

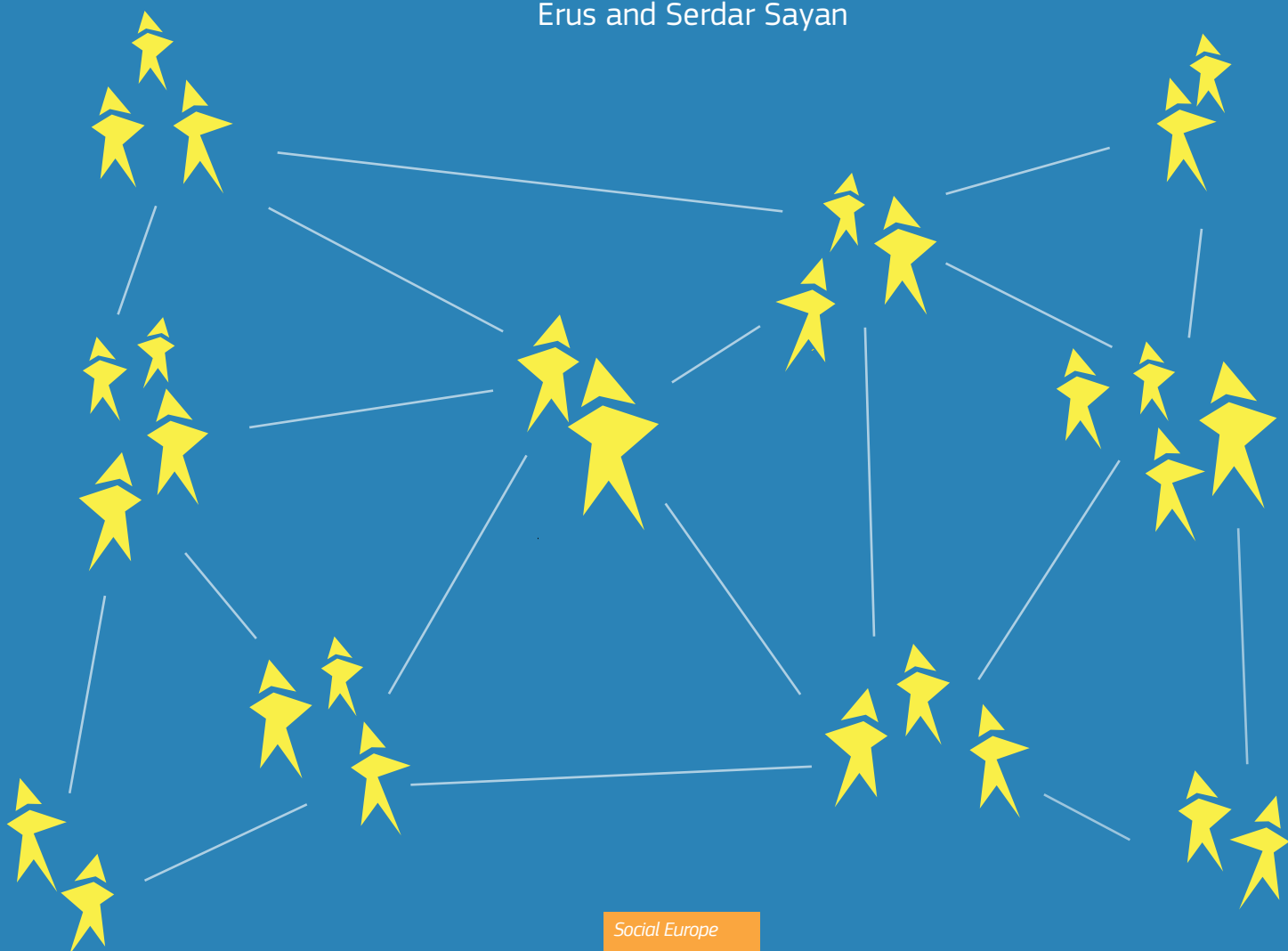


EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

# National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion

## Turkey

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national strategies to fight  
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**Turkey**

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## Summary

Homelessness is not defined in official documents in Turkey other than a few mentions of 'people who live on the streets' in some reports and circulars. Statistics on homelessness are also lacking. While estimates by non-government organisations (NGOs) of the number of people living on the streets are available, these do not rely on systematic studies and thus are not reliable.

Available studies, based on small samples, show that lack of income and lower levels of education are common among the homeless. Mental health problems and drug addiction are widely observed as well.

Additionally, there are 175,000 refugees (from Syria) living in temporary refugee camps and 3,860 women residing in shelters to escape domestic abuse. Some 15,000 orphans without homes are sheltered in orphanages as well. Finally, a proportion of the Roma population live in mobile homes or tents, but their housing conditions are generally not good.

Turkey lacks any strategies to tackle homelessness and housing exclusion (HHE), with the exception of policies that address orphans without a home and women who are victims of domestic abuse. The only policy initiative for those living on the streets is the temporary shelters that municipalities provide when weather conditions are severe. In the past decade, governments have been running social housing projects to enable low-income households to own their homes, but these are mostly beyond the means of homeless individuals.

There are a handful of NGOs, mostly in Istanbul, working to address the needs of homeless individuals. With limited resources, they mostly provide shelter and food, as well as social and psychological services, to a small fraction of the homeless.

The lack of a strategy that defines the problem and proposes policies is a major weakness that urgently needs to be addressed in Turkey. Policies addressing drug addiction and mental health problems are insufficient. Providing social assistance to the homeless is left almost totally to NGOs, which apparently need government support to extend their services. Finally, housing is also a major problem among Syrian refugees and requires immediate attention.

## 1 The nature and extent of homelessness and housing exclusion

The constitution of Turkey defines the republic as a social state (Article 2), furnishing the state with the objective of securing the welfare, peace and happiness of individuals and society (Article 5) and envisaging that executive bodies will be in charge of achieving these objectives (from municipalities to the Ministry of Labour, Social Services and Family). Despite this, homelessness is not explicitly defined in official documents in Turkey. Ad hoc government measures that tackle homelessness, and efforts by municipalities and civil organisations geared to homeless people, provide some, albeit unreliable, data on the state of the problem.

Yeter (2018) notes that there have been attempts by the government to include homelessness in the public coverage of social services, but concrete results have yet to emerge. A 2003 circular by the Ministry of Interior Affairs (2003/7) gave instructions to establish shelters for homeless people in each and every province in Turkey, but failed to pursue this directive. In a Social Services Council meeting in 2004, an amendment to the Social Services Law was proposed, with the aim of establishing social service centres to serve people 'who live on the streets': but the legislation never materialised. In a 2010 report by the Human Rights Commission of the Turkish parliament, the state of homeless individuals living at the provincial bus terminal in Ankara was evaluated, and it was recommended that permanent shelters should be built in Ankara and other provinces experiencing similar problems. Finally, a direct reference to homeless people (as 'people living on the streets') was made in a directive by the then Ministry of Family and Social

Policies (MoFSP) in 2017. Yet none of these documents attempted to include a comprehensive definition of homelessness; the term was vaguely used to refer to people living on the streets, without providing additional subcategories. As such, the homeless were conceptualised in official documents in a way that corresponds to the first category in the ETHOS<sup>1</sup> classification (see Table A1 in the Annex).

When unpacked, the term homelessness can be described in the categories below; in other words, although an official definition is lacking, certain groups of people can be easily identified that fit the ETHOS classification system.

- Adults residing on the streets, especially in populated urban centres. Their total number is quite low in comparison with most European countries. The safety network provided by families seems to explain the low level of these figures. Even when only the homeless in Istanbul (a mega city with close to 16 million residents) are considered, their total is estimated to be a few thousand at most. Most of them are men, and the majority seem to have psychological problems. Municipalities and NGOs, and at times state authorities, provide help and support.
- Orphans without a home, who are sheltered by the state. The current figure is around 15,000. Compared with the first group, much more care is provided to this subgroup; yet some children cannot be reached, and live on the streets.
- Turkey has a large refugee population. Currently there are close to 4 million displaced people in the country (the bulk from Syria).<sup>2</sup> There are more than 20 refugee camps in Turkey near the roughly 500-mile border with Syria, offering accommodation to only around 175,000 of them.<sup>3</sup> Some of those outside the camps, however, do not have a proper shelter.
- Women who have been subject to domestic violence and live in shelters. There are a total of 144 such shelters across the country, most of which are run by the Ministry of Labour, Social Services and Family, while others are operated by municipalities, the Immigration Authority, and one NGO (Purple Roof).<sup>4</sup>
- Finally, Turkey has a large Roma population. Even though only a small percentage of Roma are mobile and spend their lives in tents, a considerable number still remain without proper housing given the large Roma population.

Official statistics on homelessness are also non-existent. There are no official figures, only estimates provided by NGOs. In particular, volunteers working for the NGO 'Şefkat-Der', which has been providing assistance to the homeless for some 15 years, estimate that there are around 70,000 homeless people in Turkey (excluding refugees, orphans without homes, women survivors of domestic violence who live in shelters, and the Roma living in mobile homes/tents) (see Table A2 in the Annex), with between 7,000 and 10,000 of them living in Istanbul (Emek ve Adalet Platformu, 2011). In a more recent news article, the founder of another NGO, the Hayata Sarıl Association, estimated that there were 150,000 homeless people in Turkey, with 15,000 in Istanbul (Külsoy, 2018). However, these figures might be somewhat inflated, since the number of those who receive assistance from municipalities is significantly lower. According to figures provided by the Istanbul metropolitan municipality on municipal shelters, there were 500-600 beneficiaries during the winter of 2005-06, and 1,010 in 2010-11 (Akyıldız, 2017). Even when the likelihood that some homeless people might be unwilling to accept shelter

<sup>1</sup> European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion.

<sup>2</sup> Data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224> (accessed 28 April 2019).

<sup>3</sup> See statistics at: [https://www.afad.gov.tr/upload/Node/2374/files/15\\_10\\_2018\\_Suriye\\_GBM\\_Bilgi\\_Notu\\_1.pdf](https://www.afad.gov.tr/upload/Node/2374/files/15_10_2018_Suriye_GBM_Bilgi_Notu_1.pdf) (accessed 28 April 2019).

<sup>4</sup> News story at: <https://www.ntv.com.tr/kadina-siddet/turkiyede-kadin-siginmaevlerinin-durumu,j20-010ZIEWJr1wpKZvelQ> (accessed 28 April 2019).

services (for mostly psychological reasons) is taken into account, the estimate of 15,000 may be inflated. Because statistics are lacking, it is impossible to make an overall assessment, let alone measure the change over time.

As noted above, 175,000 refugees (from Syria) live in refugee camps. This number is lower than the 2016 figures, when the number reached over 250,000 individuals. More than 3 million refugees (mainly from Syria but from other countries as well) are currently scattered around Turkey. It is likely that some of them are living on the streets or in temporary accommodation; but statistics are lacking.

There are currently 3,860 women living in shelters for victims of domestic abuse (they are eligible to bring their children to shelters if under 12), but there are claims that these shelters are functioning at full capacity and more women's shelters are urgently needed. Some even state that the number of places in shelters for women who suffer from domestic violence should be raised to 8,000.<sup>5</sup> Domestic violence is a serious problem in Turkey (in 2018, 440 women were killed and 317 were physically abused, mainly by their husbands, lovers, ex-husbands and ex-lovers).<sup>6</sup>

Studies indicate that the population of Roma and similar social groups in Turkey is 2-5 million. Exact numbers remain unknown as most Roma live in overcrowded households and many do not have identity cards. Roma communities in Turkey live in various regions of the country and the majority of them (97 per cent) are settled.<sup>7</sup> The living conditions of those who are mobile and live in mobile homes/tents, however, can be rather daunting.

Although the number of street children is estimated to be around 42,000, most of these children spend their nights at home (UNICEF, 2006); children without families are under the protection of the state. Currently there are approximately 15,000 children in orphanages.<sup>8</sup> It may well be that some of those children without families cannot be reached or refuse to go to an orphanage.

Available information on the characteristics of homeless individuals is also scarce and contradictory in certain aspects, as it relies on studies with limited sample sizes. For example, Meneviş (2006) found that in a sample size of 206 individuals living on the streets in Ankara, about two-thirds had no regular income, one-third had disabilities, one-third had a criminal record, and two-thirds were single or divorced. Bektaş (2014) surveyed 101 homeless individuals who were in prison, and found that only a quarter were married, only 17 per cent had upper-secondary education or more, and 77 per cent were younger than 34. In a sample size of 58 homeless individuals, Işıkhan (2001) found that women constituted the majority, followed by children. The findings indicated that they lacked education, and that substance abuse (including alcohol, tobacco and narcotic drugs) was common. In another study conducted at a government shelter, however, Işıkhan (2002) found that, of 95 homeless individuals, 71 were men.

## 2 Relevant strategies and policies tackling homelessness and housing exclusion

There exists no national strategy to address HHE. As mentioned above, although the Turkish constitution provides a very general social welfare state framework that clearly includes homeless people, the homeless are not explicitly identified in any legal

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<sup>5</sup> News story at: <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yazarlar/2017/11/29/turkiyede-137-siginma-evi-var-en-az-8-bin-olmali> (accessed 28 April 2019).

<sup>6</sup> News story at: <https://www.ntv.com.tr/kadina-siddet/2018-yilinda-440-kadin-olduruldu,EntxopiEs0a7fCB3mfbSvg> (accessed 28 April 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Further information at: <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-19> (accessed 28 April 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Further information at: <http://www.sosyalhizmetuzmani.org/yetistirmeyurduiletisim.htm> (accessed 30 April 2019).



documents that describe social assistance. The only document that comes close is a directive instructing local authorities to take preventive measures to protect homeless individuals from harsh winter conditions. At local government level, we are not aware of any well structured strategies; only occasional provision of shelters, especially in winters when weather conditions are severe. Additionally, there are a few NGOs engaging with homeless people. Their activities range widely, from providing food and shelter to job training. Finally, the two areas where the Turkish state clearly and explicitly addresses the problem and sets up solution mechanisms are orphans without shelter and women suffering from domestic violence. All in all, it is difficult to talk about national and regional strategies that are implemented with regards to homelessness. And since we lack data about homeless people, it is not possible to observe the likely impacts of ad hoc policies by municipalities and the central government.

There is no minimum-income scheme in Turkey. Existing general social assistance policies are fragmented. Although homeless people are entitled to welfare assistance in theory, it is known that some lack ID cards and others are psychologically unfit to apply.

Over the last decade, the government has been implementing policies for the construction of low-cost housing, without any specific reference to homelessness. Although these housing options target low-income individuals, they are clearly out of reach for homeless people or those at risk of becoming homeless.

A specific group subject to housing exclusion is the Roma population. In 2010, the government launched the 'Roma Opening', which was a policy initiative targeting the social exclusion of the Roma, and which included plans to provide them with low-cost housing. Yet steps have yet to be taken to this end, and currently the Roma Opening seems to be focusing only on job creation and education.<sup>9</sup>

When the influx of Syrians into Turkey started, the government initiated measures to accommodate them and took the necessary steps to set up camps along the border to provide shelter to the incoming people. The EU supported Turkey in these efforts.<sup>10</sup> But, as mentioned, these camps (the quality of services therein has been subject to discussion) have been providing shelter to only a small percentage of a total of 3.5 million Syrian refugees. The remaining people seem to have been left to their own devices.

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

The only direct support government authorities provide to homeless individuals is municipal shelters offered during the winter months when weather conditions are severe. Additionally, there are also services provided to orphans without a place to stay and to women facing domestic violence.

Several NGOs specifically address the problems homeless people face. Yeter (2018) looked into services provided by five NGOs that assist homeless people in Istanbul; two of them also provide support to the homeless in other provinces. These NGOs state that their aim is not only to provide services but to rehabilitate homeless people to become productive members of society as well. Hence, they provide employment and psycho-

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<sup>9</sup> News stories at: <http://www.edirneyenigun.com/haber/18581/roman-acilimi-milat-oldu.html> (accessed 28 April 2019) and at:

<https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/turkiye/2018/11/03/edirne-roman-egitim-qonulluleri-dernegi-baskani-turan-salli-roman-acilimi-soylemde-kaldi> (accessed 29 April 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Commentaries at: <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/types-accommodation> (accessed 28 April 2019) and at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/thinking-outside-camp-syrian-refugees-istanbul> (accessed 28 April 2019).

social support in addition to shelter, food and clothing assistance. They are financed by donations and provide services with the help of volunteers. It should be noted that, according to Yeter (2018), the shelter capacity of these five NGOs is very limited: around 100 places in total. NGO representatives indicate that they select people who no longer wish to be homeless and give priority to more fragile cases. People with addictions and those who claim to prefer living on the streets are usually excluded from getting support.

The Housing Development Administration, or TOKİ, is a government institution aiming to provide 'social housing' for the poor since its foundation in 1984. Through public funds TOKİ has been able to subsidise mass housing and extend home-ownership to lower-income sections of the population. Over the past decade, 150,000 housing units targeting low-income families, and 330,000 housing units targeting middle-income families, have been completed (TOKİ, 2017). The cost of these units is still high for households with a very low income, but supply falls short of demand. Indeed, there were more than 600,000 applications for the latest batch of 50,000 subsidised units to be constructed in the upcoming three years. At any rate, given the fact that almost all homeless people have no proper job that creates a flow of steady income, and a significant number seem to have psychological problems, they would be unable to purchase these housing units regardless of how much they might be subsidised.

As noted above, housing projects had been initiated for the Roma population as part of the Roma Opening launched in 2010. There were, however, complaints, including over the quality of housing and the lack of space for socialising and affordability, which the MoFSP admitted to in April 2016 – as acknowledged in the national strategy document for the social inclusion of Roma for 2016-2021. The document set strategic targets to improve housing conditions by taking the income, employment, education and transportation concerns of the beneficiaries into account (MoFSP, 2016). As mentioned above, since 2016 the Roma Opening has mostly focused on education and job training, with accommodation issues receiving less attention.

Lacking data on HHE, it is difficult to pinpoint weaknesses in the response to homelessness. With this proviso, three major weaknesses can be stated as follows.

- There exists no strategy that defines the problem and proposes policies.
- Social assistance for HHE is very limited and lacks necessary psycho-social support to lift homeless people out of their current state.
- Preventive and curative measures addressing drug addiction and mental problems are lacking.

Priorities should be to:

- support NGOs in the short term, given their experience with HHE;
- develop a comprehensive strategy, instead of ad hoc solutions that are put in place when the problem becomes life-threatening; and
- develop policies to address housing problems faced by Syrian refugees.

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## Annex

**Table A1: ETHOS Light categories defined as homeless in Turkey**

Operational category		Living situation		Definition	Defined as homeless in Turkey
1	People living rough	1	Public space/ external space	Living on the streets or in public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters	Yes
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation	No
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homelessness hostels	Where the period of stay is time-limited and no long-term housing is provided	No
		4	Temporary accommodation		No
		5	Transitional supported accommodation		No
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation		No. Although not officially defined as homeless, there is a sizeable refugee population and some of them reside in refugee camps. Also important are women who stay in shelters dedicated to victims of domestic abuse.
4	People living in institutions	7	Healthcare institutions	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing No housing available prior to release	No
		8	Penal institutions		No
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9	Mobile homes	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence	No. Although not officially defined as homeless, there are Roma living in mobile homes.
		10	Non-conventional buildings		No
		11	Temporary structures		No
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	12	Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence	No

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

Operational category	Living situation	Most recent number (*)	Period covered	Source
1 People living rough	1 Public space/ external space	70,000 people	2011	Estimate by volunteers working for Şefkat-Der, an NGO providing assistance to the homeless (Emek ve Adalet Platformu, 2011). Estimate by the founder of an NGO, the Hayata Sarıl Association (Külsoy, 2018).
		150,000 people	2018	
2 People in emergency accommodation	2 Overnight shelters	Unknown		
3 People living in accommodation for the homeless	3 Homelessness hostels	Unknown	2018  2018	Total figure of women living in 144 women's shelters (news report at: <a href="https://tr.euronews.com/2019/02/12/yerel-secimlerde-siginma-evlerindeki-kadinin-adi-yok">https://tr.euronews.com/2019/02/12/yerel-secimlerde-siginma-evlerindeki-kadinin-adi-yok</a> . Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD).
	4 Temporary accommodation	Unknown		
	5 Transitional supported accommodation	Unknown		
	6 Women's shelter or refuge accommodation	3,860 in women's shelters		
4 People living in institutions	7 Healthcare institutions	Unknown		
	8 Penal institutions	Unknown		
5 People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9 Mobile homes	Unknown		
	10 Non-conventional buildings	Unknown		
	11 Temporary structures	Unknown		
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	Unknown		

(\*) There are also 175,000 people (from Syria) in refugee camps.

