

The Finnish National Programme to reduce long-term homelessness

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Due to lack of comprehensive statistics concerning the homeless in Bulgaria, there is as yet no strategy on a national level for combating homelessness. This is why one of the priorities of the National Reform Programme is precisely **to provide suitable housing conditions for the vulnerable groups and to reduce homelessness with the aim of social inclusion of the homeless**. This priority will be achieved by means of, among other things, a complete strategy for combating homelessness, the creation of a network of social, health and educational services for the homeless, the establishment of employment, educational and qualification programmes for the homeless, the improvement of the housing conditions of the most vulnerable members of the Roma community, the creation of a statistical database regarding the homelessness in Bulgaria and its dimensions. The result from the above measures will be a network for the support of the homeless and the prevention of homelessness.

In Bulgaria there is no official definition of the terms homelessness and housing exclusion but the experts in housing policy use the ETHOS typology. The unofficial definition of homelessness which entered standard use is being utilized as well. It includes only those citizens who are obviously without shelter: people who sleep on the streets in the parks and on other public places.

The information on the housing fund and the housing conditions in Bulgaria is acquired via regular census of the population and the housing fund. After reviewing the ETHOS typology it was determined that the National Statistical Institute (NSI) can provide data for some of the 13 operational categories but unified in one more general group: primitive dwellings. That category includes homes which do not provide normal living conditions to its inhabitants. The primitive dwellings include:

- Dwellings in primitive buildings such as sheds and huts;
- Dwellings in mobile means such as circus wagons, trailers, wagons, ships, barges;
- Dwellings in attics and cellars which were not initially built to be dwellings;
- Dwellings in buildings with prohibition for living;
- Dwellings in building which are currently being constructed.

The typology proposed by the Institute of sociology to the Bulgarian Academy of Science (BAS) corresponds to a certain degree to the ETHOS typology. The main difference in the way of grouping – the ETHOS typology has four general groups of homeless people while the Institute of sociology offers five. The proposed types of homeless people are:

- “Obviously” homeless: roofless or rough sleeping;
- “Hidden or concealed” homeless: shared housing;
- “Potential” homeless: with a temporary shelter;
- “Active” homeless: bankrupted people, roofless after a disaster (“self-saving” from homelessness by self-help building, looking actively for solving the houseless);
- “Particular” homeless (homeless people with housing property of their own).

There are multidimensional reasons for homelessness and housing exclusion but at its core the reasons are the lack or not sufficient financial resources to ensure access to the housing market. According to the research of the Institute of sociology to BAS the following reasons for homelessness and housing exclusion should be taken into consideration:

- Bank loans and bankrupt leading to loss of property;
- External and internal migration processes;
- Housing frauds against elderly people;
- Neglected children and children at risk;
- People with low incomes which prevent them from purchasing homes;
- People who have been left homeless as result of natural disasters such as: landslides, flooding rains, earthquakes, thunderstorms, other floods, etc.

According to NSI data the housing fund in the country as of 31.12.2007 amounts 3 746 758 dwellings. 2 372 522 are in the cities and 1 374 236 in the villages. The rate of dwellings availability in 2007 is 491 dwellings per 1000 persons. An average of 2.04 persons live in one dwelling (2.28 in the cities, 1.63 in the villages). The average floorage per person for the country is 20.13 square meters –17.72 square meters in the city and 25.97 square meters in the villages.

Bulgaria entered the transition period with over 93% of private housing property. The processes of privatization and restitution did not bring significant change in the housing property and its structure. According to the available statistical data in 2005 the allocation of the available housing fund is as follows: 96.8% private and 3.2% public (municipal or state). The share of the latter is highest in the agglomeration areas of the capital (6%) and the big cities (3.6%).

The policies for combating homelessness and housing exclusion are complex. They are developed, implemented and monitored at all three levels of governance – national, regional and

municipal. It must be noted that the main actors are the bodies of the executive authority at central level and the bodies of the local self-governance (the municipalities).

National level

The main participants in the development, implementation and control of the policies related to homelessness and housing exclusion at national level are the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (regarding the implementation of the national housing policy) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The Ministry of Defense also implements social policy regarding housing accommodation but they are targeted only to the military personnel and include: accommodation in departmental homes and hostels for the period of military service; provision of opportunity to purchase homes from the departmental fund; payment of compensations for the professional soldiers who do not own homes and are not accommodated in departmental homes in the settlement where they serve and are thus forced to rent homes in terms of free contract.

Other institutions at central level which add to the institutional frame of the policy for homelessness and housing exclusion are the State Agency for Child Protection and the Agency for Social Assistance. Their role is mainly in the field of social assistance, social services and the protection of the children's rights and the rights of the other vulnerable social groups which include the homeless persons.

Municipal level

According to the housing strategy and the principles of decentralized governance the local authorities are responsible for the housing conditions of the population. The management of the social services targeted to homeless persons is in the authority of the municipalities. Most of the municipalities have their own housing strategies and among the priorities are the management and the development of the municipal housing fund. Each municipality has its own programme for child protection. These programmes also concern the children on the streets, the homeless children, etc.

At **regional level** the issues related to the housing policies are part of the regional development plans. Furthermore, each region has its own strategy for development of the social services.

We cannot discuss the combat of homelessness and housing exclusion without the use of complex approach i.e. the implementation of multidimensional policies. Here should be mentioned the following policy fields that are related to the problem: access to the labour market, the training and qualification, access to education, healthcare, social assistance, social services, equal opportunities and anti-discrimination, etc. Considering the fact that homelessness and housing exclusion are parts of the overall policy for combating child poverty the National strategy for the child 2008-2018 along with other measures provisions the development of policies for the state to take some part of the housing loans for young families and families with many children. The strategy pays special attention to the development of the children's skills for independent life after leaving the specialised institutions.

The following social services provide shelter and support for homeless persons and children:

- **Centers for temporary accommodation** which provide the homeless people with suitable conditions of life, support for finding a job, support for medical treatment or meeting of other specific needs. The maximum stay is defined as no more than 3 months in a calendar year.
- **Shelters** which are complex of social services provided temporary in a period of up to 3 months to homeless persons when there is urgent need of satisfying their basic needs related to the provision of shelter, food, healthcare, hygiene, social, psychological and legal counseling.
- **Protected housing** which provide both shelter and social care to the accommodated persons. They are mainly targeted to youths and people with disabilities, mostly mental disabilities and children/youths leaving the homes for upbringing of children deprived of parental care. The legislation does not regulate a period of stay but as a rule these services ensure the transitional period to independent life.
- **Centre for Street Children** is a complex of social services related to the prevention of children falling on the streets and dropping out of school, with social rehabilitation and integration of children living permanently or partially on the street via individual work with the child and its family, family consulting and support, medical and hygiene services, literacy courses for the children, training in parental skills. The maximum period for provision of the service is 1 year.
- **Crisis centre** is a complex of social services for people victims of violence, traffic or other form of exploitation which is provided for a period of 6 months and is targeted at providing individual support, at satisfying the daily needs and providing legal consulting to the beneficiaries or social-psychological assistance when there is need of immediate intervention, including via mobile teams for crisis intervention.
- **Transitional homes** which are intermediate form of service for taking the children out of the institutions. It is a social service where people live independent lives supported by professionals in order to prepare them for leaving the specialized institutions.
- **Supervised homes** which are forms of social services for support and consulting of people at the age of 18 who are leaving the specialized institution, the transitional home or the protected home and are about to lead independent life. They are also used as prevention for accommodation in specialized institution.
- **Units "Mother and baby"** provide temporary accommodation for up to 6 months of pregnant women and mothers at risk of abandoning their children. Parental adherence is encouraged. The units provide assistance for the young mothers via social, psychological and legal consulting and support.
- **Family-type centers** which are complex of social services provided in family-type environment for limited number of persons – no more than 15.
- **Specialised institutions** – homes for elderly people, people with disabilities and children.

The centers for temporary accommodation and the shelters are solely designed for homeless persons. The same can be said for the centers for street children. The entire above mentioned services are financed from the state budget via the municipal budgets as activities delegated by the state. Of course, there are similar services funded by the municipalities or private providers but their number is rather limited.

In regard with the observation of the principles of gender mainstreaming that policy is developed by observing the corresponding requirements and by observing the principles of equal opportunity and non-admission of discrimination. In the field of social services for homeless persons they are planned by taking into consideration the need for provision of equal number of places for accommodation for males and females.

The main stakeholders involved in combating homelessness and housing exclusion are the bodies of the executive authority at central and local level, the bodies of the local self-governance and the non-governmental organizations. The latter have significant contribution for the development of the policies and their implementation. The first two types of stakeholders are mainly involved in the regulation and the strategic framework of the policy. The municipalities are at the same time the most important participants in its implementation. The funding is part of the state and the municipal budgets. There are many opportunities offered in the frames of the European Funds. Special attention should be paid to the non-governmental sector. It is extremely active in the field of social services. In the process of formulation and monitoring of the policy the non-governmental sector participates via involvement in work groups for the development of documents and legislation and also via their participation in the consultative bodies on the issues of social inclusion and the different aspects of that policy.