

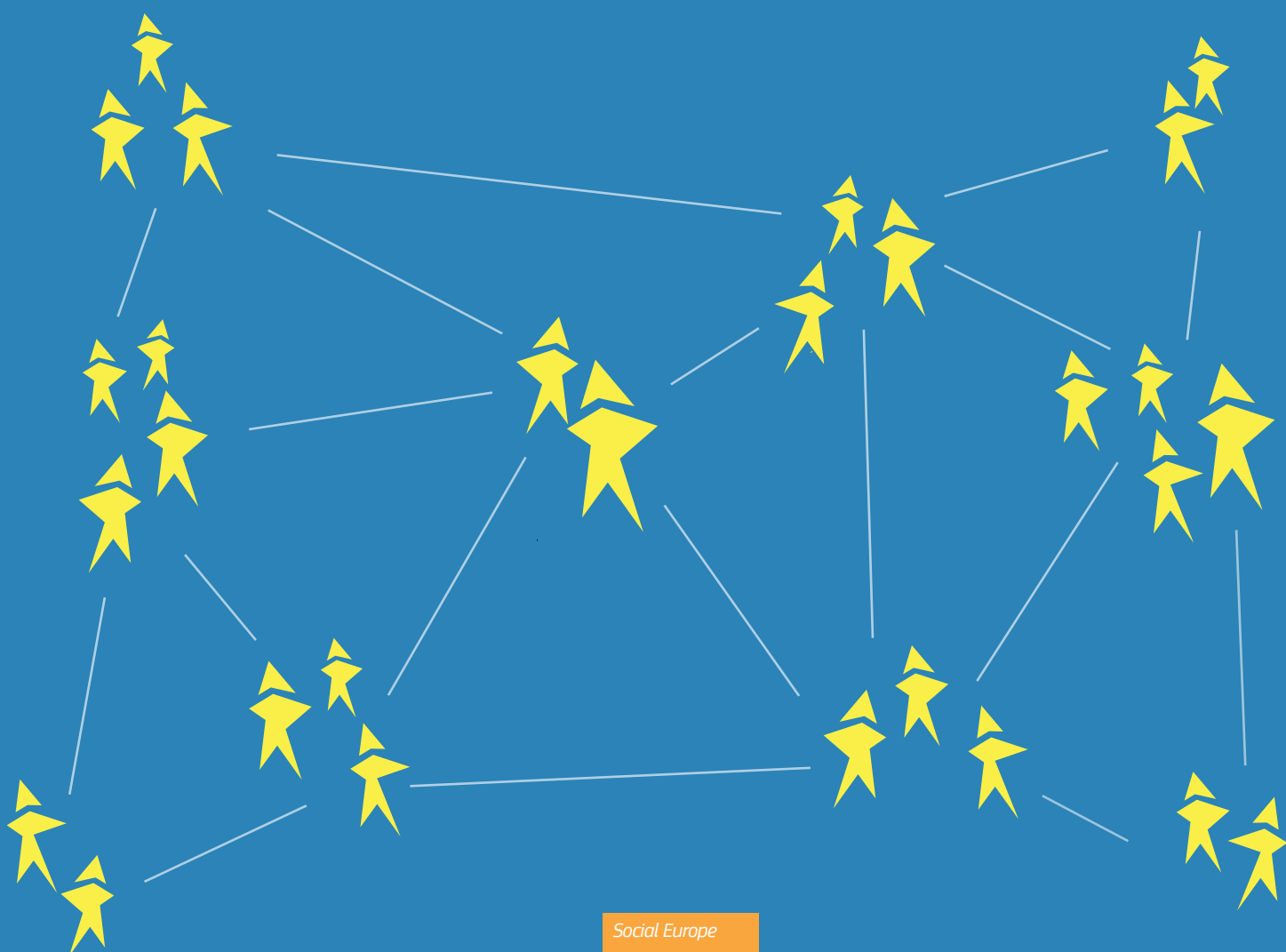


EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion

Slovakia

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European Social Policy Network (ESPN)

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

Slovakia

2019

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Summary

Slovakia does not have a national strategy on homelessness. Existing strategic documents in the field of social policy, social inclusion and housing policy refer to more general categories, such as 'persons at risk of social exclusion', 'persons in an unfavourable social situation' or 'persons in material need'. The terms 'homelessness' and 'homeless people' are not defined in the Slovak legislative system.

The housing conditions of the marginalised Roma population are addressed by the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020 and related action plans, with the global objective of reducing the gap between the majority population and the members of marginalised Roma communities in terms of access to housing, quality of housing and basic infrastructure, as well as of supporting a reduction in residential segregation.

According to the 2011 Population and Housing Census, there were 23,483 homeless persons in Slovakia (0.4% of the total population). However, this number refers only to 'secondary homelessness', i.e. only to persons living in long-term, transitional shelters or similar arrangements. Due to the lack of data, changes in the extent and composition of homelessness and housing exclusion cannot be identified properly.

Although an integrated, strategic approach to homelessness at the national level is still lacking, there are some good examples at the local level. Two regional capital cities – Bratislava and Trnava – have their own strategies on homelessness. Both contain examples of innovative approaches. They include a pilot testing of the Housing First approach, strong support for social integration projects, and an emphasis on building up social counselling teams. An innovation bias at the local level may stem from the fact that municipalities are often more receptive to ideas from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) than are the central authorities.

As regards EU funding, it is used to a limited extent to enhance homelessness and housing exclusion responses. Under the European Social Fund (ESF) Operational Programme 'Effective Public Administration', the project 'Key to your home' is implemented by two NGOs that belong to the major providers of services for homeless people in Bratislava (*Proti prúdu* and *Depaul Slovakia*). Within the national project 'Field Social Work in Municipalities I', funded under the Operational Programme 'Human Resources', the call for proposals was published in 2017 and also focused on NGOs working with homeless people. The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), with a total allocation of €64.8 million for the period 2014-2020, targets the homeless population explicitly.

Social services provided to homeless people are regulated by the Act on Social Services. Crisis intervention services play a dominant role, accompanied by the so-called support services. Social services are provided by municipalities/local authorities, self-governed regions or by non-public providers (including NGOs, charities, other civil society organisations). Organisations established by municipalities/local authorities are over-represented among providers.

Social housing in Slovakia suffers from several deficiencies, including a lack of rented flats and low accessibility (despite the fact that the income situation of the household represents one major criterion in determining eligibility for social housing).

The coordination of various interventions to help homeless people is rather weak. Case management – which would link the provision of social services, healthcare, housing and other interventions – is missing. Limited accessibility to healthcare represents another challenge. When it comes to sustainable solutions, the significant underdevelopment of social housing is a big problem. The 2011 Population and Housing Census shows that the share of public rental housing was only 3% of all dwellings. According to 2017 data from the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), only 1.6% of the population lives in dwellings with a reduced rent or cost free.

The approach to homelessness in Slovakia lacks innovative approaches at the national level. Innovative measures come from the local level, as the strategic documents – as well as the application of the system of transitional housing – show.

The most important gaps in the way Slovakia tackles homelessness are the following: lack of a national strategy on homelessness; lack of regular collection of data on homelessness; lack of coordination of social services for homeless people; a shortage of public rental housing; and limited access by homeless people to healthcare and public services. When designing new policies, an emphasis should be placed on: the regular collection of data on homelessness; making social housing a more inclusive and more open system; new incentives for municipalities to develop the social housing sector; and an experimental testing of innovative ideas.

1 The nature and extent of homelessness and housing exclusion

The terms 'homelessness' and 'homeless people' are not defined in the Slovak legislative system (see Table A1 in the Annex). Furthermore, Slovakia has neither a national 'homelessness' strategy nor any other national strategy that would define these terms. National strategic documents in the field of social policy, social inclusion and housing policy refer to more general categories, such as 'persons at risk of social exclusion', 'persons in an unfavourable social situation' or 'persons in material need'.

Yet, the specific situation of homeless people is partly reflected in Act No. 448/2008 on Social Services. According to the Act, social services are aimed at, inter alia, preventing, solving or mitigating an unfavourable social situation. This situation is defined as a risk of social exclusion, a limited ability for social inclusion, and a limited ability to solve social problems by oneself. Prior to 2018, the Act identified eight causes of unfavourable social situations.¹ Since January 2018, a ninth cause has been added to the list: 'the loss of housing or the risk of losing housing'. In other words, being a homeless person (or at risk of becoming a homeless person) is now officially recognised as a reason for being provided with social services.² The problem is that the precise meaning of the term 'loss of housing' is not specified. As the ETHOS classification shows, it can refer to a range of various conditions.

Similarly, an explicit definition of housing exclusion is not included in existing strategic documents and legislative norms. People at risk of housing exclusion are included in other categories, defined mostly in terms of low income or unfavourable social situation.

Despite the absence of an integrated, strategic approach to homelessness, accompanied by this 'blindness' of Slovak legislation, there are some sources of information on the extent and composition of homelessness and housing exclusion. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic provided the first estimates of the extent of homelessness in 2011, based on the 2011 Population and Housing Census. In line with the Commission Regulation (EU) No. 519/2010, the census also collected information on homelessness. However, attention was paid only to 'secondary homelessness' – i.e. persons living in long-term, transitional shelters or similar arrangements. As a result, the core categories of the homeless population – people living rough or people staying in night shelters – were not included. The estimated size of the homeless population – 23,483 persons (0.4% of the total population) – should be treated with caution. Men represented 61% of

¹ The eight causes of an unfavourable social situation are: a) lacking conditions for the satisfaction of basic needs; b) habits, lifestyle, addiction, etc.; c) disability that threatens the adequate development of children aged less than seven years; d) disability or bad health conditions in general; e) reaching pensionable age; f) caring for a person with long-term disability/health problems; g) living in a spatially segregated locality with the presence of concentrated and inter-generationally transmitted poverty; h) loss of housing or risk of loss of housing.

² Prior to 2018, when the Act on Social Services did not list 'loss of housing or risk of loss of housing' among the forms of unfavourable social situation, homelessness was – implicitly – subsumed under other situations.

the homeless population. Looking at the age profile of this population, children aged below 15 years were over-represented – they accounted for 17.9% of all homeless persons. When interpreting this number, it is important to keep in mind that it refers to *secondary* homelessness – i.e. to persons living in temporary or transitional accommodation (for example, halfway houses). On the other hand, the number of older persons (aged 60 or over) was very low, compared to the other age categories (Table 1). The age profiles of homeless men and women are similar, but women are over-represented among younger persons.

The 2011 census also focused on collecting information regarding other individual characteristics (education, economic activity, nationality, etc.), but the response rate was very low. In general, experts involved in the preparation and implementation of the census concluded that the census on homelessness in 2011 was not used to its full potential (Ivančíková and Škápik, 2015: 39).

Table 1: Age profile of homeless population in Slovakia (based on secondary homelessness), in 2011 (%)

	Total population	Men	Women
0-14	17.9	15.4	21.8
15-19	6.4	5.6	7.4
20-29	17.9	17.1	19.1
30-39	19.6	20.5	17.9
40-49	18.9	20.6	16.2
50-59	13.4	15.1	10.7
60+	5.8	5.7	6.8

Source: 2011 Population and Housing Census, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

A census of homeless people in Bratislava (the capital of the Slovak Republic), carried out in 2016, represents the second important source of information on homelessness and housing exclusion.³ While covering only the country's capital city, it provides more detailed information than the 2011 Population and Housing Census. The aim of this census was to assess the number and main socio-demographic characteristics of the homeless in the city. The definition of homelessness was based on the ETHOS classification and covered homeless people living rough, in overnight shelters, homeless hostels, temporary and other transitional accommodation, and penal or medical institutions. In addition to the census of the homeless population, a survey of their living conditions was carried out, with the aim of collecting the necessary data for better targeting policy interventions.

According to the census, there were 2,064 homeless persons in Bratislava in 2016, representing 0.5% of all inhabitants. In terms of the ETHOS classification, people in accommodation for the homeless (ETHOS Light category 3) and people living rough (ETHOS Light category 1) were the groups most frequently present: they represented 32% and 30%, respectively. People living in emergency accommodation (ETHOS Light category 3) accounted for 15% of the total homeless population in Bratislava.⁴ Men (65%), persons aged 25-49 (36%) and persons living alone (33%) were over-represented. There were also 284 children among homeless people in 2016. The vast majority of them lived in (various) types of accommodation. Only a very small proportion

³ For more information, see Ondrušová et al. (2016). The paragraph in this report relies on the ESPN Flash Report – see Gerbery (2017).

⁴ More details on representation of the ETHOS Light categories are provided in Table A2 in the Annex.

of them were living rough. Half of the homeless suffered from long-term health problems, with women being more frequently at risk. A significant part of the homeless population of Bratislava had long experience of homelessness: 40% of them had experienced their (first) loss of housing 10 years or more prior to the year of the census (Table 2).

Table 2: Characteristics of homeless population in the capital city of Slovakia in 2016 (%)

Category	%
Gender*	
Men	64.5
Women	29.7
Not identified	5.8
Age*	
0-17 years	13.8
18-24 years	3.4
25-49 years	35.7
50-64 years	25.8
65 years or over	4.7
Not identified	16.8
Living arrangements**	
Living alone	32.6
Living with partner	15.2
Living with friend/friends	7.5
Living with child/children	4.7
Living with parent/parents	1.5
Living with partner and child/children	1.1
Other arrangements	1.9
Not identified	35.5

*Characteristics of some homeless people were not properly identified due to refusal to answer questions or inability to communicate.

**Only adults are reported here.

Source: Ondrušová et al. (2016).

Administrative data on the provision and use of social services represent another important source of information (forms of social services that are provided to homeless people or to people at risk of housing exclusion are described in Section 3). According to the Report on the Social Situation of the Population of the Slovak Republic for 2016 (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, 2017a), there were 7,158 persons in night shelters, 1,820 in homeless hostels, 574 in emergency housing facilities, and 219 in halfway homes (temporary transitional housing for young adults leaving foster care). These data refer to the number of clients of the social services in the Slovak Republic as a whole. As a result, they cover only people who used given social services, and not all homeless people in need of such services.

Administrative data allow the numbers of clients to be compared over different years. As comparisons are limited by the fact that the Act on Social Services has been amended several times, we focus on a shorter period. Between 2013 and 2016, the number of persons in night shelters increased by almost 50% (there were 4,798 persons in night shelters in 2013). The number of persons in homeless hostels increased by 21%. An increase also occurred in the use of halfway houses (16%). The use of emergency

housing facilities decreased in the given period by 34%. Unfortunately, there is no additional information regarding the changing composition of the clients of these social services.

However, in general, it is very difficult to identify changes in the extent and composition of homelessness and housing exclusion. The general population census focused on the homeless population only once – in 2011. The census of homeless people in Bratislava was also carried out only once. Administrative data on social services cover only those homeless people who have access to services and who are able/willing to use them. On the other hand, there is indirect evidence from a survey of providers of social services for homeless people (Ondrušová et al., 2015). In this survey, providers were asked to assess whether the demand for their services had changed: 24% of all providers reported a significant increase in demand over the previous two years and 47% reported a slight increase. Homeless hostels, basic social counselling, laundry or the services of field social workers were seen as much-needed social services by a large part of respondents/providers.

As regards the main drivers contributing to the changes, there is only a very weak empirical basis for drawing any conclusions. As a result, any explanation would be speculation.

In the last part of this section, we highlight the most crucial question regarding the size and composition of the homeless population in Slovakia: how to categorise the members of marginalised Roma communities. Many of them live in undocumented dwellings that are in danger of being demolished or in dwellings with very poor housing conditions (Mušinka et al., 2014). As a result, there are members of the Roma population in marginalised communities who could be considered either homeless or at risk of housing exclusion. Yet, these Roma communities are not specifically covered by the ETHOS Light categories (see Table A1). But from a public policy point of view, marginalised Roma communities represent a specific target group, addressed by specific strategic documents, allocations from EU Funds and policy measures. Nonetheless, when discussing homelessness in Slovakia, the situation of Roma in marginalised communities should not be overlooked.

2 Relevant strategies and policies to tackle homelessness and housing exclusion

The Slovak Republic does not have a national strategy on homelessness and housing exclusion. Homelessness and housing exclusion are partly addressed by the *National Framework Strategy for Support of Social Inclusion and Fight Against Poverty* (2014) and by the *State Housing Policy Concept to 2020* (2015). The National Framework Strategy, which systematises various approaches in the field of social inclusion and poverty reduction in relation to the Europe 2020 objectives, pays attention to homelessness and housing exclusion only to a very limited extent. Access by vulnerable groups to affordable housing is recognised as one of the most important challenges for social inclusion policies. But neither homeless people nor persons at risk of housing exclusion are explicitly mentioned in the document. Furthermore, access to housing is ignored when it comes to the proposals for future policy action.

The State Housing Policy Concept to 2020 contains a part devoted to social housing, which is defined as a public (non-profit) sector of housing for individuals and households without sufficient resources to ensure or maintain adequate housing in the standard housing market. The list of categories that face disadvantages on the housing market explicitly includes homeless people (as well as migrants, persons from marginalised Roma communities, single parents, disabled persons and young families). The document argues that accessibility to social housing must be increased – both by boosting the volume of public resources devoted to the social housing sector and by extending the list of target groups. A vertical, two-way system of social housing, consisting of various

forms of housing (which differ by standard, quality, price and durability) and accompanied by systematic social work, is presented as an appropriate model for Slovakia. Other options are not discussed.⁵

All the limitations and weaknesses of these strategic documents are to be offset by a new comprehensive strategy on homelessness which is on the way. In 2018, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family asked the Institute for Labour and Family Research to prepare a background document for a concept for preventing and tackling homelessness. The background document (Ondrušová et al., 2019) has been prepared in cooperation with NGOs and other relevant actors. It contains all the elements of the strategy, including an analytical part, an identification of the weaknesses of existing measures, a proposal for a new global approach, as well as concrete measures, a description of funding mechanisms and proposals for regular evaluation activities. Now, the document is to be commented on by the ministry.

In addition to the general strategies, which cover various target groups, there is a strategy specifically aimed at the Roma population. Among other things, it focuses on housing conditions. The Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020, adopted in 2012 and accompanied by action plans, represents a basic framework document that serves as a roadmap for all public policy interventions in the area of the social inclusion of the Roma population. The strategy was taken into account when the Partnership Agreement for the years 2014–2020 was prepared. Although it pays attention particularly to marginalised Roma communities, it also targets Roma as a national minority and Roma communities in general.

The strategy relies on three strategic principles: de-stigmatisation, de-segregation and de-ghettoising. As regards housing, the overall goal is to improve access to housing, with special emphasis on social housing and the need to promote the abolition of segregation in housing, while fully exploiting EU funds. Furthermore, it aims at bridging the gap between the majority population and the Roma population in access to housing and utilities, and reducing the proportion of shacks and illegal dwellings by 25%.

In January 2019, the strategy's updated action plans for the years 2019 and 2020 have been approved by the Slovak government. In the area of housing, it brings a new global goal: to reduce the gap between the majority population and members of marginalised Roma communities in terms of access to housing, quality of housing and basic infrastructure, and to support a reduction in residential segregation. More specifically, the action plan aims at increasing the number of persons from marginalised Roma communities in legal settlements; improving access to basic infrastructure and utilities; improving the provision of social work; improving data collection; and increasing the effectiveness of public interventions in crisis situations.

Although an integrated, strategic approach to homelessness at the national level is still lacking, there are some good examples at the local level. Two regional capital cities – Bratislava and Trnava – have their own strategies on homelessness. Bratislava's strategy *Urbem Pauperats* (Bratislava, 2017) is based on the ETHOS classification and focuses on four aspects of homelessness: rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing conditions and inadequate housing conditions. The strategy defines seven priorities:

- prevention;
- reduction in the number of people living rough;
- improvement in the quality of social services for homeless people;
- increase in quality in social integration projects for homeless people;
- preparation of documents relating to extreme social exclusion, Housing First, the sex industry, and harm reduction;

⁵ Some NGOs strongly disagree and argue in favour of the Housing First approach, which skips transitional periods and levels and moves clients directly to stable housing.

- ongoing evaluation and control of social services for homeless people; and
- cooperation among relevant actors, support of awareness-raising measures.

The short-term objectives defined by the strategy include several inspiring measures. For example, a plan to establish a team for social prevention; the creation of the conditions necessary for a transitional and integrative housing system for homeless people; and preparation of the Housing First approach. The Housing First approach seems to be one of the pillars of Bratislava's strategy, which may be attributable to the influence of the NGOs that are actively involved in services for homeless people in Bratislava.

The main activities targeted at the homeless population that are organised and paid for by Bratislava include a night shelter (founded and financially supported by the city of Bratislava); two social hostels aimed at providing temporary housing to persons and families in crisis situations, families with children and single parents without housing, and young adults who have left institutional foster care (up to the age of 35); and a low-threshold social service for families with children, which provides social counselling, preventive activities and help with preparation for compulsory education.

In addition, the capital city financially supports other activities to help homeless people that are operated by NGOs, including field/street social work aimed specifically at the homeless population, low-threshold residential care services and the night shelter, a personal hygiene centre, and various projects in the field of social integration, public health and leisure time.

The volume of financial resources devoted to activities for homeless people that are run by Bratislava itself amounted to €621,327 in 2016. Between 2014 and 2016, the figure increased by 2.5%. The largest part of the budget went on social/homeless shelters (€506,769 in 2016). While this figure decreased very slightly over the given period, expenditure on night shelter increased significantly (by 65%). According to the strategy, Bratislava intends to spend €814,180 on its services for the homeless in 2020.

The city's budget for homeless measures, funding the activities of NGOs, was €260,928 in 2016. Between 2014 and 2016, this more than doubled. It is expected that the expenditure will reach €733,000 by 2020. It indicates that the role of external actors (NGOs) will become increasingly important. An anticipated strong growth in the homeless population may represent one of the reasons behind this. The bulk of the spending will go on social integration projects (€224,000 in 2020). No further evidence is available on funding or its effectiveness.

Trnava, the capital city of the Region of Trnava and the seventh largest city in Slovakia, adopted the *Strategy for Addressing Homelessness in the Territory of Trnava* in 2017. As in the case of Bratislava, this strategy relies on the ETHOS classification. It was prepared as a reaction to the lack of (or inadequate) measures for the most vulnerable categories in the city. It was based on a mapping of the situation in the field of social service for homeless people, as well as on an empirical survey among the clients of those services.

The strategy identifies two primary target groups: a) people living rough and people in the night shelter; and b) people without housing who live in facilities (for example, homeless hostels), persons leaving institutional care, persons in insecure/precarious or inadequate housing who are at risk of homelessness.

A general objective of the strategy is to improve the living conditions of homeless people in Trnava, support their social integration and prevent a growth of the homeless population through preventive measures. In this context, the strategy defines seven priority areas:

1. social services for homeless people (increasing the capacity of the night shelter and extending its activities and services, modernising the low-threshold day centre, increasing the effectiveness of street work, supporting young homeless people);
2. access to affordable housing (supporting affordable housing for homeless people outside the system of social services);
3. social inclusion through the labour market (activation of homeless persons in relation to the labour market);
4. provision of healthcare and addiction treatment for homeless people (ensuring access to healthcare services, medical treatment of addictions);
5. assistance to families at risk of homelessness;
6. prevention of homelessness (employing preventive measures, supporting affordable social housing for vulnerable groups); and
7. communication with the public and raising awareness of homelessness.

The strategy builds on several measures that are innovative and inspiring in the context of the Slovak Republic. It expresses a commitment to increase the accessibility of *housing* for homeless people; it emphasises the role of social counselling and social prevention; and last, but not least, it contains a commitment to test a Housing First programme. It is an interesting fact that both regional strategies on homelessness in Slovakia envisage testing this specific approach.

The costs of implementation of the strategy have been estimated at €810,000 in 2019, with a further increase in 2020 and 2021. An important role in financing the measures proposed in the strategy is played by the church charity and other external sources, including the state budget, grants, the regional and municipality budget and clients' co-payments. The church charity has been particularly involved in the modernisation of the low-threshold day centre (in 2016). Its financial contribution is expected to decrease in the coming years.⁶

When it comes to funding mechanisms at the local level, an important role is played by cities' own resources, which are supplemented by external sources, including funding from the self-governed regions, the state budget and the church. In Bratislava, activities to promote social integration represent a significant part of the total budget for homelessness and its share is expected to rise. However, capital expenditure plays an important role, too. In Trnava, capital expenditure represents the largest part of the budget for homelessness.

At the national level, the Framework Strategy does not specify the funding mechanisms. In the State Housing Policy Concept, two funding mechanisms for social housing are described. First, social housing is supported through low-interest loans for construction, refurbishment or purchase of rental dwellings. The loans are provided by the State Housing Development Fund (a public body which funds the priorities of the state housing policy) and are regulated by Act No. 150/2013 on the State Housing Development Fund. The loans can be claimed by towns, villages, self-governed regions or legal persons. Secondly, the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development provides subsidies that can be used to purchase rental dwellings for the purposes of social housing. The provision of subsidies is regulated by Act No. 443/2010 on subsidies for the development of housing and for social housing. Furthermore, the State Housing Policy Concept emphasises the role of housing allowance, which is funded from the state budget. Housing allowance has little impact on the situation of homeless people. It is more important for people at risk of housing exclusion, as it can help with housing costs.

⁶ There are no more recent data. The estimations are based on the situation in 2016.

Currently, a reform of the housing allowance is in preparation at the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family.

As regards EU funding, it is used to a limited extent to enhance the responses to homelessness and housing exclusion. Under the ESF Operational Programme 'Effective Public Administration',⁷ the project 'Key to your home' is implemented by two NGOs that belong among the major providers of services for homeless people in Bratislava (*Proti prúdu* and *Depaul Slovakia*). The project's activities focus on two areas: a) cooperation with public administration at the national and local level, in the preparation of long-term solutions to homelessness; and b) support for the participation of NGOs in this field, exchange of experiences among NGOs and improvement of their expertise. The project's activities rely on the direct participation of homeless people. The project is being implemented in the period 2018–2020 and is funded to the tune of €232,363.⁸

The national project 'Field Social Work in Municipalities I', funded under the Operational Programme 'Human Resources', represents another good example. Under this project, a call for proposals was published in 2017, focusing on NGOs working with homeless people. This was an important step, because it explicitly mentions homeless people as a target group.

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), with a total allocation of €64.8 million for the period 2014–2020,⁹ explicitly targets the homeless population. Food and basic material assistance are provided in the form of packages of pre-selected items. In 2017, material assistance was provided to 1,236 homeless persons, representing 0.9% of all recipients of material assistance (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, 2017). Food assistance was distributed to 3,920 homeless persons (2.2% of all recipients). Between 2016 and 2017, the number of homeless recipients increased significantly. In 2016, there were only 502 homeless recipients of material assistance and 835 homeless recipients of food assistance. According to the mid-term evaluation of the FEAD for the period 2014–2020 (European Commission, 2019), Slovakia has improved its performance in several respects.

Both the national and local strategies mentioned above are regularly monitored and evaluated. Implementation of the National Framework Strategy for Support of Social Inclusion and Fight Against Poverty was assessed in 2016, and in 2017 an update to the strategy was approved.¹⁰ The same applies to the State Housing Policy Concept to 2020: its implementation was assessed and the assessment published in 2018.¹¹ Both local strategies – Bratislava's strategy *Urbem Pauperats* and Trnava's Strategy for Addressing Homelessness in the Territory of Trnava – define a mechanism for regular review and assessment. Yet, no evidence on their effectiveness is available.

As regards the EU indicators on housing, the National Framework Strategy for Support of Social Inclusion and Fight Against Poverty relies extensively on their use. The section 'Housing conditions as factors of poverty and social exclusion' reports severe housing deprivation, overcrowding and housing cost overburden. These indicators are regularly monitored and assessed in the Report on the Social Situation of the Population in the Slovak Republic, published by the Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs and Family.¹²

⁷ Priority axis 1 'Strengthened institutional capacity and effectiveness of public administration', specific objective 1.1 'Improved systems and optimised processes of public administration'.

⁸ The total budget for the support of civil society activities within Priority axis 1 is €2,350,326. For more information, see http://www.reformuj.sk/prioritne_osi/prioritna-os-1/

⁹ The amount refers to the EU resources and national contribution. Based on European Commission (2019: 9).

¹⁰ <https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/rodina-socialna-pomoc/boj-proti-chudobe/>

¹¹ <https://www.mindop.sk/ministerstvo-1/vystavba-5/bytova-politika/dokumenty/koncepcie>

¹² <https://www.employment.gov.sk/isp/>

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

The Act on Social Services recognises homelessness and risk of homelessness as a form of unfavourable social situation which requires the provision of social services. It does not define explicitly what types of social services are intended for homeless people. In practice, the so-called crisis intervention social services and support services are mostly used.

Crisis intervention social services can be divided into three categories (Ondrušová et al., 2019):

- Field crisis intervention services aim at identifying persons in crisis (who need crisis intervention) and providing social counselling, assistance in exercising their rights, and food. In terms of the ETHOS classification,¹³ crisis intervention covers especially categories ETHOS 1 and 11.
- Low-threshold centres, community centres and integration centres provide a similar range of services, which are supplemented by support for personal hygiene, social rehabilitation, development of work skills, preventive and leisure activities. This group of services covers mainly homeless people in categories ETHOS 1 and ETHOS 2.
- Provision of overnight stay, temporary and emergency housing. They cover categories ETHOS 2, 3 and 4.¹⁴

Among the so-called support social services, the following interventions are relevant for homeless people: personal hygiene centres, canteens and laundries. All these types of services can be combined, according to a client's needs. These services are provided by municipalities/local authorities, self-governed regions or by non-public providers (including NGOs, charities, other civil society organisations). According to the survey of providers of services to the homeless population (Ondrušová et al., 2015), more than a third of providers (34.9%) have been established by municipalities/local authorities. Providers established by self-governed regions represented 15.7%, by churches 16.9%, and by NGOs 14.9%. Almost all service providers are engaged in all necessary activities, including planning and coordination, and delivery. The survey shows that monitoring and evaluation activities are less frequent, as providers' capacities are limited. Overburden by administrative procedures and activities also plays an important role (ibid.).

Prevention is one of the key pillars of any successful strategy to address homelessness. This can happen in various domains and can be carried out by various actors. Some preventive activities are provided by social services, as described above. When someone leaves institutional care, interventions by social workers and social curators¹⁵ are crucial. Social work with children/young people in children's homes includes preparation of an individual plan for leaving the institution. It aims at defining and creating conditions that are conducive to a transition to independent living, including a plan for how to ensure one's own housing and find a job. Furthermore, young adults leaving children's homes can benefit from a financial allowance, the maximum amount of which is five times the subsistence minimum.¹⁶ However, the provision of a financial allowance is a matter of discretion; it is not provided automatically (for example, a serious infringement of rules can rule it out). The effectiveness of individual plans for young people leaving institutional care has not been measured yet.

¹³ In this paragraph, we refer to the original ETHOS classification (not to ETHOS Light).

¹⁴ Support social services for homeless people may be provided under different conditions. Their coverage, therefore, depends on the type of facility/crisis intervention service.

¹⁵ See https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/socialne-veci-a-rodina/socialna-kuratela/co-je-socialna-kuratela.html?page_id=12841&lang=en for a definition of social curatorship.

¹⁶ See Gerbery (2015) for more details on subsistence minimum.

Municipalities can also contribute to prevention, as they have several duties towards their citizens. For example, according to the Act on Social Services, municipalities have to search for persons at risk and in need of social services. However, this obligation is defined only in very general terms. The Act does not specify the extent of such activity or how it should be performed. In the case of people at risk of homelessness, municipalities can identify the risks of debt, arrears and eviction, and can provide social counselling and other forms of help (public social housing, for example).

Taking into account the design of social services and housing policies in Slovakia, access to permanent accommodation solutions is supported mainly through social housing. Social housing is regulated by Act No. 443/2010 on subsidies for the development of housing and for social housing, and is defined as housing acquired with the use of public funds for persons who are unable to acquire housing by dint of their own efforts. It is expected that social housing should provide adequate and decent conditions, which means that it must meet all the essential functions of housing. The problem with the definition of social housing is that it also includes housing financed from public funds and provided within the framework of social services. This means that housing provided in social services institutions is also considered part of social housing. According to Ondrušová et al. (2019), while such a broad concept of social housing allows subsidies to be granted for the renovation of social services facilities (which provide housing services), institutional housing should not be defined as part of social housing because of the limitations of institutional housing (lack of autonomy, for example) and because of existing requirements for the de-institutionalisation of social services.

When it comes to the narrow meaning of social housing (institutional housing left out), the income situation of a household represents one of the main criteria of eligibility for social housing. The core target group includes:

- persons who live in households with a monthly income not exceeding three times the amount of the subsistence minimum;
- persons who live in households with a monthly income not exceeding four times the amount of the subsistence minimum, provided they live in a single-parent household, a household with a disabled household member, or have left institutional care, foster care or alternative personal care.

Social housing in Slovakia suffers from several deficiencies. Non-governmental organisations draw the attention of policy makers not only to the lack of rental flats that could fulfil the role of social housing, but also to the fact that the social housing system is not accessible to some vulnerable groups, including homeless people.¹⁷ Access by the most deprived persons, including homeless people, is limited because many municipalities examine a household's ability to pay rent and/or define a minimum income level as one of the eligibility criteria. Furthermore, the eligibility criteria often include conditions of permanent residence or the absence of debts/arrears owed to the municipality. All these conditions have a negative impact on the accessibility of social housing for homeless people.

Problems with the development and the functioning of social housing in Slovakia have also been articulated by organisations working with homeless people. According to the empirical survey of the providers of social services to homeless people carried out by the Institute for Labour and Family Research (Ondrušová et al., 2015), the organisations criticised the lack of capacity in the social housing sector, the lack of rental flats and their high prices, and the lack of a systematic approach by municipalities.

An assessment of the overall approach to homelessness must take into account the fact that coordination of the various interventions is rather weak. The fact that it is not required may lead to serious problems in the case of emergencies. A case-management

¹⁷ <http://romovia.sme.sk/c/20064254/nina-benova-stat-sa-musi-zaobrat-politikou-socialneho-byvania.html>

approach, which would interconnect the provision of social services, healthcare, housing and other interventions, is missing.

There are also other things that limit effective and sustainable ways out of homelessness. One is the role played by the principle of permanent residence, i.e. a local connection rule. Citizens can access public institutions and services on the basis of their permanent residence (i.e. they can attend a labour office or ask for rental social housing only in their place of permanent residence). This significantly limits the access of homeless people to public services, as they often lack official documents and cannot change their status.¹⁸

Limited accessibility to healthcare represents another challenge. Homeless people may face difficulties in finding a GP, since they often do not have permanent residence in the municipality where they live. Arrears on healthcare insurance may result in healthcare being limited to urgent/emergency care. Finally, access to healthcare is limited by the absence of sufficient financial resources among homeless persons.

When it comes to sustainable solutions, the significant underdevelopment of social housing is a big problem. The 2011 Population and Housing Census showed that the share of public rental housing represented only 3% of all dwellings. According to the EU-SILC 2017 data, only 1.6% of the population lives in dwellings with a reduced rent or cost free (this can be regarded as a proxy indicator for the use of public rental housing), compared to 10.7% in the EU as a whole. This proportion has been low for a long time (Table 1). Moreover, the development of public rental housing has stagnated in recent years. One reason may be a lack of interest on the part of municipalities, which reflects the inadequate incentives embedded in the system of subsidies and loans, funded from the state budget.

Table 1: Share of population in dwellings rented at reduced cost or cost free (%)

	EU	Slovakia
2009	11.8	1.7
2010	12.0	1.6
2011	11.9	1.7
2012	11.2	1.8
2013	11.0	2.0
2014	10.9	1.8
2015	10.9	1.5
2016	10.9	1.6
2017	10.7	1.5

Source: Eurostat.

The approach to homelessness in Slovakia suffers from a lack of innovation at the national level. Policy measures that are in place reflect a 'standard' design of the social policy and a 'standard' division of responsibilities. It is noteworthy that the development and implementation of social innovations is hampered by the fact that homeless people

¹⁸ The absence of official documents represents a special problem that requires more attention. The survey of providers of social services to homeless people shows that help with official documents is viewed as one of the most important activities.

and homelessness are not defined by strategic documents and the legislative system. Innovative measures come from the local level. This may stem from the fact that municipalities and self-governed regions are often more receptive to the ideas of NGOs than are the central authorities. As we mentioned in Section 1, the strategies of two Slovak cities – Bratislava and Trnava – contain examples of innovative approaches. They include a pilot testing of the Housing First approach, strong support for social integration projects, the building-up of social counselling teams, etc. Another regional capital city, Banská Bystrica, does not have a regional strategy, but runs a transitional housing system. This consists of three networks of facilities (for childless persons, families with children and older persons), each including several levels/stages of housing: from overnight shelters and homeless hostels to transitional supported accommodation.¹⁹ A transitional housing system has also been implemented in the town of Dolný Kubín. It contains four levels of housing (with public rental flats at the highest level) that are accompanied by the provision of social services and counselling.²⁰

To sum up, the following weakness/gaps can be identified in relation to policy addressing homelessness:

- the lack of a national strategy on homelessness;
- the lack of regular collection of data on homelessness;
- the lack of coordination of social services for homeless people;
- a shortage of public rental housing; and
- limited access by homeless people to healthcare and public services.

Based on existing evidence, the following priorities for improvement can be recommended:

- to launch the regular collection of data on homelessness;
- to establish an interdepartmental task force for preparing a comprehensive approach to homelessness;
- to make social housing a more inclusive and more open system;
- to introduce new incentives for municipalities to motivate them to develop the social housing sector and use existing tools of state support; and
- to create conditions for the experimental testing of innovative ideas.

¹⁹ <https://www.banskabystrica.sk/zivot-v-meste/socialna-pomoc/socialna-a-krizova-intervencia/>

²⁰ However, according to the comparative study published by the Institute for Labour and Family Research (Škobla et al., 2016), the system faces some difficulties. It lacks some features of the standard model of a transitional housing system and it limits transitions to a higher level due to the high costs related to public rental flats (high rent, requirement to pay in advance and to have an income greater than 1.3 times the subsistence minimum). One of the overall conclusions of the study was that the adoption of transitional housing systems in towns does not necessarily correspond to the actual principles of transitional housing.

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Annex

Table A1: ETHOS Light categories defined as homeless in Slovakia

Operational category		Living situation		Definition	Defined as homeless in Slovakia
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	No official definition
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation	No official definition
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 official definition
		4	Temporary accommodation		
		5	Transitional supported accommodation		
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation		
4	People living in institutions	7	Healthcare institutions	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing No housing available prior to release	No official definition
		8	Penal institutions		
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 official definition
		10	Non-conventional building		
		11	Temporary structures		
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 official definition

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

Operational category		Living situation		Most recent number	Period covered	Source
1	People living rough	1	Public space/ external space	615 persons in Bratislava (29.8% of all homeless people in Bratislava)	October- November 2016	Census of homeless people in Bratislava; Ondrušová et al. (2016)
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	7,158 persons in the Slovak Republic	2016	Administrative data on the use of social services. In: Report on the social situation of population of the Slovak Republic for 2016
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homeless hostels	1,820 persons in homeless hostels	2016	Administrative data on the use of social services. In: Report on the social situation of population of the Slovak Republic for 2016
		4	Temporary accommodation	219 persons in halfway homes (temporary housing facilities for young people – living situation 'temporary accommodation')		
		5	Transitional supported accommodation	No data as there are no such services		
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation	574 persons in emergency housing facilities – living situation 'Women's shelter or refuge accommodation'. (NB: emergency facilities offer services for a broader category of people: any person at risk due to the behaviour of other persons)		
4	People living in institutions	7	Healthcare institutions	29 persons in healthcare institutions (1.4% of all homeless persons in Bratislava)	November 2016	Census of homeless people in Bratislava; Ondrušová et al. (2016)
		8	Penal institutions			
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9	Mobile homes	Data not available (This category was not covered in the census. No information from other sources available)		
		10	Non-conventional building			
		11	Temporary structures			
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	Data not available (This category was not covered in the census. No information from other sources available)		

