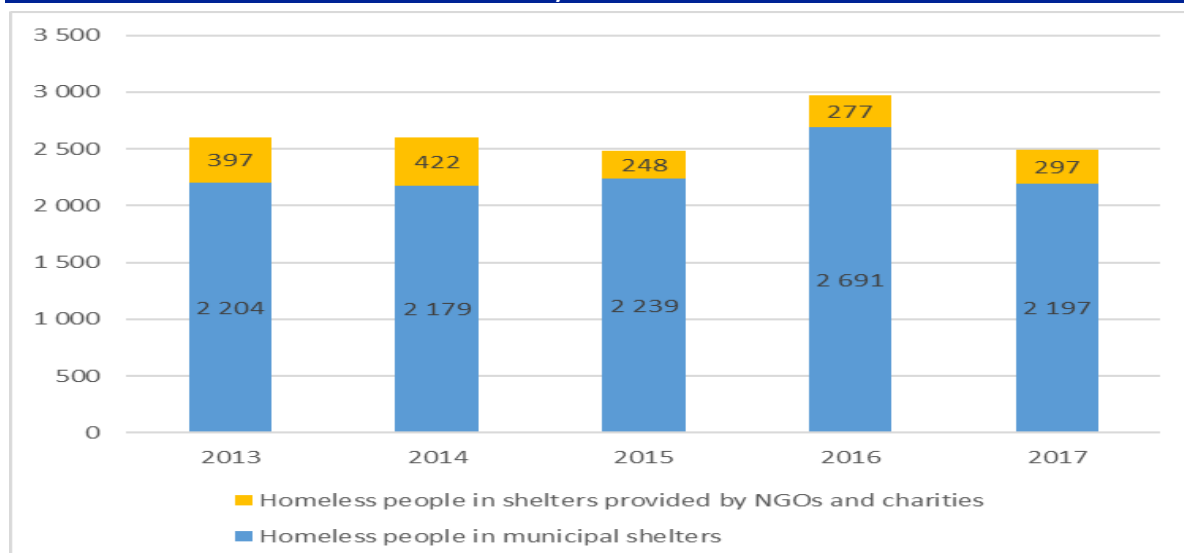
¹⁸ Socialinės rizikos asmenų, neturinčių nuolatinės gyvenamosios vietos, ir elgetaujančiųjų 2013–2018 metų integracijos ir socialinės pagalbos programa. 2013. Vilniaus miesto savivaldybė [Vilnius City Council Programme for Integration and Social Assistance for Persons at Risk of Social Exclusion without Permanent Residence and for Beginners in 2013-2018, approved by decision on 24 July 2013, No. 1-1390].

¹⁹ Lietuvos Respublikos išmokų vaikams įstatymas 1994 m. lapkričio 3 d. Nr. I-621 [The Law on Child Benefits of the Republic of Lithuania, 3 November 1994, No. I-621].

Modernisation of Multi-Family Buildings of the Republic of Lithuania (2013)²⁰ aims at providing support for low-income families to access permanent accommodation (i.e. to rent municipal social housing, to privatize municipal (public) premises under preferential terms, to rent municipal residential premises on a non-commercial basis, to use partial compensation for rents and subsidised housing credits, etc.). Nevertheless, as was mentioned in Section 1, access to this financial support is of limited scope and coverage (Snieškienė and Dulinskienė, 2014).

Service providers. As set out under Lithuanian law,²¹ those mainly responsible for planning, coordinating, funding, monitoring and evaluating services in the case of homelessness and housing exclusion are the municipalities, i.e. municipal social assistance departments.²² Municipalities prepare annual plans of social services, including those aimed at solving the problems of homelessness and housing exclusion. The planning of the provision of shelter accommodation is undertaken in line with the adopted norms of social services for adults.²³ Other providers include NGOs, charities and other civil society organisations. Services run by these providers cover only around 12% of people living in shelter accommodation (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Number of persons in municipal shelters and in shelters provided by NGOs and charities for the homeless, 2013-2017



Source: Statistics Lithuania (2019b).

Service effectiveness and main challenges. The main systemic challenge limiting effective and sustainable ways out of homelessness is the low level and reliability of funding available for social protection in the sphere of housing. As mentioned in Section

²⁰ LR Paramos būstui įsigyti ar išsinuomoti įstatymas 2014 m. spalio 9 d. Nr. XII-1215 [The Law on State Support for the Acquisition or Rent of Housing and for the Modernisation of Multi-Family Buildings of the Republic of Lithuania, 9 October 2014, No. XII-1215]. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/620cd9e0584311e49df480952cc07606/asr>

²¹ LR Vietos savivaldos įstatymas 1994 m. liepos 7 d. Nr. I-553 [The Law on Local Self-Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 7 July 1994, No. I-553]. <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.D0CD0966D67F/asr>; LR Socialinių paslaugų įstatymas 2006 m. sausio 19 d. Nr. X-493 [The Law on Social Services of the Republic of Lithuania, 19 January 2006, No. X-493]. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.270342/LuSTzyOScm>

²² LR Socialinių paslaugų įstatymas 2006 m. sausio 19 d. Nr. X-493 [The Law on Social Services of the Republic of Lithuania, 19 January 2006, No. X-493]. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.270342/LuSTzyOScm>

²³ Dėl Socialinių paslaugų išvystymo normatyvų patvirtinimo. SADM ministro įsakymas. 2014 m. sausio 20 d. Nr. A1-23 [An order of the Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania on the Approval of the Normatives for Social Services, 20 January 2014, No. A1-23].

2, financing of housing social protection in Lithuania has increased over the past decade, but still remains at a very low level both in absolute terms and compared to the EU average. Moreover, there are big disparities in the level of development of both the network of general social services and specific services addressing the issues of homelessness and housing exclusion.

Monitoring and evaluation of the quality of services provided in shelters for the homeless and crisis centres is the responsibility of each municipality.²⁴ It is done on an ad-hoc basis. As stressed in the recent report by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the provision of housing for the homeless is not the most effective way of solving the homelessness problem; instead it requires complex solutions, including a wide range of public services, increasing housing supply, affordability, etc. (SADM, 2019). Complex solutions for homelessness should also include such services as addiction treatment, development of social and working skills, day centres for the homeless, provision of healthcare and transportation, counselling and support regarding debt prevention and reduction, etc. Moreover, the duration of service provision in shelters for the homeless is insufficient to solve the complex problems of homeless people (Kocai, 2008). As a result, people who leave shelters receive no further support and often end up on the street again (Snieškienė and Dulinskienė, 2014). Moreover, there is a lack of strategic measures for preventing high debts for housing and a lack of effective measures to reduce indebtedness and help with debt relief.

Finally, an efficient response to homelessness requires individualised, specialised interventions for separate groups of homeless people (e.g. newly released from prison, people with disability, children from foster homes, etc.). Recommendations made by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour envisage case management and better cooperation between institutions.²⁵ Comprehensive support should also include support for those who have left shelter homes, such as day centres and individual counselling.

Furthermore, as has been mentioned, social housing is difficult to obtain because of the very long waiting lists (3-12 years, depending on municipality). Financial assistance with the rent is received by only around 8.4% of all people waiting for social housing.²⁶ Research also shows that access to independent-living homes and residential care homes for the elderly is very limited. An increasing number of elderly people are experiencing homelessness, and the services do not correspond to their needs (Ivanauskienė and Gončiarova, 2017).

Innovations in the sphere of responses to homelessness and housing exclusion are mostly based on the best practice of other countries, with some adjustments to the local context.

For example, a project oriented towards a new model for integrating newly released prisoners into society has been up and running for around five years in Lithuania. Within the scope of the project (which is based on Norwegian practice), transitional supported accommodation is obtained for people before the end of their detention. Social services (including counselling) aimed at preparing prisoners for independent living are provided

²⁴ LR Socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministro įsakymas dėl socialinės globos normų aprašo patvirtinimo. 2007 m. vasario 20 d. Nr. A1-46. [An order of the Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania on the Approval of Normatives for Social Care, 20 February 2007, No. A1-46]. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.292682/asr>

²⁵ LR Socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministro įsakymas dėl apgyvendinimo nakvynės namuose ir laikino apnakvindinimo paslaugų teikimo rekomendacijų patvirtinimo. 2017 m. gegužės 10 d. Nr. A1-234 [An order of the Minister of the Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania on the Accommodation in Shelters and Temporary Housing Services Guidelines Approval, 10 May 2017, No. A1-234]. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/3ac70042368511e79f4996496b137f39?jfwid=wny8rl1pt>

²⁶ SADM, Dėl informacijos pateikimo: Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo kontrolierių įstaigai [Information provided to the auditor's office of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania]. No. 1/3D-401, 2019.

(Saldžiūnas, 2016). While there has been no research, it can be noticed that there is a reduction in the number of ex-prisoners in homeless shelters.²⁷

Similarly, the Vilnius municipality, within the scope of its programme for integration and support for homeless people for 2013-2018, established transitional supported accommodation for people moving from homeless shelters to independent accommodation.²⁸ Such accommodation is provided together with support from social workers to manage finances and debts, and other counselling services that help people adjust to independent living.

An example of adjusting existing practices to the local context is the amendment of an existing law to allow municipalities to rent housing from private or legal persons and then sublet it to people in need of housing support. This amendment, which came into force in January 2019, addresses the issue that most housing is rented illegally, which prevents people from claiming rent assistance. It also addresses the issue of the stigma facing poor and homeless people on the rental market.

Gaps and priorities for improvement. Based on the information discussed in this report, the following weaknesses and priorities for improvement in the sphere of homelessness and housing exclusion are highlighted:

- There is no national integrated strategy for addressing homelessness in Lithuania, and nor is homelessness an issue that is addressed in the Action Plan for Increasing Social Inclusion 2014-2020 or other related documents. Existing definitions of homelessness used for administrative and statistical purposes cover only some of the ETHOS Light categories of homelessness. It is essential to plug these gaps. Development of a national strategy aimed at preventing and tackling homelessness and housing exclusion in an integrated manner would help consolidate existing resources, expertise, local and international best practice and funding, which are much needed to solve these complex problems.
- Social protection funding in the sphere of housing is very low in Lithuania, both in absolute terms and compared to the EU average. This results in long waiting lists for social housing, as well as low access, scope and effectiveness of rent assistance and other services related to homelessness and housing exclusion. While the current level of homelessness is at a relatively low level, it is likely to rise. Hence, inadequate funding for social housing and homelessness-related services can be expected to become even more problematic in the future, and needs to be increased.
- Shelter accommodation can be characterised as a low-intensity service, oriented towards control of the homeless, rather than a sustainable long-term solution to the problem of homelessness. The heterogeneous characteristics and needs of homeless people are not reflected in service provision – except in the provision by crisis centres of specialised services for mothers with children. Flexible and complex solutions to homelessness should include such services as addiction treatment, development of social and working skills, day centres for the homeless, provision of healthcare and transportation, debt prevention and relief, social and psychological counselling and support, etc. Municipalities should aim at extending access to these services. New models of service provision should be developed, such as supported housing, housing-led and Housing First services. Such initiatives by municipalities or NGOs should be supported through a national programme.

²⁷ Based on Statistics Lithuania.

²⁸ Vilniaus miesto savivaldybės taryba, Socialinės rizikos asmenų, neturinčių nuolatinės gyvenamosios vietos, ir elgetaujančiųjų 2013-2018 metų integracijos ir socialinės pagalbos programa. Patvirtinta 2013 m. liepos 24 d. sprendimu Nr. 1-1390 [Vilnius City Council Programme for Integration and Social Assistance for Persons at Risk of Social Exclusion without Permanent Residence and for Beginners in 2013-2018, approved by decision on 24 July 2013, No. 1-1390].

- Access to social housing is very low, and the number of evictions from social housing is on the increase. New amendments to the law, which will come into effect in September 2019,²⁹ should help extend the currently low level of assistance with rent and credits for housing for supported groups. While costly, social housing remains the preferred option, and a safer one than rent assistance on the private market (since the latter does not function properly). Hence, access to social housing should be further expanded by municipalities, alongside improvements in the provision of rent assistance and increased subletting of private rented accommodation by municipalities. Furthermore, counselling services for the prevention of debt accumulation and mechanisms for debt relief should be developed by municipalities, in order to prevent evictions.
- Homeless people are among the most stigmatised groups, facing a high level of discrimination on the rental and labour markets, as well as in other spheres of life and in access to essential services. The issue of stigma and discrimination against homeless people should be systematically addressed through different channels, including social actions, media campaigns, etc.

²⁹ Paramos būstui įsigyti ar išsinuomoti įstatymo Nr. XII-1215 pakeitimo nauja redakcija [Amendment to the Law No. XII-1215 on Assistance for Housing Purchase or Rent]. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/673dbcc230f911e9a505bd13c24940c9>

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Annex

There is no official definition of homelessness used in the national strategic documents in Lithuania. Existing definitions of homelessness used for administrative and statistical purposes cover only some of the ETHOS Light categories of homelessness. Tables A1 and A2 are based on the definition of homelessness used for statistical purposes.

Table A1: ETHOS Light categories defined as homeless in Lithuania

Operational category		Living situation		Definition	Defined as homeless in Lithuania
1	People living rough	1	Public space/ external space	Living in the streets or public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters	YES: also in places not intended for human habitation
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation	YES: night shelters
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homeless hostels	Where the period of stay is time-limited and no long-term housing is provided	NO
		4	Temporary accommodation		YES: shelters for homeless people
		5	Transitional supported accommodation		NO
4	People living in institutions	6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing No housing available prior to release	YES: crisis centres and shelters for mothers and children
		7	Healthcare institutions		NO
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	8	Penal institutions	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence	NO
		9	Mobile homes		NO
		10	Non-conventional building		NO
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	11	Temporary structures	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence	NO
		12	Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence		NO

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

Operational category		Living situation		Most recent number	Period covered	Source
1	People living rough	1	Public space/ external space	n.a.		
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	410	Jan-Dec 2017	Statistics Lithuania
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homeless hostels	n.a.	Jan-Dec 2017	Statistics Lithuania
		4	Temporary accommodation	2,494		
		5	Transitional supported accommodation	n.a.		
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation	1,530	Jan-Dec 2017	Statistics Lithuania
4	People living in institutions	7	Healthcare institutions	n.a.		
		8	Penal institutions	n.a.		
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9	Mobile homes	n.a.		
		10	Non-conventional building	n.a.		
		11	Temporary structures	n.a.		
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	n.a.		

