



Family and homelessness in Romania

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The current situation - scarce knowledge about homelessness in Romania

- No reliable estimation at the national level, no systematic administrative records since 2007/2008
- No central institution has the formal responsibility for coordinating policies in the field (social housing to the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration; homelessness to the MoLFSPE, implementation to local authorities)
- The census failed to return reliable estimates
- Estimate of the local authorities on the number of homeless children – less than 1.000 during the last 5 years
- NGOs occasionally report the number of their beneficiaries (much higher figures)
- Bits and pieces of information on the profile of the phenomenon from research studies
- Lack of information on the social services addressing the homeless
- Occasional estimates on the number of shelters (2014 – World Bank)

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Housing

- Almost complete ownership of the housing stock, 97% compared with an EU-28 average of 70.4 % (2012) - a culture of housing ownership
- Difficulties in supporting the cost of housing: high overburden rate (conventionally, a homelessness risk indicator – 15.4% RO compared with 11% EU28)

Families

- Large intergenerational households – high average number of household members (2.7 RO compared with 2.3 EU28), overcrowding
- Almost 2/3 of the youth are living with their parents (61.2% in RO compared with 44.2% in EU27 - 2013)
- Many public benefits are dedicated to the family unit, not to individuals, greater responsibility for the family - especially the support of the elderly but also in some areas of children support (pre-school)

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Low level of spending on family benefits: the second lowest in the EU, 181 PPS compared with the 557 PPS in average in the EU (OECD)

A “familialisation” regime and high burden on the shoulders of families

Questions:

1. ***What happens when the family fails to perform its protective functions or dissolves?***
2. ***Does family always manage to act as an anti-homelessness proof network?***
 - Children begging in the streets and returning to families - at risk of permanent homelessness;
 - Families ending up on the streets (evicted, former residents of social housing etc.)
 - Children born to the homeless;
 - Families who squat abandoned buildings, live in improvised or inadequate shelters or private entrepreneurship homes in marginalized areas;
 - Other types of “households” and groups, organized in family-type arrangements

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Homelessness in Romania, size of the population, census data: *1542 people have been counted as homeless*

Several arguments against this finding:

- The use of policeman to extract data for the other cities than Bucharest
- Even the most optimistic of the previous estimates (3-4 years earlier than the census) reported 3 X this number (MRDPA, 2008), with some estimates reporting 10X (Dan, 2007)
 - no major developments occurred in the housing, social housing and homelessness policies
- Field research: full-occupancy shelters (and unmet demand) yet no reported homeless at the census (World Bank, 2014)
- Samusocial organization in Bucharest alone reports more than 4400 individual clients in Bucharest between 2007 and 2013
- The capacity of shelters is higher than the reported number of homeless and still insufficient
 - (+ homelessness is often described as a lagging phenomenon)

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Homelessness in Romania: size of the homeless population - earlier research (administrative or survey data in certain localities)

- A series of approximations obtained in 2007, using the estimation of the authorities (weak control of researchers) and several scenarios to impute estimations for the missing data localities, estimated a number ranged between 11,000 and 14,000 homeless (Dan, 2007)
- Other official estimates, exclusively from administrative sources (Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, 2008), suggest a much lower figure, about 4,000 homeless people in the country in 2008
- A Save the Children research in 2009 based on the capture-recapture method in three major cities (Bucharest, Brașov, and Constanța) identified around 1,400 children and youth (up to 35 old)
- A Save the Children research in 2014 based on the same method estimated over 1,000 children and youth in Bucharest (1,100)

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Homelessness in Romania: profile (1)

Census data (consistent with previous research) - first reported by the National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction (MoLFSPE /WB):

- Almost all the homeless people live in the urban area (95.3%)
- 1/3 of the total population of homeless lives in Bucharest; in the capital city and the county residencies are concentrated 88.2% of the population
- More than $\frac{3}{4}$ (75.9%) are men
- Most of the homeless are active age adults: –almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total
- Unacceptably, more than 10% are children;
- The education stocks are lower than in the overall population: 9,5% have not graduated any kind of school while only 4,5% have graduated tertiary education
- The share of unmarried, widowers and divorcees is considerably higher than in the general population...

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Marital status of the homeless compared with the general population (Census)

| | Unmarried | Married | Widower | Divorcee |
|--------------------|-----------|---------|---------|----------|
| General population | 41,9 | 48,1 | 9,5 | 4,2 |
| Homeless | 70,0 | 5,8 | 3,5 | 20,6 |



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Homelessness in Romania: profile (2)

Previous research

- A large part of homeless have medical problems but access to health services is low.
- Serious health problems, chronic malnutrition, school dropout and illiteracy (about 50%), physical abuse and sexual abuse (often beginning in the family and continued in the streets), stigma and discrimination, limited access to social services (education, health, social assistance), use of drugs or chemical solvents (Dan, 2008).
- Among homeless, chronic diseases and mental illnesses are more common than among the overall population (both cause and effect of living on the streets)
- sporadic access to food and water.
- Lack of identity papers is a common problem.
- The prospect of employment or even work by the day and is very low due to poor hygiene and social networking capabilities.
- Lower life expectancy



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Save the children, 2009

- Children living in the streets typically have a low level of education (most have no more than a completed primary school education), and their main source of income is begging, followed by daily occasional work and washing cars/ windscreens.
- They generally have little if any access to services. While in Bucharest the situation is slightly better, with more than half of the subjects (55.9 percent) receiving services at some point, in Brasov and Constanta very few have benefited from such services

Save the children, 2014

- Two categories: permanently in the street and in the street by day – the composition of the population, the causes, and partly the problems are different

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Homelessness in Romania: profile – interviews Samusocial 2013

- Many of the interviewees come from residential centers or from socially disorganized families
- One crucial event triggering the trajectory leading to homelessness: sickness, divorce, losing the house as a result of the restitution of the nationalized dwellings, scamming with houses etc.
- The better off layer of the homeless population, i.e. those accessing on regular basis the scarce offer of social services dedicated to this social category, usually resent night shelters
- Even the “better off” more active homeless population does not access social services they are entitled to, such as social aids, free of charge health services, pensions etc.; ces
- A few cases of successful labour market integration among their beneficiaries over time a long period of time – 5-10 years;
- Homeless people who are not in the streets stay in temporary improvised or improper accommodation – night shelters, private entrepreneurship initiatives for the accommodation of poor population, hostels, shared rent in low value areas such as ghettos - as long as possible
- Some of the homeless people have experienced emigration episodes – contribution of remigration to homelessness in the recent years might be a valuable research topic for the future

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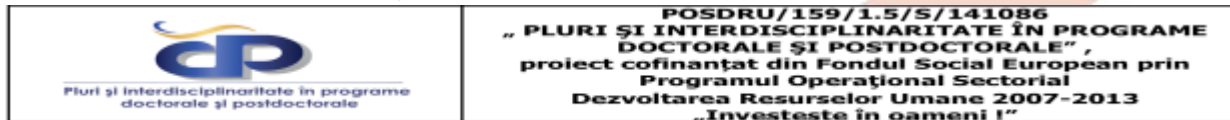


Homelessness in Romania – case study: the Russian woman

One of the Samusocial regulars: however, disconnection from the system of social benefits and entitlements

Life story:

- Comes from a residential institution, unknown parents
- Cohabitation and poor relation with the extended family,
- Cancer leads to divorce
- Trials over the custody of the child and the ownership of the house
- Wins both, sells house “for the treatment of cancer” -
- Lives for primary and secondary school of the child in the railway station which is guarded and paid, uses the sanitary facilities of the station
- Children is in boarding school at Targoviste, begs for food and produces some money from hourly paid jobs, travels weekly to the boarding school
- No type of benefit for disability (allowance, pension), no social aid



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Institutional set-up: central and local social services

- The 2011 Law on Social Assistance recently introduced a legal definition for homelessness.
- Shelters (the capacity seems to be growing)
- Emergency units of the local authorities
- Emergency support at the headquarters of NGOs
- Some isolated long-term “integrated services” projects: housing for families, school, health, employment mediation (Parada, Bucharest)
- Mobile teams
- Emergency and social housing (“quasi”-social)

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Shelters

- Situation of Social Housing survey (WB 2014), 104 shelters for homeless people existed in urban areas, with a total of 2,525 places available.
- However, the qualitative research conducted for this Strategy suggests that they do not yet fully meet the existing needs.
- Tend to become long-term accommodation for their current residents, mainly because of the lack of social housing or alternative accommodation.

(World Bank, 2014).

Institutional set-up: unconventional sheltering

- The problem of adults institutionalized in institutions for persons with mental /physical disabilities; some of them are homeless, some lonely elderly, some former beneficiaries of the child protection system – however, their number is not known;
- The tendency to become permanent shelters – social reintegration becomes more difficult after residency in such shelters

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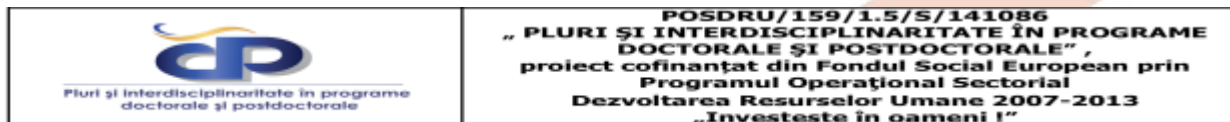


Social housing and homelessness

- The homeless population is not normally a candidate for social housing
- The demand is already greater from the population regarded as eligible: the objective to ensure the sustainability of renting: priority for families
- The SSH showed that about 28,000 to 29,000 state-owned dwellings are officially registered as social housing units. The number of applications received by urban mayoralties exceeds 67,000, while the local authorities estimate that the need amounts to 55,000 to 60,000 units (Strategy on social inclusion and poverty reduction, WB 2014)

Strategies and Plan

- The eradication of child homelessness (Child Protection and Social Inclusion strategies)
- Expand emergency intervention
- Develop prevention (inexistent)
- NGOs test some long-term solutions (Housing First type)



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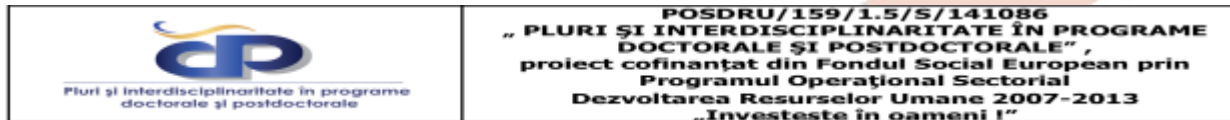


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Discussions. Family events conducive to homelessness :

- Living in the streets as a way of life for families who are not generating income:
 - Permanently living in the streets with the family
 - Living in the streets during the day and returning to the family to sleep (exploited for work /begging)
- The abandonment of children – in the post-institutionalized phase they are not monitored
- ? Family fails to perform its protective role (no data):
 - Extremely poor youth?
 - Elderly from extremely poor multigenerational households? (expensive nursing homes, scarce offer of services)
- Family break-up: divorce, break-up of consensual habitation couples
- Domestic violence: stigma prevents resorting to public authorities
- Lonely elderly victims of real estate scams



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The shortcomings of the public intervention:

- Not all the abandoned children are taken into the care of the protection system – “invisible” children
- Post-institutionalized children
- Mental illness – low capacity;
- Domestic violence
- Persons exiting from the prisons
- Persons exiting from medical facilities (physical and mental care)
- Drug addicts
- Evictions from social housing / restituted nationalized houses
- Some studies talk about the emergence of a generation of children born in the streets; according with the 2014 Save the Children research, around 40% of the individuals over 14 years old have children; around half of them live together with their children.



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