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Table of contents

BELGIUM.....	3
BULGARIA	7
CZECH REPUBLIC	11
DENMARK.....	15
GERMANY.....	20
ESTONIA.....	24
IRELAND	30
GREECE	34
SPAIN 37	
FRANCE.....	41
ITALY 46	
CYPRUS	50
LATVIA	53
LITHUANIA.....	57
LUXEMBURG.....	61
HUNGARY	65
MALTA.....	69
NETHERLANDS.....	73
AUSTRIA.....	77
POLAND.....	81
PORTUGAL.....	85
ROMANIA.....	89
SLOVENIA.....	92
SLOVAKIA	95
FINLAND	100
SWEDEN	104
UNITED KINGDOM.....	108

BELGIUM

1. CURRENT SITUATION

The population of Belgium, which stood at 10.85 million at 1 August 2009, grew 0.8% from 1 January 2007 and 1 January 2008 (the strongest growth since 1965). The average size of households in 2007, which was unchanged from 2006, was 2.31 persons (it was smaller in Brussels at 2.04 and larger in Flanders at 2.37). The distribution among types of household also remained constant at around 27% for single-person households and around 6% for families. In 2008 there were nearly 5 million dwellings in Belgium. Single-family houses make up the very large majority (75.3% in 2001), except in Brussels (where they comprise 28.2%). The percentage of households owning their dwelling is very high (69.5% in 2001), with the exception of Brussels (42.7%). No national statistics are available on the number of empty dwellings, but in 2006 the water distribution agency in Brussels put the number in Brussels at 15 000 in 2006.

The risk of poverty is nearly three times higher for a tenant than for someone who owns the property they live in (10.2% against 28.4%) and is over three times higher in Wallonia. Those at risk of poverty are twice as likely to be unsatisfied with their accommodation than the population as a whole. 17% of the population live in housing with a structural problem, which is close to the EU average (18.1%). The percentage of the population for whom the cost of accommodation exceeds 40% of their disposable income is 3.2% (2007) for owners, 4.5% for owners with a mortgage, 11.4% for tenants paying a moderate rent or who pay no rent and 33% for 'normal' tenants. Only the latter category are in a clearly less favourable situation than the European average (25.4%). The median percentage of the share of disposable income (with or without a housing allowance) allotted to accommodation is 17%, which is much lower than in Germany or the Netherlands. The overcrowding rate is very significantly below the European average (5.7% against 16.9%); nonetheless, the rate rises for tenants renting at market prices (11.6% against 17.6% for the EU) and is higher than in Germany and the Netherlands in almost all cases. Lastly, the purchase price of dwellings doubled from 2000 to 2008.

There are no national statistics on homelessness, probably because of Belgium's complex institutional set-up. Flanders is the only region with a fairly uniform, comprehensive and effective registration system (*Tellus*). However, the number of homeless in Belgium can be estimated at 17 000, although the reliability of such figures varies significantly with the region. A recent survey in Brussels puts the number of homeless in the capital at 2 766 while regional surveys have estimated the number at 18 000 in Wallonia and 10 315 in Flanders. According to a survey of *centres publics d'aide sociale* (CPAS – municipal public social assistance centres) under way, young people and those with psychiatric problems or problems of dependency appear to make up a growing percentage of the homeless. A Flanders Region study covering the period 1982-2002 also notes a clear increase in women, non-nationals and persons in debt among the homeless in Belgium.

2. POLICY FRAMEWORK – GOVERNANCE

The players are the political authorities at national, regional or community level, the municipalities (which run the CPAS), charities (which may be subsidised), specialised bodies such as the *Centra voor Algemeen Welzijnswerk* (CAW – centres for general welfare work), assisted by the *Steunpunten Algemeen Welzijnswerk* (SAW – support centre for general

welfare work) in Flanders, social housing companies, rental agencies, and organisations of owners which rent out the latter's properties for them. Consultation bodies, such as the *Concertation bruxelloise de l'aide aux sans-abris* and *La Strada* in Brussels, exist at each level. All actors also take part in implementing the national social inclusion action plan (*PAN-Inclusion*).

Housing and homelessness are to a very great extent the responsibility of the regions (housing and exclusion) and the communities (homeless), while the federal authorities remain mainly responsible for legislation on rents, taxation, urban policy and policy on poverty (emergency accommodation); major land reserves belong to certain State departments. The CPAS (municipalities) are the most important public actors in the system. This complex situation has the advantage of subsidiarity but calls for extensive coordination of the actors. An interministerial conference on coordinating policies applied took place in 2005 but did not bring very tangible results. A cooperation agreement between the Federal State, the Communities and the Regions on continuity of policy on poverty (<http://www.luttepauvrete.be/accordcooperation.htm>) was approved by Belgium's six Parliaments in 1998.

The right to lead a life in dignity and the right to housing are recognised by the Constitution (Article 23) and are reflected in regional legislation. Nevertheless, the right to lead a life in dignity, which is implemented by the CPAS, is not enforceable. Moreover, rents are not subject to general surveillance.

The major national policy framework is the Belgian social inclusion plan. Its general goal is to offer decent, adequate accommodation to all and it approaches the housing issue from the viewpoint of both access and quality. Its target for 2010 is a national percentage of social housing in the rental sector equal to 8% of the total number of households (compared with 6.2% in 2006); this focus on social housing is criticised by the experts, who would prefer a reference to a general accessibility target. The 'housing' programme of the national urban policy also has access and quality as priorities; a total budget of €69 million has been set aside for investment programmes at local level. The regions and communities have set other, generally unquantified, targets with the stress on the supply of decent, accessible housing (without any target for the homeless). Various programmes exist:

- (1) Flanders: establishment of supplementary social housing through the development of public-private partnerships; supported accommodation and introduction of a rent allowance scheme;
- (2) Wallonia: aid for the establishment of community housing; improvement in quality; development of public-private partnerships; investment in public housing; utilisation of empty property and supply of accommodation vouchers;
- (3) German-speaking Community: aid for establishment of emergency accommodation, accommodation designed to encourage residents' social inclusion and transitional accommodation;
- (4) Brussels: easier access to private rental accommodation (with planned supply of 5 000 extra dwellings, reform of rent allowance, trial with subsidised rent); support for homeless centres; training of social workers (assistance to homeless in underground); supported accommodation and aid for access to property ownership.

Very little information is provided on spending at national and regional level.

3. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

3.1. Access

In terms of prevention, joint landlord/tenant committees were set up in 2007 in three cities to regulate relations between landlords and tenants, mediate in conflicts and establish a scale of rents. The trial does not appear to have been followed up. Furthermore, the judiciary must notify the CPAS where persons are under threat of eviction. In Flanders and in Brussels homeless reception centres and supported or guidance centres also play a part in forestalling the eviction of social tenants. Rent allowance mechanisms also play a role.

Various measures are applied to stimulate the supply of housing for persons with a low income, such as increasing the stock of low-cost housing (new buildings and renovation), rent allowances and removal and installation allowances. Construction of new housing is encouraged by the imposition of town-planning rules, support for social housing agencies, management of private housing by the latter (and incentives for owners to entrust their property to them) and the establishment of public-private partnerships.

In 2006 Belgium had 62 social housing units for every 1 000 households, not including low-cost accommodation belonging to local authorities or entrusted by private owners to public bodies such as *agences immobilières sociales* (AIS – social real-estate agencies). These had 2 000 housing units in Brussels and 3 000 in Wallonia. The supply of low-cost housing seems to be far from adequate: in 2006 the waiting list was equivalent to 60.5% of social accommodation existing across the country; it was less in Wallonia (45.6%) but much more in Brussels (79.2%). Flanders adopted a decree in March 2009 setting a target of an extra 43 000 social housing units by 2020 (in collaboration with the private sector). Conditions of access to social housing vary with the region: Flanders recently made its criteria stricter.

In terms of access to privately owned accommodation, Flanders has gradually extended the rent subsidy system in the last few years. Social housing agencies in Flanders rent accommodation on the private market and sublet it. Aid towards payment of rent guarantees has been introduced. Wallonia is seeking to develop public-private partnerships, the establishment of collective accommodation managed by approved private associations, the utilisation of empty private property and the supply of accommodation vouchers. Although it has been the subject of discussion for several years, no system for controlling rents (currently a federal competence) has yet been introduced and this seems to be holding back the introduction of a rent-allowance mechanism on a wide scale.

To help former inmates on their release from penal establishments or asylums, the preference is for collective accommodation (independent living units with communal areas). In Brussels a system called *Concertation de l'aide aux justiciables* was set up in 2006 to coordinate assistance to such persons.

Emergency accommodation (subject to an eight months maximum), managed by the CPAS and financed by the National Lottery, has been in place since 2006 at federal level, with assistance in searching for long-term housing. Similar systems, at times for certain target groups (such as battered housewives) also exist at regional level.

The supply of supported accommodation is a regional responsibility. In Flanders the service is seen as an intermediate stage between residential accommodation and independent housing. The support is flexible in form and degree: special home services may be provided. The regions are also responsible for finding long-term solutions. Flanders has designated seven

pilot regions since 2002: bodies help the homeless to find social housing and to become autonomous.

Certain services are there for specific target groups in Brussels (shelters for women, who may also have priority access to social accommodation) and in Flanders (special temporary accommodation for young people, men and women; accommodation for battered housewives, non-nationals and victims of human trafficking). Lastly, ensuring a social mix is a political goal for each region.

3.2. Quality

The regions, which are responsible in this area, have set binding quality criteria and clearly defined legal categories for housing. Progress in improving quality is encouraged by positive and dissuasive incentives: an administrative authorisation is required in Flanders and Brussels for renting out certain accommodation against which there is a question mark. Regional and federal urban regeneration programmes have been put in place and renovation premiums introduced. No information has been provided on Structural Fund assistance in this area.

4. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

No clearly defined active inclusion strategy seems to exist. However, social workers within the social welfare services monitor pathways to integration. A comprehensive approach to the problems encountered (education, training, childcare and employment) and networking of the actors involved are promoted. Work experience is offered in the social economy sector (for example, via the *wep-plus* plan in Flanders) and certain social groups, e.g. women (*M/V United* in Flanders) and immigrants (*inburgering*), are given priority. Flanders also holds training courses in ICT (*AKMC*).

Access to health care is facilitated through medical centres open to all and local nurses in Brussels and local health centres in Flanders (*wijkgezondheidscentra*), projects in place since 2007 to combat drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse, particularly among disadvantaged groups and free vaccination campaigns and campaigns to promote a healthy diet. One of the CPAS' tasks is also to facilitate access to care.

Quality standards have been laid down by law in Flanders on the quality of services.

5. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Belgium still seems to be looking for a coherent, coordinated policy on homelessness. The *Service de lutte contre la pauvreté*, a body set up by the interparliamentary agreement of 1998 (see above) to combat poverty, has the task of making recommendations, while the regions have published reports and convene coordination meetings of the actors. Bodies like *La Strada* in Brussels help with the work of gathering the necessary data, which are still incomplete; in Flanders the CAW are under an obligation to provide the authorities with data on registration each year.

BULGARIA

1. CURRENT SITUATION

While there is no official definition of "homelessness" and "housing exclusion", an unofficial definition entered standard use in the last couple of decades and includes only those citizens who are clearly without shelter: people who sleep on the streets, in parks and in other public places. Information on housing conditions and the housing fund in Bulgaria is collected via the regular census of the population (last one in 2001). Following a review of the ETHOS typology, it was estimated that the National Statistical Institute (NSI) can provide data for some of the 13 operational categories but only under the more generalised category of primitive dwellings. The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences suggested a typology which was not accepted by the government and which, to a certain extent, corresponds to the ETHOS one. Experts on housing tend already to use the ETHOS typology, albeit informally. Relevant national statistical data does not exist at the moment and, as a consequence, Eurostat is limited in the data it can provide for Bulgaria. The next national census is foreseen for March 2011 at which point data in compliance with Eurostat requirements and the ETHOS typology should be available.

According to data from national statistics¹, the housing stock (as of 31.12.2008) amounts to 3 767 081 dwellings, 2 391 516 of which are in the cities and 1 375 565 in villages. The rate of dwellings availability in 2008 is 495 dwellings per 1000 people with an average of 2.02 people living in one dwelling (2.26 in the cities, 1.60 in the villages). The average floorage per person for the country is 20.35 square meters –17.87 square meters in cities and 26.45 square meters in the villages.

As per research data in 2005², the allocation of the available housing stock was as follows: 96.8% private and 3.2% public (municipal or state). The share of the latter was the highest in and around the capital (6%) and the big cities (3.6%).

There remains a serious need for construction of financially-affordable dwellings and mass renovation of the existing housing stock. Data shows that more than half of the investment in construction is in residential buildings. The constructed buildings are primarily in the private sector with the share of public investment barely exceeding 10%. Housing generally is considered to be a private issue and not a concern of the authorities. The municipalities have legally-defined responsibilities regarding the care for the housing stock but have no resources for its maintenance. Nevertheless, they are entitled to undertake investment projects for renovation and restructuring of blocks of flats. At the same time, the National housing strategy³ shows that only 3% of all blocks are State or municipal property.

¹ National Statistical Institute

² Homeless and Homelessness in Bulgaria, Iskra Dandolova, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences - 2005 - <http://www.cuhp.org/admin/EditDocStore/Dandolova.pdf>

³ National housing strategy = <http://www.mrrb.government.bg/index.php?lang=bg&do=law&type=4&id=220>

6. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

The two most important levels of policy management are the national and municipal ones. At national level, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (regarding the implementation of the national housing policy) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, State Agency for Child Protection and Agency for Social Assistance (regarding the social inclusion aspects) are the main stakeholders. The government adopted in 2004 the National Housing Strategy which, although not limited in time, does not contain clear measurable and comparable outcomes. Moreover, there is no evidence of what funding has been allocated to implement the strategy and what has been achieved as regard targets for the last five years of implementation.

In reality, responsibility to undertake action regarding the needs of housing of homeless people rests at municipal level. While each municipality should have its own strategy, permanent lack of financial resources does not allow for any real action on the ground.

It remains unclear to what extent the central level supports the development and most importantly the implementation of the municipal strategies on homelessness within a concise policy and especially those in big cities where the most vulnerable appear to reside.

In relation to the Roma population in particular, there is an operational strategic document related to real funding - the National Programme for Improvement of the Housing Conditions of the Roma in Bulgaria until 2015 which was adopted by the government in 2006. The programme involves ambitious measures and not insignificant financial resources - 1.26 billion BGN until 2015 - from the State and municipal budgets and EU Structural Funds. Funds absorption, however, is extremely low (only 10 million BGN for 2007 and 20 million BGN in 2008 were used).

It is clear that, at national level, the authorities should take political commitment in the field of housing policy and homelessness which, at present, remains marginal to the social inclusion process. There is a need of a new realistic strategy having timeline objectives and activities linked to specific funding, not only from the EU funded Operational Programmes, but also from the state budget with responsibility clearly defined in reference to the implementation of these policies.

In general, although there is legislation regarding housing, in reality there are difficulties in guaranteeing shelter and residence to citizens who are in serious housing need. Moreover, social services for people without housing are not well developed. It is, accordingly, necessary to enforce the existing legislation and create special one if needed, backed up by appropriate funding, which could ensure temporary or permanent housing, as well as accessible social services, to people who have found themselves without shelter. This is particularly necessary for big cities where the number of homeless people grows steadily as reported by NGOs.

7. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

Given the general situation and the overall policy, it is evident that, in general, access to housing is extremely limited. In practice, preventive measures do not exist with a resulting lack of support for people who have been evicted or are in danger of being evicted from their

homes. In effect, the issue is left to the local governments with no state involvement as such. Data from of the Social Assistance Agency⁴ clearly show that the existing 12 Temporary accommodation centres in the country have the capacity to accommodate 713 people. There are 30 Centres for Home-Type Accommodation in the country. The centres are for children and have capacity for 353 people. There are 4 Shelters in the country with capacity of 65 people with all of them for children and not adults. There are 11 centres for street children with capacity of 186 people. There are 94 services providing protected housing for 783 people (all of them are adults). All of these services are funded by the state budget. Such services are also provided by private providers but their number is rather limited. Accommodation for homeless people is provided by specialized institutions as well. Urgent placement in temporary accommodation was extremely difficult until November 2009 especially for people who have lost their IDs and do not have health insurance. Obtaining accommodation in such institutions required 8 different documents and allows the person to stay there for up to 3 months. However after November 2009 all the necessary paper work is done by the social workers, including for obtaining ID cards. Unlike in the mid 90s when a lot of street children existed, according to the NGO sector observations, the number of homeless adults is now visibly higher with all their attendant needs.

In general, the reports of different experts from the NGO sector⁵ conclude that the social policy of Bulgaria in this particular area is inadequate. There is no statistical data and, moreover no adequate social services based on modern social work type approaches to overcoming housing exclusion related issues and homelessness. Access to independent housing is also very limited. What remains a serious issue, although limited services are available, is the access to housing for the most vulnerable and helpless people who have lost their housing – mostly people with mental and personality disorders, people who have gone out of institutions, drug addicts, alcoholics, etc.

As regards the quality of the housing stock, it is evident that, again due to the lack of regulation and overall policy strategy, the quality varies depending on the level of commitment of the local authorities. Issues like illegal housing for Roma, deteriorating housing conditions on State-owned properties, although well below acceptable standards, still do not elicit an adequate political response.

8. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

As homelessness is not in the focus of social policy, very limited number of services are provided to people without shelter. Moreover, there is no data to what extent the social work for integration of people with housing problems that is in place in relation to access to the labour market – training, retraining, employment initiatives, communication skills etc. gives tangible results and leads to a change of the life of the homeless people or the children from the Centres for street children.

While in theory opportunity for access to health care exists (the state budget provide funds for the health insurance of the people subject to social assistance and for diagnosis and medical treatment of people without incomes and/or property that allow their personal participation in the health insurance process), in reality this is a very complicated issue. The latest changes in

⁴ [http:// www.asp.government.bg](http://www.asp.government.bg)

⁵ *HOMELESSNESS IN BULGARIA*. Douhomir Minev. Prepared for FEANTSA – September 2003 - http://www.feantsa.org/files/enlargement/research_bulgaria.pdf

the Law on health insurance seem to add additional burden on the homeless people in that respect.

9. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

There is limited statistical data on homelessness. Information so far is available only by research commissioned by NGOs or the Council of Europe⁶. Since November 2009 registering of homeless persons in Social Assistance Directorates has been introduced. As per the Law on Census of the population and the housing stock, the next census will be in March 2011. It is at that point that all the current gaps in statistics might at least be partially filled. The Law on Census of the population states that a preliminary pilot census is to be carried out as a first phase in order to test the process and the means for the census. It is at that stage that a careful analysis of the indicators on homelessness and housing is to be made and corrective actions taken if needed. This will help the policy makers adapt the required actions to homeless people which, by that point, should be supported by an appropriate system for monitoring of progress and evaluation of results.

⁶ *TRENDS AND PROGRESS IN HOUSING REFORMS IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE* – October 2005
- http://www.coebank.org/upload/infocentre/Brochure/en/Housing_reforms_in_SEE.pdf

CZECH REPUBLIC

1. CURRENT SITUATION

According to the Population Census of 2001, there were 4,366,293 flats in the Czech Republic (427 flats per 1000 inhabitants) and since then the number of private flats and houses being constructed has been increasing but there has been almost no construction of rental housing. The main problem remains a lack of financially affordable flats for low income households. Significant part of the housing stock transferred to municipalities from the state after 1989 was sold and only very small part is recently used for social purposes. In recent years the state expenditure on housing has been 0.7-0.9% of GDP.

The share of population with housing costs exceeding 40% of the total income was 10.3% in 2007, which was lower than the EU average (12.3%). However, when broken into categories by tenure status, only the share of tenants with reduced price or free (9.7%) was lower than the EU average (13%), households of outright owners, with mortgage or market price rents was above the EU average. The overcrowding rate is very high (32% in 2007, EU: 17.3%) with a considerable difference between non-poor (28.8%) and poor citizens (63.1%). The proportion of people deprived was lower than the EU average, 81.5% of people reported to live in acceptable living standards (EU: 75.2%). However, there are several seriously deprived localities inhabited mostly by Roma with worsening conditions.

The Czech definition of homelessness covers only "roofless" and "houseless". There is no system of regular collection of data neither monitoring. Partial data can be obtained from three sources: the Population Census of the Czech Statistical Office (CZSO), the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) data on people living in institutions and shelters, occasional surveys of NGOs working with the homeless. There are thousands of citizens that can be classified as homeless in the Czech Republic, concentrated in the largest cities.⁷

The homeless are mainly men, middle-aged, long-term unemployed, disabled, alcohol and drug users. The main reasons for homelessness are broken family relationships, economic problems (unemployment, over-indebtedness, etc.), the lost of housing, addictions, psychological and mental problems. People released from prisons, institutions and children's homes are also vulnerable in this respect. Present crisis factors are increasing prices of rents and energies and the lack of social housing. Special housing benefits and housing supplement allowance are provided for people in need, but latter only in case of legally contracted housing.

⁷ According to the NGOs statistics, the numbers are following for roofless: Prague (3074 in 2009), Brno (452 in 2006), Ostrava (2158 in 2009); houseless: Prague (1696 in 2009), Brno (380 in 2006), Ostrava (521 in 2009), in the CR (4484 in 2005 according to NGOs and 4542 in 2007 according to the MoLSA). According to the CZSO, there were following numbers of people in insecure housing (17213 subletting according to the 2001 Census); inadequate housing: 222 in mobile housing, 3232 in unfit provisory housing, 12519 in recreation chalet or country house and around 129 thousand of people, who do not live in standard housing (institutions, austerity shelters, recreation objects).

10. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

The Czech legislation does not acknowledge the right to housing, only specific social benefits for housing are guaranteed for low-income groups. The system of administration is decentralised and thus responsibility for housing is with the municipalities. The government (Ministry for Regional Development) sets the rules and provides financial contributions to the local governments for the construction of municipal flats via targeted programmes. Otherwise it does not have a tool to influence municipalities to allocate specific number of flats to people in need or to influence their way of dealing with socially excluded localities and people facing eviction. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is responsible for the methodology and for setting the rules for social services that are delivered by the regions and municipalities. The regions must elaborate the Medium Term Plans for the Development of Social Services on the basis of the Act on Social Services. A key role in delivering social services for the homeless is played by NGOs that are well organised and trusted.

There are weaknesses in the housing policy. The social housing sector is almost non-existent and there is a preference to target directly citizens with special social benefits than support the building of social housing. There is no prevention strategy with regarding to losing one's home and to homelessness, and financial support to NGOs working in this field is insufficient. Municipalities use only a very small part of their stock of flats for people in need and before social work and solving the situation of people in danger of losing their housing they prefer zero tolerance and evicting people to sub-standard housing usually in the suburbs. As a consequence, problems with socially excluded localities have been increasing.

In 2005, the Concept of Housing Policy was approved by the government with fairly vague objectives to increase financial affordability and overall offer of housing, its quality and preservation, etc. In 2000, the State Housing Development Fund was established with fluctuating budgets, reaching 16,899 Mio CZK in 2008, however, the share devoted to municipal rented housing is small and decreasing due to EU regulations of state aid. Since 2003, the Programme for the Construction of Subsidised Housing for socially disadvantaged groups (the elderly, people with disabilities, people leaving the institutions, etc.) of Ministry for Regional Development is in place, however, also with decreasing allocation.

11. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

As already mentioned the sector of social housing is underdeveloped and there are not enough dwellings for low-income groups. The government support is focused especially on support to ownership of dwellings and on reconstruction of prefabs built before 1989 (1.5 billion CZK), where significant part of the middle and low income groups live. Special social benefits are available: the housing benefit (since 1995) and the new housing supplement allowance (since 2007) that is, however, provided only in case of legally contracted housing. People living in non-standard housing cannot get this allowance. Moreover, the amount is limited by the normative costs in the particular locality.

The leases are protected by the Civil Code, which lays down the obligation in certain cases to provide substitute housing in case of lease termination. The municipalities are not obliged to help people without housing to access one and furthermore, they prefer evicting people with arrays. Social work is ongoing in socially excluded communities (inhabited mainly by Roma) carried out by NGOs and some municipalities but their capacity is insufficient to meet the demand.

Temporary accommodation for the homeless is provided by means of low threshold day centres and overnight shelters, hostels, temporary housing. The maximum length of stay is one year in one facility, many people move among different facilities over the years. Supply of provisions is not sufficient.⁸ For example according to the 2004 Prague's Survey only 37% of the homeless were living in temporary accommodation. Several thousand places are available for women with children but there are no places for men with children.

As there is almost no social housing, transition from emergency to permanent accommodation is almost impossible. Only the programme for supported housing (2003) is implemented through direct subsidies to municipalities for the construction or modernisation of housing without barriers for the disabled, the elderly and people in difficult life situation. Rents in these dwellings should not exceed the average market price. As regards the entry flats, the target group is defined by low income and by difficulties in accessing the rental market (people leaving institutions, children's homes, hostels for the homeless, members of ethnic minorities, refugees). Contracts are for two years and it is possible to renew them.

Low-income groups of the population have problems with the affordability of housing due to high selling prices. At the same time the rental market is getting expensive as well due to the gradual rents' deregulation and increases of energy prices. In 2006 an act was approved by the government with the aim to align regulated rents with market prices by 2010. This change will affect approximately 20% of the population. After the rapid rent growth in years 2006 – 2009, the government decided, according to social impacts of deregulation, to divide the last phase finalizing deregulation in 3 following years (2010, 2011, 2012) in the selected cities.

All new buildings are governed by regulations to ensure the minimum building quality, such as the Building Act and the Act on Public Health Protection. Otherwise, there are no minimum standards guaranteeing the quality of temporary housing for the homeless. This type of housing is defined as social service, and thus has to follow the standards of quality of social services.

A large part of the housing stock (the panel apartment blocks) that was built before 1989 from the prefabricated technologies does not have the satisfactory technical parameters. Moreover, dwellings are fairly small. Thus the improvement of quality of these houses is one of the biggest priorities of the Czech housing policy with significant amount allocated (for loans and subsidies) through the programme PANEL. The overcrowding rate is high as compared to the EU, but the proportion of people deprived is significantly lower in all monitored categories.⁹

Since 2001 Program on recovery of panel housing estates of Ministry for Regional Development has been in force. The subsidy is provided to municipalities for reconstruction of public areas within panel housing estates in order to make these parts of town attractive. Subsidies of this national program do not cover reconstruction of the block of flats that is the reason why the Czech Republic has taken advantage of drawing financial sources from ERDF and created Integrated Operation Programme (IOP). IOP includes activities on renovations, reconstructions and modernisations of the blocks of flats in socially deprived localities and

⁸ According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2007 Statistics Yearbook, there were 4208 places in 162 night shelters; 334 places in 29 halfway houses; 459 places in 29 hostels. As regards halfway houses (for persons up to 26 years of age), which provide also mediation, therapy and advocacy, there is around 330 places but more than 1000 youngsters are released from children's homes each year.

⁹ Proportion of people deprived in 2007: leaking roof 15.6% (EU: 18%), bath or shower 0.8% (EU: 3.3%), indoor toilet 1.2% (EU: 3.6), dark dwelling 4.4% (EU: 8.1%)

also targeted projects aiming at prevention and reduction of spatial and social segregation estates especially inhabited by Roma. Moreover, the Regional Operational Programmes support the creation of the Integrated Development Plans of the cities.

12. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Attention is paid to active inclusion to support entering the labour market, but especially by means of increased conditionality of benefits. A complex social protection system is in place but as regards the employment services still more needs to be done to increase their capacity and ensure individualised approach. No specific strategy is focusing on the homeless, who are usually long-term unemployed. The Act on Social Services (in force since 2007) created the basis for the obligatory standards of quality together with the Inspection of Quality. The scope and quality of services have been increasing and positive development has been stimulated also by the community planning of social services (based on the Act as well).

All citizens are entitled to health care that is based on compulsory health insurance; however, the homeless usually do not pay insurance and therefore are sometimes refused treatment. Only one specialised medical service exists in Prague. The homeless have approximately ten times higher prevalence of TBC and also are more often exposed to chronic diseases, infections, and mental disorders.

13. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

No regular monitoring system or evaluation is in place. NGOs have been carrying out surveys on an irregular basis in the largest cities. Sources of data are incomplete and not entirely reliable. Some evaluations were elaborated by researchers and representatives of the NGO sector, for example the National Reports on Homelessness 2005 and 2006.¹⁰

¹⁰ <http://www.nadeje.cz/index.php?q=node/28>

DENMARK

1. CURRENT SITUATION

A national definition of homelessness has been adopted as part of the national count of homelessness which was carried out in 2007 and 2009. It consists of a conceptual definition and an operational definition with 8 categories, which are based on the ETHOS typology adapted to the Danish context.

The national count of homeless people showed that approximately 5000 individuals were homeless in the reference week (week 6, 2009). This corresponds to 1 per 1000 inhabitants (in Copenhagen 2.9 per 1000). It is estimated that 11000 to 13000 persons are affected by homelessness per year. Of the 4998 persons registered in the national count, 506 persons were sleeping rough, 1952 were sleeping in homeless hostels, and 1086 were staying temporarily with family and friends. The rest belong to the remaining categories. 2432 (49%) of the homeless were registered in the Copenhagen metropolitan area.

Homelessness in Denmark is to a very large extent related to substance abuse and/or mental illness. A majority of homeless are men (78%) and 22% are women. Around 20% among the homeless are young (18-29), while more than 50% are 30-49 year olds and few (5%) are above 60 years. Approx. 20% belong to ethnic minority groups. For 20% of the homeless, evictions were mentioned as an important reason for their situation. The number of evictions has increased during recent years from 1823 in 2002 to 3762 in 2008¹¹.

There is substantial regional variation in waiting lists for public housing but no official national statistics are available. There are relatively short waiting lists in most provincial towns and cities but relatively long waiting lists in the Copenhagen area. Waiting lists for public housing are open to all Danish residents, but municipalities can refer at least 25% of vacancies to individuals with social needs.

The share of population living in a household where housing costs represent more than 40% of the total household income was 13.4% in 2007 (EU average: 12.3%). By tenure status, the share is bigger for the tenants paying a market price rent (25.4% (EU average: 25.4%)).

The overcrowding rate is very low (6.8% in 2007, EU: 17.3%). As to the proportion of people deprived, it was significantly below the EU average in 2007 (the rate of population reported to live in acceptable living standards was 85.0% in Denmark, 75.2% in EU).

Denmark's social expenditure destined to housing benefits (% of total benefits) was 5.3% in 2006 (EU27: 2.3%).

14. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

While there is no statutory right to housing in the Danish legislation, the law on social services defines a range of interventions such as homeless hostels, medium-term supported housing, long-term supported housing, social support attached to the individual, social drop-in

¹¹ Figures provided by the Danish Courts

centres and substance misuse treatment. The provision of these services is the responsibility of local authorities (municipalities). The law on public housing enables municipalities to refer 25% of vacancies in public housing to socially vulnerable groups. The Ministry of the Interior and Social Affairs has the overall administrative responsibility for policies and services for homeless people. The Ministry of Employment has the responsibility for general labour market activation policies and social assistance to homeless people.

A national strategy to combat homelessness has been adopted for the period of 2008-2011 with four objectives: a) reduction of the number of people sleeping rough; b) young people should be offered better options than staying in a homeless hostel; c) the average time spent in a homeless hostel should be reduced to 3-4 months; d) housing problems should be solved prior to release from prison or treatment centres. The strategy links efforts to the principle of "housing first".

The Danish government has reserved funding of €66 Mio for the implementation of the strategy. The main part of the funding will be distributed to selected municipalities with the largest homeless populations. An important aim is to develop methods with documentation of their effectiveness and to distribute this knowledge to municipalities in other parts of the country. Each selected municipality will adopt an action plan to reduce homelessness within one or more of the four national objectives. The action plan will also include an obligation to continue the initiatives after the 4-year period. The main stakeholders are municipalities, central government and NGOs.

NGOs also play an important role in services for the homeless. They often operate services such as homeless hostels and social drop-in centres. The management of social drop-in centres is generally supported by municipalities but also partly funded by the NGOs themselves.

A national user organisation (SAND) has been established among the homeless facilitated by the central government. SAND is often consulted in matters such as policy development and implementation.

15. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

15.1. Accessibility

The law on social services specifies a municipal obligation to provide temporary accommodation for the homeless (individuals who have no dwelling or cannot use the dwelling they have due to social problems). Homeless hostels exist in almost all larger cities and towns and are organised in a national association. The supply of places generally meets demand, though normally places are utilised to a high degree. It can occur that hostels are full for the night and that users will have to use emergency night shelters. There are no general national standards for quality of accommodation, but the hostels are like all other public institutions subjected to rules of general inspection.

The most important general mechanism for accessing permanent accommodation is the referral to social housing via municipal waiting lists. In the Copenhagen region in particular, there is excess demand for public housing and relatively long waiting lists. Social housing is

generally open to all but locally there can be barriers which act against the re-housing of certain groups. This may be the case for example of active substance users, making up a large proportion of homeless people, who could be a problem for the neighbours.

According to the law on social services, social support in own home can be provided. A continuous challenge is to provide sufficient social support to individuals in their own homes in order to enable them to stay there. One of the key priorities in the national homelessness strategy is to strengthen the provision of social support at municipal level.

Social housing is non-profit (cost) based. Segments of the private rental stock (based on age and status of renewal) are subject to rent control. Individuals with low income can uphold a rent subsidy based on income, rent and size of the dwelling.

The number of evictions has increased over the last years. A new initiative aims to provide counselling for people who are at risk of eviction and obliges housing authorities to notify municipalities of individuals with eviction orders.

Institutional release can be a pathway into homelessness. A recent project has focused on better procedures with regard to release from prisons. One of the four goals of the national homelessness strategy is to secure that a housing solution is established upon institutional release and projects under the strategy will focus on strengthening procedures of coordination in this area.

Besides the referral to social housing, there are targeted forms of supported housing available for groups with specific needs in the law on social services. An example is the so-called alternative nursing homes for individuals who are in need of care due to long term substance use and where there is a relatively high staff ratio to provide specialised care. A continuous challenge is to provide more places of supported housing for those with special needs. The so-called 'skæve huse' (untraditional housing) consist of small independent housing units with social support attached and provide a housing alternative for those who do not fit into ordinary housing.

It is an objective to have a socially sustainable composition of dwellers in social housing areas. Thus, rules may be applied locally to the effect that priority is granted to people with stronger resources in order to create a more balanced composition of dwellers in the area.

15.2. Quality

There are no national definitions of inadequate or overcrowded housing. The rental housing stock is generally subject to municipal supervision. There is a general emphasis on renewal of the public housing stock through both large scale renewal of estates and local renovation projects.

There has generally been emphasis on providing area based interventions in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Many larger housing areas have undergone intensive renewal programs and there is a tradition for programs of social activities and interventions in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Social services in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are generally integrated into mainstream municipal social services.

At 6.8% in 2007, the overcrowding rate is very low (EU average: 17.3%). As to the proportion of people deprived, it was significantly below the EU average in 2007.

16. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

The services for homeless people are specified in the law on social services and thereby included into general social service provision. As described above, the national strategy on combating homelessness aims at strengthening service provision. Particular aims are to strengthen the municipal provision of individualised social support for individuals with complex needs.

Homeless people receiving cash benefits are subject to the legislation on activation, where consideration of individual resources should be given. Counselling services at local job centres are available to individuals without employment. The national count of homeless people showed that 14% among the homeless were participating in labour market activation. This indicates that there is a considerable distance to the labour market for most of the homeless people, and this generally reflects the complex social problems of many homeless individuals.

Homeless persons are like other inhabitants in Denmark covered by universal health care services free of charge. There can be practical barriers of access, for instance due to lack of knowledge of the particular needs of the homeless among staff in the general health care system, or due to individual circumstances. Specialised outreach health care services have been set up in some larger cities to reach homeless people with health needs who do not seek assistance from the general health care system.

Street outreach work is aimed to render general support to rough sleepers and to facilitate their use of existing services. The law on social services gives the legal base for so-called social contact persons aiming at social outreach work in municipalities. Social drop-in centres (many run by NGOs) exist in most large cities to provide support to rough sleepers.

There are no national standards for quality of social services for homeless people.

17. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

There is a national system of documentation of the use of homeless hostels. Numbers of users are registered together with basic client information. Annual statistics are published. A national count of homeless people was carried out in 2007 and 2009 and a third count is planned in 2011 as part of the monitoring of the implementation of the national strategy. The reporting system is generally good, even if it remains difficult to estimate with accuracy the number of rough sleepers.

No general policy evaluation has been carried out recently. An evaluation of the so-called city programme ("Storbypuljen" 2003-2005) in 2007 concluded that the programme had succeeded in establishing more targeted interventions towards the most marginalised individuals including the homeless, but that there was a continued need to further develop services and interventions.

GERMANY

1. CURRENT SITUATION

In official reports (such as its Report on Poverty and Wealth¹²), the German government refers to a definition of homelessness ("*Wohnungslosigkeit*") used by the BAG W¹³, an association of public and private bodies and institutions that offer services and assistance to people suffering from homelessness. According to this definition, a person/a family is considered as "homeless", when they live in a dwelling without having a leasing contract for it or being the owner of that dwelling. The definition encompasses both, dwellings that are provided by an institution or on an informal basis (e.g. by friends). The government operates with the notion of "people in very difficult life situations"¹⁴ and links it with the issue of homelessness. The government does not make references to the ETHOS-typology.

The Government quotes estimates presented by the BAG W according to which 254,000 people (0.3% of the total population) have been homeless in 2006 (18,000 rough sleepers), suggesting that the overall number of homeless people has halved since 1998. 25% are estimated to be women, 64% men and the remaining 11% children or adolescents.

There is a lack of empirical data but it appears that the overall situation on the housing market is good in view of the overall offer of accommodation, its quality and its price level: the different dimensions of deprivation show low figures (e.g. leaking roof: 14% for DE (2008) and 18% for EU27 (2007); bath/shower: below 1% to 3%; indoor toilet 1 % (2008) to 4% for EU27 (2007) etc). "Overcrowding" is not an issue¹⁵. Between 1997 and 2007, rents have increased more slowly than the general inflation rate. While for the time being¹⁶, no data are available on the share of housing costs in total disposable income and the share of population whose housing cost burden exceeds 40%, housing costs in general or access to housing for people with a low income do not appear to be of major concern.

Data on waiting periods for social housing and the different dimensions of the ETHOS-typology are not available.

As to the reasons for homelessness, the government sees primarily an accumulation of problems people have been or are still confronted with (such as unemployment, high debt, problems within the family, social problems, psychological problems etc). In view of the relaxed situation on the housing market and of the effectively working social protection

¹² Lebenslagen in Deutschland. Der 3. Armuts- und Reichtumsbericht der Bundesregierung ("Life Situations in Germany". The German Federal Government's 3rd Report on Poverty and Wealth), in particular chapter XI 1.

¹³ Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe e.V.

¹⁴ "Personen besonderen Lebensverhältnissen mit sozialen Schwierigkeiten" (Achstes Kapitel SGB XII)..

¹⁵ The respective rates are low, amounting to 4% for all households (17% for EU27) and even lower when one-person households are excluded, amounting to 3% (18% for EU27). They do not show any gender gap with higher figures for the young (5.1%) and a very low rate for people above 65 (1% – EU27: 7%). Overcrowding occurs more often in densely populated areas (4%; EU27: 17%) than in rural areas (2%; EU27: 24%). In terms of household composition families composed of two adults and one or two children are better off (2% and 3% respectively) than families with 3 or more children (6%) or lone parents (12%).

¹⁶ It is expected that data will be available in 2011.

system, the government doubts that homelessness could be explained in general by a shortage of affordable housing space.

18. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

At the Federal level, the Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development¹⁷ is responsible for housing allowances (*Wohngeld*); the Ministry of Justice is responsible for the law of tenancy, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for social assistance benefits, including housing costs (*Kosten der Unterkunft*). The competence for providing social accommodation is with the regions (*Länder*) and the task to provide rough sleepers with an accommodation or shelter lies with the local authorities (*Kommunen*).

The government identifies as the overall objective ensuring an appropriate provision of housing space for all households that do not have enough resources at their disposal to provide themselves with sufficient housing space.

In view of preventing and combating homelessness, the government uses legal provisions (protecting tenants), benefits and allowances, the provision of – affordable - social accommodation and other legal instruments (such as the referral of people that run the risk of becoming rough sleepers into temporary accommodation).

Explicit target groups are low-income households, households with children, lone-parents households, pregnant women, older and disabled people, homeless people and other needy persons. The German Constitution obliges to mainstream the gender aspect in all policy areas.

Given that the relevant action is organised at the federal, regional and local level, there is not a single, nation-wide dedicated budget to fight homelessness. Within the Operational Programme for the federal level (*Bund*), the ESF lends financial support (€124 Mio) to a programme "Die Soziale Stadt – Bildung, Wirtschaft, Arbeit im Quartier (BIWAQ)"¹⁸ that sets out to integrate measures in the field of housing, employment and social inclusion in a local context.

Social housing policy is implemented primarily at the level of and by the local authorities in cooperation with social NGOs fighting homelessness (*freie Träger der Wohnungslosenhilfe*).

The German Constitution contains a general social policy objective that encompasses the housing dimension; however, this provision does not give rise to an individual right.

19. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

19.1. Accessibility

There is a broad range of instruments in place to reduce the risk of eviction: (1) the tenancy law protects tenants against eviction to a large extent. In principle, lease contracts run without any limit of time. A termination of a contract is possible only in case of serious reasons e.g. if the landlord shows that he needs the dwelling for himself or for close relatives. In any case, the tenant can contradict the termination if it constitutes a non acceptable burden. A landlord

¹⁷ Ministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung.

¹⁸ http://www.esf.de/portal/generator/834/programm__soziale__stadt.html

that wants to terminate a contract has to motivate his/her decision with reasons that can be checked. (2) households with low income can apply to receive a housing allowance (*Wohngeld*). The amount depends on the number of people living in the household, the total income and the rent to be paid. (3) in the framework of minimum income provisions, the amount of benefits covers housing costs. In the case of impending loss of accommodation, the competent public body pays the costs for housing and heating directly to the landlord. There is also a possibility to bail out a tenant that has not paid the rent for some time; (4) in the framework of the promotion of social accommodation (*soziale Wohnraumförderung*), the state provides affordable accommodation to households facing problems in accessing housing; (5) in emergency cases, there is a possibility of referral to social accommodation/shelter.

In view of temporary accommodation, the local authorities are obliged to provide, equip and maintain appropriate facilities to offer housing space for homeless people and their families. In case of need, it is a subjective right to get access to a temporary accommodation in at least some sort of shelter (*Notunterkunft*). In the case of emergencies, the provision of a shelter should be temporary (in principle not longer than 6 months but de facto it happens that some people (have to) stay much longer). The local authorities can work together with - and delegate parts of their task to provide accommodation to - social NGOs (such as the Red Cross).

Although there are no empirical data, it appears that the supply of temporary accommodation is generally sufficient. Quality standards are defined at the regional level. Given that such accommodation is supposed to be temporary, their standards, in terms of size and equipment, are below normal accommodation. Jurisprudence has ensured that, on grounds of respecting the human dignity, a minimum standard has to be respected.

There is no nation-wide policy on how to support the move from emergency accommodation to more permanent solutions; these vary from region to region and sometimes from city to city. Evaluations about the effectiveness of these policies are not available.

In view of affordability, a combined approach is used: legal stipulations ensure that the rent cannot be increased in an inappropriate way; the construction of affordable accommodation for low-income households is subsidised by the State and households with a low income can receive the housing allowance or housing costs in the framework of social assistance benefits.

19.2. Quality

In the case of non-social accommodation, the tenant has the right to reduce the rent when the quality standard is insufficient. In the case of social accommodation, quality standards reached such a high level that the respective stipulations were not needed any longer and were abolished in the mid-eighties.

In view of the links between policies to promote adequate housing and other urban regeneration policies, the mainstream policy (*soziale Wohnraumförderung*) described above, is complemented by targeted action at the local level (BIWAQ-programme).

20. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Most people affected by homelessness are considered as "capable of work" (*erwerbsfähig*) and are entitled to the same benefits as any other job-seeker (in the first place a job-seeker's

allowance). They are also entitled to receiving support to find or keep a dwelling. The same applies for employment measures (such as training, job counselling etc), however public authorities usually take into account the specific problems linked to being homeless and focus on establishing first of all a stable relationship between them and the client before considering activation measures (such as an insertion contract that encompasses obligations and sanctions).

Since the last health care reform, all citizens have a right to be ensured. In addition, a range of measures tries to reach out to people more distant from the mainstream medical system (e.g. medical streetwork; medical visits in temporary accommodation/shelters). Streetworkers also try to get in contact with rough sleepers to help them make use of the possibilities offered by the social protection system.

To the extent that homeless people are considered fit to work and therefore are entitled to receive the entire range of benefits and services for job seekers, the quality control for these measures is carried out by the Public Employment Service (and, in the case of so-called accompanying measures, such as debt advice service or counselling for drug addicts, by the local authorities).

21. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

There is not nation-wide statistics on homelessness. The government did not report on any evaluations carried out.

ESTONIA

1. CURRENT SITUATION

For a total population headcount of 1.340 million living in Estonia (Statistics Estonia, 2009), there were 638,200 dwellings (2007) with 96% of them in private ownership. In 2006, the estimated number of households was 573,400, the average household had 2.3 members. Approximately 85% of households live in dwellings which they own, and 15% are tenants. 65.7% of dwellings are in urban areas, and 34.3% in rural areas. One third of the total households lived in Tallinn or in its surroundings in 2006.

Housing costs represent 15.2% of the expenditure of households in 2006, and household costs 5.9%. Housing costs were the highest in Tallinn. The share of population living in a household where housing costs represent more than 40% of the total household income was 5.2% in 2007 (EU average: 12.3%). By tenure status, the share is bigger for the tenants paying a market price rent (24.6% EU average 25.7%). In case of social housing, the housing lease and other costs are generally paid by local government while the person pays rent and other utility costs.

Statistical data on people needing social housing or night shelters is available from year 2000, when the Ministry of Social Affairs¹⁹ started gathering data from the local governments that are responsible for providing social care and housing services. At the end of 2006 the number of places in establishments providing night shelter services was 383 (as Tallinn has the biggest number of homeless people, the number of places was 130 in 2006 and 160 in 2009) and there were 11 establishments providing 24h services. This service was used by 1535 people (2006): 1250 (81%) were homeless and 285 (19%) had other reasons.²⁰ NGOs have been very active and have the biggest experience in dealing with homelessness.²¹

The peak for the need for night shelter services was in 2004, the number of homeless decreased by 21% in 2006 compared to that of 2003.²² In 2007 the number of homeless people in night shelters was 1346 and in 2008 it had decreased to 957. There are very few homeless people in the counties and in those that provided such service, the demand was fully met (average occupancy rate of one shelter place was 59 % in 2007).

¹⁹ The Ministry of Social Affairs provides national and regional annual statistical data on: 1) night shelter services for the homeless (the number, age, sex, etc.) 2) shelter services and rehabilitation services to people released from penal institutions; 3) housing services in the form of social housing, premises, support homes.

²⁰ An expert opinion puts the number of homeless people in Estonia in 2006 at 3000-3500, Norway 2006, National strategy to prevent and tackle homelessness, Comment paper, Estonia, Jüri Kõre, Tartu University.

²¹ In Tallinn the Centre of Welfare Services provides shelter and counselling service; Tallinn Centre for Social Work provides social accommodation, shelter services and emergency social care (clothes, food), since 2006 they also provide debt counselling service, and since 2007 counselling those who own rent for municipal dwellings (so-called social counselling). Catering for the homeless in soup kitchens are organised in Tallinn by the Estonian Red Cross Tallinn section, JK Taverni OÜ, Salvation Army in Estonia, SA Social Work Centre Sõbra Käsi (Friend's Hand). In Tartu NGO Iseseisev Elu (Independent Life) is providing homeless day centre services and the service of supported housing (living); SA Varjupaik (Shelter) provides lodging service, etc.

²² The Environment Strategy until 2030

National statistical data is collected on the basis of service users and for this purposes a person is considered homeless²³ if he or she does not have any legal relationship (ownership, tenancy, permanent accommodation agreement) with any dwelling, room or part of these that can be qualified as a living area. People in this group do not have a residence; they do not earn the income to purchase or rent a residence, and they lack the social abilities to change the situation they are in.²⁴

22. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

The principle of the social State is reflected in the Constitution where it is stated that "the State cannot let a citizen down, it must take care of those who cannot earn a living by themselves as well as guarantee subsistence for them". The right to housing as a social right has been indirectly recognised by the Civil Chamber of the Supreme Court.²⁵

The right to housing (right to State assistance in case of need) is realised with mechanisms set in place under the *Social Welfare Act* (1995). These include: 1) the right to apply for social housing from the local government in case the person or family is not able to ensure it for itself and 2) the right to receive inevitable social assistance that also includes the opportunity to use temporary shelter.

Local governments have according to the *Local Government Organisation Act* (1993) responsibility for: provision of public services and amenities, social care, welfare services, housing and utilities, spatial planning, etc. The financial resources for provision of the services to the homeless are included in local government budgets. Every local government is free to set exact rules on who is eligible for public housing. Many local governments have specified priority target groups in their procedures for allocating social apartments that aim to prevent people from becoming homeless. These target groups include single parents, elderly people living alone, disabled people, and people who start independent life after being raised in a substitute home.

The main policy instrument for housing in Estonia is the Estonian Housing Development Plan (EHDP) 2008-2013²⁶. On the basis of EHDP the state shall invest into: increasing municipally owned housing stock, making available housing services, enhancing the quality and energy efficiency of the housing stock and into works needed to develop residential areas. The budget for EHDP is nearly 140 MEUR. This EHDP until 2013 is a follow-up to the previous plan for 2003-2008. The objectives and measures of the EHDP served as a basis for planning the state budget resources as well as for funding from the EU Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund during the period of 2007- 2013.

²³ There is no definition in law, neither is ETHOS typology officially used though all the categories of that typology receive support.

²⁴ FEANTSA Annual Theme 2008 Housing and Homelessness – National Report Estonia.

²⁵ Decision of the Civil Chamber of the Supreme Court, 18 October 2000 (3-2-1-104-00). – Riigi Teataja (The State Gazette) III 2000, 25, 278 (in Estonian). Namely, it is forbidden to evict from a municipal dwelling in case the local government is obliged to provide social assistance to the person living in the apartment, and the rent debt has arisen for valid reasons. The court in delivering its judgment also referred to section of the Constitution, which stipulates that families with many children and people with disabilities are under the special care of the local governments.

²⁶ http://www.valitsus.ee/failid/_eluasemevaldkonna_arengukava_2008_2013.pdf

Both the Estonian National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008-2010 and especially the EHDP foresee measures to support families with difficulties to cope to cover housing expenses and help to find possibilities for housing acquisition. The themes and objectives of the Estonian Environmental Strategy 2030 and National Environmental Action Plan of Estonia for 2007-2013 are closely related to EHDP.

23. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

23.1. Accessibility

In order to buy a 120 m² property in early 2009, 23 years of rent were needed, which corresponds to the EU average. Nevertheless, in early 2009, the ratio of the square metre price on disposable income per capita for Estonia was still around 35% higher than that in the EU.²⁷

In 2000, housing provision was divided between sectors as follows: 81% were in owner occupied sector, 4% co-ops, 11% in private rentals, and only 4% in public rentals (of which 25% was state owned and 75% constituted municipal housing fund). Such distribution of the housing stock is the result of the large-scale privatisation and restitution programmes that took place in the 1990s. The share of public housing dropped from 61% in 1992 to 4% by 2000. As a result, the public sector has retained only a minimal opportunity to directly influence housing provision by offering affordable rental dwellings.²⁸ Therefore between 2003 and 2006, local governments used state financing (EHDP) for building 1032 municipally owned dwellings.

According to the legislation, a distinction should be made between the social housing (which is also in a municipal ownership) and municipal housing in general (includes dwellings which have not yet been privatised as well as 'social dwellings'). Usually, the same rent level and rental conditions apply to both types of social dwellings and other dwellings in a municipal ownership.²⁹ At the end of 2007, 157 local governments (69.2% of local governments) possessed social or municipal housing. In total, local governments owned 6,393 residential spaces that could be used to provide the housing service at the end of the 2007. 302 or 4.7% of these residential spaces had been adapted for people with special needs; 5,796 or 90.7% of the residential spaces were occupied. The use of social housing is generally regulated by a contract with a term of one or two years, which can be extended if the need persists. Social housing services are also provided by private or the non-profit sector.

There are no direct limits on housing costs, although regulations exist on prices of electricity, thermal energy (heat), water and sewage services, natural gas where prices must be approved by local municipalities or by Estonian Competition Authority. Some local municipalities have also set rent controls on municipal buildings.

In 2006 subsistence benefits, foreseen by the *Social Welfare Act*, were paid to 19,229 households (ca 3.4% of the total number of households) and an estimated 46% of the amount was used to compensate housing costs. The global economic and financial crisis has had considerable impact on Estonia. The local governments have paid out 92.1% more support in

²⁷ Balázs Egert & Dubravko Mihaljek, 2007. "[Determinants of House Prices in Central and Eastern Europe](#)," [CESifo Working Paper Series](#) CESifo Working Paper

²⁸ FEANTSA Annual Theme 2008 Housing and Homelessness – National Report Estonia.

²⁹ FEANTSA Annual Theme 2008 Housing and Homelessness – National Report Estonia.

Q2 2009 than in Q2 2008 in order to guarantee the minimum income for its inhabitants (64 € per first person and additional 51 € per person).

23.2. Quality

In 2006, around 50% of the housing stock dated back to before 1970, while the stock of low-quality Soviet era apartment blocks, built during 1971-1989, accounted for some 44% of the total housing stock. Around 20% of them were of very low quality. Dwellings of less than 15 years of age accounted for only 6%. Fewer than 1000 dwellings were added annually from 1996 to 2001. Construction activities accelerated to 5100 units in 2005 and more than 7000 in 2007.

70.5% of all households live in an apartment, 19.5% in family dwellings and terraced houses and 10% in farmhouses. In the first half of 2007, 91.8% of the dwellings were permanently inhabited. The average floor area per capita was 28.9 m² in 2008.³⁰ Two-room apartments make up the largest share of dwellings, i.e. 229 860 apartments or 36% of the total.

The quality and energy consumption of the housing stock is poor. Dwellings in Estonia are smaller, older and in some cases have poorer standard amenities and the share of apartments is larger than that of private houses. In addition to the amortisation of the structures and technical systems of residential buildings the supporting infrastructure and utility systems are obsolete. However, only one tenth of the households regarded the condition of their dwelling as poor, more than 40% of the households regarded the conditions of their dwellings as good, and almost a half of the households thought that it was satisfactory.³¹

Housing deprivation by item is higher than EU-27 average (21.6% and 18.0%, respectively), whereas deprivation proportion is higher than average in the case of more than one deprivation item. The rate of population reported to live in acceptable living standards was 64.7% in Estonia in 2007, whereas it was 75.2% in EU.

Comparison to the other EU countries demonstrates that the Estonian overcrowding rate (42.8%) is one of the highest compared with other EU countries (EU-27 17.3%). At the same time the number of 1-person households that are excluded from such statistics is also very high (44.9%, the EU average 18.1%). Overcrowding by gender is the highest for females (43.4%; EU-27 16.8%); by age groups the highest for 0-17 (54.6%; EU-27 22.1%); by poverty status for poor (47.3%; EU-27 26.8%); by degree of urbanisation for intermediate (55.9%; EU-27 10.8%); by tenure status for tenants - market price (70.7%; EU-27 17.6%); by quintiles for the first quintile (46.9%; EU-27 25.5%); by households with dependent children for other household type (68.4%; EU-27 44.2%); by households without dependent children for other household type (43.3%; EU-27 19.4%).

According to a study analysing the housing-related problems 17% of households claim that their dwelling is too small and that the number of rooms is not sufficient, compared to the overcrowding rate of nearly 43% it might be surprising. However overcrowding occurs in apartments that are mainly in the capital where people prefer to come to work from all over Estonia, therefore they tend to put up with overcrowding while attempting to improve their situation. 11% of the households claims that the lack of conveniences is a very important

³⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/publication15590_en.pdf

³¹ Anneli Kährlik, Ene-Margit Tiit, Jüri Kõre, Sampo Ruoppila. Access To housing for vulnerable groups in Estonia, Praxis Centre For Policy Studies, 2003, <http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00001650/01/raport.pdf>

problem; for 10% of the households the poor condition of the dwelling is a very important concern.³²

24. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

According to FEANTSA report³³ on Estonia's situation the typical chains of events leading to becoming homeless are the following:

- Alcohol abuse -> unemployment -> rent debts -> eviction or sale of apartment (29% of cases);
- Release from a detention institution -> incapability to find employment -> incapability to rent housing in the private market due to no income and the social background (25%);
- Unemployment -> alcohol abuse -> rent debts -> eviction or sale of apartment (15%);
- Unemployment -> alcohol abuse -> family falling apart or end of partnership -> loss of housing (15%).

All local government authorities are required to provide assistance and counselling service, irrespective of the place of residence of the person in the population register. Counties have developed county-level information and counselling centres that provide people with special needs and their families with comprehensive advisory and counselling services (social, psychological, family, legal and debt counselling).

In the capital the number of homeless people is bigger but more financial means to fight the problem are available, therefore they have been able to provide social accommodation whereby every service user receives 24-hour accommodation in combination with a plan that specifies actions to reintegrate society. The objective is to assist the person in relocating to social or municipal housing or a rental apartment. In smaller local governments, the movement from night shelter to social housing is smoother and faster.

25. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The national housing policy (EHDP) is implemented by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Culture and in cooperation with the Credit and Export Guarantee Fund KredEx, Enterprise Estonia, National Heritage Board as well as by local governments and the relevant non-profit associations active in this field.

The EDHP shall be updated at least once every four years. The Development Plan shall be implemented on the basis of annual implementation plans, defining the specific nature, volume and organisation of the activities to be carried out during the nearest year. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications shall be directly responsible for the implementation of the Development Plan and evaluate the progress of the activities undertaken on the basis of the impact and output indicators specified in the Development

³² Ibid.

³³ Estonia – National Report, Housing Solutions for People who are homeless, FEANTSA Annual Theme 2008, Housing and Homeless, p. 9.

Plan. Evaluations shall be conducted on a quarterly basis and also at the end of the year, based on the quarterly reports and comprehensive annual reports submitted by KredEx.

IRELAND

1. CURRENT SITUATION

The general issue of access to housing in Ireland has been significantly affected by both population and economic growth in recent years. The population increased by 9% between 2001 and 2006 to 4.11 million while the average household size declined to 2.82 in 2006 from 3.33 in 1991³⁴. These demographic patterns helped create huge demand for housing and a consequent 'boom' in house construction - 93,419 housing units were constructed in 2006 compared to 33,725 in 1996). Despite this, the average price of a house in Ireland rose from €102,222 in 1997 to €322,634 in 2007 (although they dropped to €305,269 in 2008)³⁵.

The 2006 census³⁶ estimated that there were 1.452 million occupied permanent housing units in Ireland with a further 216,500 (12% of total) unoccupied housing units and a 50,000 (3% of total) holiday homes.

Eurostat figures reveal that, in terms of affordability, 3.1% of the population had a housing cost burden of more than 40% in 2007, compared to an EU average of 12.3%, with the first quintile the most represented among this at 11.3% (compared to 35.2% in EU). However, there is a marked difference in this group between 'owners' and 'tenants', with only 1.5% of the former (with a mortgage) exceeding the 40% threshold (compared to 8.5% in EU), but 23% of the latter group (paying market rates), just below the EU average of 25.4%. The median for the population as a whole of the share of housing costs in household income was 10% (compared to 18% in EU) falling to 9% when housing allowances are taken into account. The highest median for different groups of the share of housing costs in household income was for households headed by a lone parent or classed as 'poor' – 15% for both after housing benefits (compared to 28% in EU), and 'tenants' – 16% compared to 27% in EU.

In relation to the incidence of 'homelessness', the 2008 Housing Needs Assessment, carried out by all local authorities, found that, of those households experiencing a form of 'housing need', over 50% related to ability to meet housing costs, while 3% were classed as 'homeless', 3% lived in 'unfit accommodation', 9% were in overcrowded accommodation and another 9% in involuntary sharing. The survey also found that while 31% of those with a housing need have that need met within 12 months, a further 29% waited between 12 and 36 months³⁷.

However, a disadvantage to the Housing Needs Assessment is that it only takes account of those who have registered as having a housing need. The 'Counted In' survey³⁸, on the other

³⁴ According to Census of Ireland, <http://www.cso.ie/census/>

³⁵ Housing construction and housing cost figures are taken from national statistics from the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/>

³⁶ www.cso.ie

³⁷ The result of the assessment was included in the reply to the SPC HHE questionnaire by the Irish authorities.

³⁸ 'Counted In' is the 2008 version of a survey of homelessness carried out in Dublin every 3 years by the Homeless Agency and is available here: <http://www.homelessagency.ie/getdoc/10ba727c-4a3f-4450-9478-15c083b899de/Counted-In,-2008.aspx>

hand, is a point-in-time assessment of those using homeless services which was extended from Dublin to the cities of Cork, Galway and Limerick in 2008 and so can be considered as more comprehensive in coverage. For Dublin, this survey found that 1361 households (covering 1634 individuals) were homeless, compared to 1361 households in 2005 (a 5% increase which is the same as the population increase during the same period), while a further 708 households were regarded as living in long-term or transitional accommodation. The number of people sleeping rough in Dublin was reported to have fallen by over 40%, to 110 from 185 in 2005. In the cities of Cork, Limerick and Galway, a further 767 households were reported to be homeless, including those in transitional and long-term accommodation. Males made up more than two thirds of the homeless (68% in Dublin) while the majority of individuals were single – accounting for 60% in Dublin. The average age of homeless people was 39 in Dublin and 43 – 44 in other urban centres. 16% of homeless people in Dublin were of non-Irish nationality.

26. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

Ireland has not adopted a formal definition of homelessness but, in operational terms, it is narrower than that developed by ETHOS (although there is a commitment to review the operational definition). Access to housing is neither a legal nor a constitutional right in Ireland, although the Housing Acts and associated legislative and administrative provisions do aim at ensuring that housing needs are adequately addressed.

Overall responsibility for homelessness and housing exclusion is dispersed across a number of areas, mainly in relation to the division between housing and adult homelessness (The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government) and child homelessness (Health Service Executive - HSE) while policy implementation is primarily the responsibility of the HSE and local authorities.

Attempts at improving the coordination of governance arrangements have recently been made with the establishment of a Cross Departmental Team on Homelessness (which oversaw the preparation of the latest homelessness strategy and includes representatives of all relevant government departments and agencies) and a National Homeless Consultative Committee. The consultative committee marks a move towards more a 'partnership' based governance model (as it brings together statutory and voluntary bodies) which is further in evidence in the new homelessness strategy and the establishment of the Homeless Agency – which oversees the integrated implementation of the strategy in Dublin and whose board of management includes statutory and voluntary stakeholders.

Reflecting the definition of homelessness used, Irish public policy objectives primarily reflect a concern with housing, in so far as they are focused on preventing homelessness and, where it does happen, to ensuring it is as short as possible. These objectives are set out in the national strategy. *The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness 2008 – 2013* which also sets out roles and responsibilities for implementation across the different levels and sets out an integrated long-term system for funding. The strategy also envisages a strong role for locally based homeless fora which help coordinate action at local level and which involve non-statutory stakeholders.

27. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

27.1. Accessibility

In terms of prevention, Ireland has focused in recent years on strengthening the rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants in the private rental market through the Residential Tenancies Act, which legislates for issues such as minimum periods of notice. The follow-up of people due to be released has been addressed by homeless strategies since 2000 but an independent review has recommended that actions be improved in this area, including through better integration of services for those leaving institutional care.

Emergency accommodation for the homeless in Ireland is provided through hostels or bed and breakfast establishments while voluntary services also provide other services such as day centres and outreach services. The reports notes that there is a sufficient number of emergency places for this wishing to avail of them while also stating that policies are being put in place to support the move from emergency to more permanent accommodation. However, the details of these policies are not yet available.

Two new schemes (Support to Live Independently and Homeless RAS Initiative) are being developed by the authorities in order to promote independent living with appropriate supports. These involve sourcing accommodation through long-term leasing in the private sector combined with procurement of support services, where required. While these are currently based in Dublin, plans are afoot to roll them out nationally.

Housing in Ireland is dominated by private ownership (approximately 3 in every 4 houses are privately owned), leaving private rental (about 10%) and social rented housing (about 10%) very much as less favoured options³⁹. However, given affordability issues brought on by the housing boom of the last 15 years, Ireland has invested significantly in social and affordable housing in recent years (delivered mainly by local authorities and voluntary and cooperative bodies) in order to help those on low incomes to gain access to housing. Access to social housing can be provided through either discounted houses for purchase (at significantly below market value), shared ownership (with the local authority) or social housing for rent. Access to housing through these avenues is based on a persons 'housing need' which in turn is assessed by the relevant local authority.

Increased investment in recent years ensured that 21,250 'affordable' units were made available for purchase between 2002 and 2008. In addition, the government significantly increased resources for other forms of social housing, including direct construction by local authorities and voluntary housing groups, with the result that between 1997 and 2007 the annual provision of all forms of 'social and affordable' units almost doubled from 9,296 to 18,341⁴⁰. The official Government target is to address the housing needs of 60,000 households between 2007 and 2009. Given the low rents and subsidised purchase prices, affordability of social rented accommodation is not a major issue. However, the rapid rise in private rents in recent years means that those working on low wages, or families with one income, are most concerned by affordability issues while the increase in unemployment may now lead to increased affordability problems for those with mortgages.

³⁹ According to Census 2006, 1,068,368 dwellings in permanent housing units are 'owner occupied' out of total number of dwellings in permanent housing units of 1,462,396.
<http://beyond2020.cso.ie/Census/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=76512>

⁴⁰ Figures provided by national authorities in the reply to the SPC HHE questionnaire.

27.2. Quality

Ireland has traditionally focused on structural criteria when legislating for 'quality' housing. Local authorities are empowered to inspect dwellings under these criteria and to force owners to make improvements. The issue of 'over-crowding' is also legislated for in that two people of the opposite sex, who are over ten years of age and not living together as husband and wife, who must sleep in the same room shall be regarded as living in an over-crowded house. The rate of inspections of properties by local authorities has also increased significantly in recent years.

28. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Housing and health are the two main elements of the policy response to homelessness in Ireland although the latest strategy document does show a more integrated approach in recognising the need for cooperation among a wide range of service providers, including in relation to education, training and employment. Here, a number of supporting measures are set out while guidance has been provided and protocols signed between agencies on providing access to these employment and education related services. Such cooperation among service providers in this area is a relatively new departure in Ireland so the success of the strategy in terms of service provision will depend on the availability and coordination of these services on the ground.

29. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Data availability and its use for monitoring and evaluation has been an issue for some time in Ireland, in particular with different techniques for gathering data in use across different local authorities. However, the new homeless strategy does appear to target this issue by setting specific performance indicators for each of its six strategic aims. In addition, the roll-out of a new data collection across the country following its piloting in Dublin should address the deficiencies in how data is collected. Evaluation of strategies and their implementation is carried out under the aegis of the cross departmental team on homelessness and the national consultative committee.

GREECE

1. CURRENT SITUATION

In 2008, population in Greece increased to more than 11 million people⁴¹ due mainly to the continuation of influx of immigrants. According to the 2001 population Census, the number of households exceeded 3,6 Mio units. There were 36,600 people living in non-regular dwellings (tents, caravans, mobile homes, etc), while there were 76,200 people sharing their dwelling. According to a recent survey, in 2009, there were 7.720 homeless people and people confronted with housing exclusion (excluding Roma and refugees). However, other studies show that their number has been on the increase over recent years: approximately 14,000 people in 2005 and 20,000 people in 2008.

As regards the number of houses, official data show that in 2000 there were 5.4 Mio houses, 3.6 Mio of which were inhabited and 1.8 were empty⁴². Home ownership amounted to 74.2 % of the total population, 20.2% were tenants and 5.6% occupied their dwelling under other arrangements (donation, free of charge, etc). In general, the difficulty in acquiring a house in Greece does not stem from a shortage of houses, but is rather due to the imbalance between the price of a house and the household income. Over the last few years one observes that although there is an estimated excess supply of dwellings and the prices of flats are dropping (-1.4% in 2009 in Athens)⁴³, the demand for houses keeps decreasing. The share of the population living in a household where housing costs represent more than 40% of the total household income was 16% in 2007, higher than the respective EU-27 average (12.3%). By tenure status, this share was found to be higher (24.1%) for tenants paying a market price rent, which, nevertheless, is slightly less than the EU-27 average (25.7%).

The overcrowding rate in Greece is very high (27.6 % in 2007, EU-27 17.3%). The rate of population reported to live with zero deprivation items was 76.3%, slightly higher than the EU-27 (75.2%). However, some vulnerable groups, like the Roma, low income earners, immigrants and refugees, still face significant deprivation in terms of housing quality.

The role of the Greek State in housing has been limited until recently, despite the increase of urban population and the increase of immigrants. The lack of a legally binding definition of homelessness has not allowed the adoption of a concrete methodology which would enable the quantification and analysis of the phenomenon in Greece and the development of an integrated strategy.

30. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

The Greek Constitution acknowledges that “the acquisition of a house for those who are deprived of or are inadequately sheltered constitutes a special objective for the State” (Article 21, paragraph 4). Yet, thus far, the State has not issued the relevant laws for this right to be

⁴¹ Data extracted from: <http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE>

⁴² : http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE/BUCKET/A1604/OTHER/A1604_SAP05_TB_DC

⁴³ <http://www.bankofgreece.gr/Pages/el/Statistics/realestate.aspx>

enforceable, and as a result people are not eligible to claim for public housing support. In general, the acquisition of a house has been traditionally a private affair for the general public and the role of the State has been very limited.

Greece has not developed as yet an overall policy framework for preventing and combating homelessness and housing exclusion, neither a policy focusing on specific social groups. The exceptions in this respect are the policy actions pursued for social housing at national level, where an array of means-tested measures (rent subsidy, interest-free loans and construction projects) are being implemented by the Workers Housing Organization (OEK) which is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection. These are addressed to low income workers in order to upgrade their living conditions, while there are some small scale actions for promoting housing inclusion for Roma people in the context of an Integrated Action Plan aiming at the social inclusion of Roma.

Moreover, the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity subsidises a small number of NGOs and a few Municipalities with the purpose of running a very small number of structures (hostels) offering short stay sheltering for homeless people or victims of violence and trafficking and ex-prisoners. The Ministry provides also financing to the Prefectures for a) the provision of apartments to families in need and b) the provision of a housing subsidy amounting to €310 to a certain number of uninsured and needy old people (over 65 years of age).

31. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

31.1. Accessibility

A new law (L 3714/7.11.2008) has been in force, which is considered very useful under the present economic circumstances. It aims to protect borrowers from eviction through new foreclosure auctions arrangements. Still, there is a need for introducing provisions for supporting or re-housing the evicted.

Moreover, the Workers Housing Organization (OEK), responsible for social housing, implements actions such as: (i) rent subsidy (€ 220,000,000 for 120,000 beneficiaries), (ii) interest-free loans, addressed to disabled people and large families and for the fire-stricken (€250 Mio for 2,500 beneficiaries), (iii) new houses granted to beneficiaries with social and financial needs (following a lottery procedure). These actions are addressed to workers who fulfil certain insurance and employment prerequisites, while there are some exceptions in the cases of specific population groups such as repatriates of Greek origin, residents of border areas, etc. Apart from this array of provisions, no other provisions are in force to secure alternative forms of sheltering to all those citizens with housing needs.

The rent market is not controlled by the State and the level of rents is exclusively an individual agreement between the property owner and the tenant. The State's housing allowances (rent subsidies for low income workers and people over 65 years old, free-interest and interest subsidies for low income workers, tax-relief for borrowers) are short of securing either an outright house or decent housing conditions to every person living in the country. The majority of low income and poor people spend approximately 40% of their incomes on housing costs, which means that they are negatively affected by housing market changes.

As far as supported accommodation to homeless people is concerned, this is confined mainly to providing short stay shelter and food in hostels or other structures and, on certain

occasions, some related services. These are carried out by a small number of agencies (mainly NGOs) and cover only a small part of homeless people.

31.2. Quality

Greece lacks a legally binding policy which sets quality housing standards, other than the construction standards concerning the technical characteristics of a building as provided by the General Building Code (GBC). The persisting lack of policies both in terms of ensuring a minimum quality of housing and of linking local economic development with housing living standards, have resulted, as evidence suggests, to a relatively high rate of low quality housing mainly in terms of overcrowding as well as accessibility problems to various services. Comparable data based on the Eurostat's indicators on housing show that the overcrowding rate in Greece in 2007 was 27.6%, much higher than the respective EU-27 average of 17.3%. Urban areas presented higher overcrowding rates in comparison to other areas, tenants at market prices were confronted with higher overcrowding rates in comparison to owners and tenants at reduced price or for free. As to the proportion of people deprived, the respective EU-27 (75.2%) and Greek averages (76.3%) in 2007 were found to be more or less similar.

32. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Homeless people in Greece consist of various groups such as: women victims of intra family violence, young people, drug addicted, newcomer immigrants and refugees, Roma and repatriated people of Greek origin from ex USSR, ex-prisoners, ex- patients from psychiatric institutions, people who were evicted from rented houses and people who have lost their homes because of their inability to repay mortgages. Although there is a severe lack of reliable official data, the phenomenon of homelessness and housing exclusion presents an upward trend and the services provided are limited (in terms of coverage, budget and administrative and staff capacity). Apart from the running of a small number of short stay shelters, some supportive services are occasionally provided to homeless people such as consultancy, health insurance and health tests, unemployment card, psychological support and legal advice. Consequently, there is a need for the development of national standards on the quality of services and of integrated approaches to tackling homelessness and housing exclusion in Greece.

33. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

There is no evaluation and reporting system for homelessness and housing exclusion in Greece, either national or regional. However, considering the economic and demographic changes, it is imperative to improve data collection in the area of homelessness and housing exclusion and establish monitoring and evaluation arrangements in the context of the overall social inclusion policy framework. This, in turn, would allow a better understanding of the situation and the design of appropriate measures to cope with these phenomena.

SPAIN

1. CURRENT SITUATION

Access to housing has been severely influenced by recent developments in the socio-economic situation of Spain: The economic and financial crisis has affected severely access to housing, but the population has also continued to grow over the last years, accounting for more than 46 million people (distributed among 16,226 households) in 2007.

According to national data⁴⁴, there were 21,900 homeless in Spain in 2005⁴⁵, of which 82.7% were men, 51.8% of Spanish nationality, with an average age of 37.9 and an average income of EUR 302 / month. 37.5% took more than three years without any own lodging and 46% have children, (although only 10% live with them).

In Spain there is a dwelling by 1.88 inhabitants⁴⁶, and the number of housing units amounts to 24.5 Mio⁴⁷. The average size of a Spanish household, according to national data, is 2.8 people, although recent demographic and family structure changes have resulted in an increased number of people living alone. It can be assumed that, in general terms, the roots of homelessness do not lie with a shortage of housing, but in the imbalance between the housing prices and household incomes. With the unemployment rate rapidly increasing (up to 19.4% in November 2009), and the rate of people below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold practically unaltered in the last years, (20% in 2008⁴⁸, EU average: 16%), and although there is an estimated supply excess of 650,000 dwellings and the prices of flats are going down (-2.3% in 2008)⁴⁹, housing sales keep decreasing (from January to July 2008, the fall of housing sales has exceeded 30%)⁵⁰. The share of population living in a household where housing costs represent more than 40% of the total household income was 6.8% in 2007 (EU average: 12.3%). By tenure status, the share is bigger for tenants paying a market price rent (33% vs. an EU average of 25.7%).

The overcrowding rate is very low (3.5% in 2007, EU: 17.3%). As to the proportion of people deprived, it was very similar to the EU average in 2007 (the rate of population reported to live in acceptable living standards was 74.7% in Spain, 75.2% in EU). However, some vulnerable groups, like the Roma, still face important needs in terms of housing quality.

Spain's social expenditure destined to housing benefits (% of total benefits) was 0.8% in 2006 (EU27: 2.3%).

⁴⁴ National Homeless Survey, 2005, conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (NSI).

⁴⁵ Other sources provide homeless figures nearer to 30.000 people.

⁴⁶ National Register of Inhabitants, data of 01/01/2008 and Ministry of Housing data on accommodation units, data of 31/12/2007.

⁴⁷ It is estimated that there are about 3 Mio empty houses (NSI, Population and Housing data, 2001)

⁴⁸ 19.7% in 2007, according to national data (National Statistic Institute, Living Conditions Survey). To note that, for the first time in 2007, the data computes the ownership of the first residence, which throws significant differences in the at-risk-of-poverty rate for the elderly.

⁴⁹ FEANTSA national report

⁵⁰ FEANTSA national report

34. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

The Spanish Constitution acknowledges the right to a *decent and adequate housing*. Due to the high degree of decentralisation in Spain, the competency over housing policy is shared between the central, regional and local levels.

The main legal instrument is the Housing and Rehabilitation Plan 2009-2012. It addresses two large fronts: access to housing-related problems, as a result of increasing housing prices (with specific consideration to vulnerable groups); and the effects of the current economic and financial context on housing and construction management. The Plan aims to optimise the use of existing dwellings, to ensure a sufficient production of accommodation units and to establish the necessary conditions to guarantee equal access to housing. Specific objectives have been set up, namely to reduce the share of housing costs to a third part of the household's disposable income and increasing the rent-related activities share of the state subsidised housing). The Plan's estimated budget is €17 billion (current Plan + previous Plans) and €33 billion (agreed loans).

As part of the social services area, support policies to the homeless are an exclusive competence of the Autonomous regions in cooperation with the Municipalities. The central Government guarantees the coordination among the different public administration levels (Coordination Plan on Social Services Basic Assistance of 1998, managed by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs).

The cooperation with NGO has been strongly developed in recent years. The current NAPIncl (2008-2010) establishes the objectives, among others, of reinforcing the debate on the homeless with social organisations and of subsidising itinerant multidisciplinary social attention programmes, in cooperation with NGOs.

35. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

35.1. Accessibility

The new national legislation on land use⁵¹ introduced several measures in order to promote access to housing, including increasing the proportion of land earmarked for protected or subsidised housing (30%). The public social services system manages the so-called 'social emergency financial aid' (granted by municipalities), created to address the needs of citizens facing eviction.

Furthermore, in order to tackle the effects of the global economic crisis, the government has adopted a series of ad-hoc measures, i.e. a partial and temporary moratorium on mortgage repayment (under specific conditions)⁵², fiscal bonuses related to housing acquisition, the prepayment of the tax deduction for first residence, and the State's guarantee of 50% of the value of mortgages of subsidised housing. Other measures set a more detailed regulation of

⁵¹ RDL 2/2008 of 20 June, which establishes a minimum reserve of 30% of land for building subsidised housing. It also sets up public land patrimonies for the construction of subsidised housing + the social service system has traditionally envisaged the granting of "emergency aid" by town halls in cases of eviction.

⁵² RD 1975/2008 of 28 November, regarding "urgent measures to be adopted in matters of economy, taxation, employment and housing access"

the guarantees for access to mortgages⁵³, and a reduction in the cost of electricity for domestic use for vulnerable groups⁵⁴.

Temporary lodging for homeless people is regulated by Law 7/1985, which stipulates the creation and maintenance of *shelters* (defined as centers designed to provide food and lodging for homeless people or passers-by in situation of need for a determined period of time, including other services such as information and guidance), and of *reception centers*, (defined as residential centers addressing the needs of people in social difficulty).

The provision of social services is shared between the Autonomous regions and the Local Corporations. However, there are some measures managed at national level, like those intended to support the transition from temporary to permanent accommodation (included in the Housing and Rehabilitation Plan 2009-2012). The Plan stipulates that preferential access to State-subsidised housing should be given to particular groups including the homeless, people affected by slums eradication operations and other people socially excluded; one support mechanism are the Public Registers of People seeking subsidised housing.

According to the Housing Ministry, in 2007 the housing pool in Spain was 1.791.475 (58.1% concentrated in Cataluña, Madrid and Andalucía). The rental prices are regulated⁵⁵ and subsidised for young people⁵⁶. The creation of the *Sociedad Pública de Alquiler*, an instrument whose aim is to promote access to houses for rent, is also worth mentioning.

35.2. Quality

Law 38/1999, on Construction Management, sets up the basic construction requirements concerning functionality, safety and habitability. Additionally, all Autonomous Communities have also adopted their own housing quality standards regulations.

Housing policies are strongly linked to urban regeneration policies⁵⁷. One of the priorities of the Housing and Rehabilitation Plan 2009-2012 is related to urban regeneration, including the eradication of slums and substandard housing. Included in the HaR Plan 2009-2012, the RENOVE programme is intended to facilitate aid for the rehabilitation of accommodation units and buildings. Urban regeneration is also a priority of the Structural Funds in Spain: 43 cities have been selected under the Urban Initiative program (ERDF: €344.66 Mio).

At 3.5% in 2007, the overcrowding rate is considerably lower than the EU average (17.3%). As to the proportion of people deprived, the EU and Spanish averages were very similar in 2007, namely regarding bath/shower, indoor toilet and leaking roof. Concerning dark dwellings, Spain is doing slightly worse than the EU average (10.5% in Spain, 8.1% EU).

⁵³ Act 2/2009 of 31 March

⁵⁴ RDL 6/2009, of 30 April

⁵⁵ Law 29/1994, which determines the prices update in line with the consumer price index evolution

⁵⁶ RD 1472/2007 regulates the basic emancipation income for young people with economic aid for the payment of rent accommodation (210 € / month for 4 years). The measures have reached more than 158.227 beneficiaries, € 176.717.004 € distributed between January 2008 and March 2009.

⁵⁷ Some examples are the Law 51/2003 on Equal Opportunities and General Accessibility and the Royal Decree Law 9/2008, creating a State Local Investment Fund and a Special State Fund with the objective of boosting the economy and the employment, including among others, specific aid to adapting, rehabilitating or improving urban public spaces, construction, rehabilitation or improvement of educational, cultural and sports facilities; removal of architectural barriers, etc. These Funds have a total budget of EUR 11.000 million.

36. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

According to national data⁵⁸, there were 21.900 homeless people in Spain in 2005⁵⁹. Although social services are a regional competence, the national Government secures homogeneous services and assistance through the already mentioned Coordination Plan, and is responsible for the provision of Primary Social Service Assistance (*Servicios Sociales de Atención*) and alternative housing solutions.

The Homeless Survey, developed in 2006 by the National Statistic Institute, covered a total of 445 temporary accommodation centers and shelters, accounting for 13.033 daily available beds (of which 2.112 are in drop-in centres, 388 in pensions and 10.533 in shelters and residencies). The results of the survey showed that the average daily number of occupied beds was 10.829, which takes on an average occupancy of 83.1%.

In the framework of the European active inclusion strategy, Spain has established the following objectives: (a) support to the participation of the homeless in the labour market, including access to social insertion companies, (b) increased support to NGOs working with the homeless, (c) development of global social intervention programmes in cooperation with NGO, (d) guarantee, in the framework of the minimum economic resources, access to minimum income of insertion, (e) facilitate access to alternative lodging and to resources linked to the Public Social Service System.

37. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Ministry of Housing, in cooperation with the Ministry of Economy and Finance (through the National Statistic Institute), is responsible for the follow-up of the Housing and Rehabilitation Plan 2009-2010. A provisional closure evaluation of the previous Housing Plan (2005-2008) shows an over-fulfillment of the initially agreed financed objectives of 121% (objectives initially agreed: 544.232, extended to 720.000).

The elaboration of housing regulations is done in partnership, by a consultation process that includes the central Government, the Autonomous Communities, the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces, the Economic and Social Committee, the Consumers' Council, etc.

⁵⁸ National Homeless Survey, 2005, conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (NSI).

⁵⁹ Other sources provide homeless figures nearer to 30.000 people.

FRANCE

1. CURRENT SITUATION

For a population of 64.3 million people and 26 million households in 2009, the number of housing units amounts to 33 million in France, of which 6% are vacant (i.e. 1.95 million). The rate of ownership is growing regularly and reached 57% in 2006 for owner occupied dwellings. 20.4% of the households rent their accommodation in the private sector and 17.1% in the social housing sector. The quality of housing improved between 1996 and 2006: according to national data sources the share of houses without sanitary comfort diminished from 4% to 1.5% and the average number of person per accommodation decreased slightly to 2.3%. The percentage of households suffering from overcrowding is estimated at 9%. The proportion of the population reported to live in acceptable living standards is 79.9% in France (75.2% in the EU); however, the number of rehabilitated houses through state aid has been decreasing in recent years.

Demand for housing is influenced by social and demographic trends, such as the increase in the number of households, in particular of one or two people. The housing crisis in France thus results from a quantitative shortage but also from the gap between households' income and the cost of housing (for both the real estate and rental markets). The sharp increase in the cost of housing since the middle of the 1980s has been indeed a major problem. Housing is the largest item of household expenditure and accounts for 22% for tenants against 14% in the 1980s⁶⁰. The share of the population living in a household where housing costs exceed 40% of the total disposable income amounts to 5.6% (12.3% in the EU) and to 16.4% for tenants in the private sector (25.4% in the EU). This situation explains the low level of residential mobility in the social housing sector.

Until the financial crisis, the recent recovery in the construction of residential buildings made it possible to meet annual needs without allowing to make up for the deficit accumulated over more than 20 years (for that purpose, 500,000 houses a year would be necessary over the period 2005-2010, then 470,000 during the following decade, a threshold never reached in recent years: in 2007, the number of new dwellings constructed or started reached 438,000 – which was the highest number in years). In addition, the supply does not always match the characteristics of demand: social housing accounts for 43% of the rental stock. In spite of the effort to develop social housing, it cannot meet the needs, in particular of the poorest people, because of the increasing share of intermediate housing, of increased duration of authorisation procedures and of an inadequate geographical distribution. After the real estate crisis worsened in the autumn 2008, the lack of dwellings was estimated at 900,000 at the end of 2009 by the Foundation Abbé Pierre.

National data is not very precise as regards homeless or housing exclusion. A 2001 INSEE survey measured that during an average week of January 2001, 86.500 different people of 18 years old or more, benefited, at least once, from an accommodation service or a hot meal distribution⁶¹.

⁶⁰ National data

⁶¹ In 2009 INSEE produced an estimate, not excluding double counts, according to which there were 14 600 people living rough, 9100 in night shelters, 43 000 in homeless centres, 1500 in transitional supported accommodation, 4500 in women's shelter accommodation, 12 850 in temporary

38. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

The right to housing is not in the Constitution but access for all to decent housing is an aim of constitutional value according to the Constitutional Council. In order to ensure a certain level of social housing and a socially balanced mix of population, under the Solidarity and Urban Renewal Act (SRU Act) of 13 December 2000, social housing must represent at least 20% of the principal habitations in all municipalities of more than 3500 inhabitants (1500 in the Ile de France) located in urban areas of more than 50,000 inhabitants including a commune of more than 15,000 inhabitants. The Right to Housing Act (DALO Act) of 5 March 2007 institutes an enforceable right to housing and imposes now on the public authorities a result based obligation as regards housing: the recipients can lodge amicable and then contentious appeals.

Developing housing corresponding to the needs of the most disadvantaged in the public sector and in the regulated private sector at affordable costs is one of the objectives of the last national strategies reports for social protection and social inclusion. This report underlines the need for a specific effort in the regions and areas suffering from a deficit in social housing, in particular Ile de France region.

The policy to fight homelessness is under the responsibility of the State with the support of NGOs and of local authorities (the "départements" being in charge of families). NGOs play an important role in the definition and the implementation of policies to fight homelessness, in particular through the National Council for the Fight against Exclusions (CNLE). Housing policies are under the responsibility of the municipalities, which requires a complex exercise of coordination of both policies through a common programming framework. The reinforcement of this framework is foreseen by the Mobilisation for Housing and Fight against Exclusions Act (MOLLE law) of 25 March 2009. In view of these various levels of intervention and of the deregulation of rents, the 2009 report of the Council of State points to a split model of governance characterised by the predominance of the market.

The national objective as regards the support to homeless people, set in the framework of the organic law concerning the Finance Acts (LOLF), is to improve the fluidity and efficiency in the supply of services to the most vulnerable. This objective is linked to intermediate objectives with indicators (proportion of people finding accommodation after an emergency call, share of people finding a permanent housing and/or employment, share of specific accommodations...).

39. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

39.1. Accessibility

The policy to promote the affordability of housing is based on the building of rent regulated housing units (social housing and subsidies for investments in the regulated rental housing sector) and means-tested housing allowances, which also depend on the level of the rents. Housing allowances benefit 5.7 million households. A rise in the percentage of total disposable income devoted to the cost of housing was observed between 2000 and 2007, in particular in the private sector, owing to the increase in rents and insufficient indexation of

accommodation, 16 000 in temporary accommodation or reception centres for asylum seekers or refugees. These data are based on a light version of the ETHOS nomenclature and are drawn from a variety of sources.

allowances. Better indexation of these allowances on the rental index has been in place since 2007.

The Social Cohesion Plan (2004) set the ambitious goal of 500 000 social housing units over five years (with 140 000 housing units planned for 2010). There is, however, a shift recently towards promoting home-ownership with the objective of selling 40 000 social houses a year. The social housing objective of the SRU Act has not yet been met and the penalties laid down by the law are not very effective (moreover, only 140 infringement procedures were initiated in 2004 for 500 municipalities in breach of the law). An overall deterioration in access to housing has been observed, especially for the most disadvantaged households, and the economic crisis has worsened this. In 2007, only one third of the 1.2 million applicants for social housing obtained satisfaction.

The Fight against Exclusion Act of 29 July 1998 provides for the prevention of evictions through an emergency mechanism for tenants acting in good faith (and who have priority for relocation under the DALO Act), departmental charters for the prevention of evictions, the conducting of social surveys, a section on prevention in departmental plans for housing disadvantaged people and specialised coordinating of. However, the number of evictions rose in 2007 to 106 000 eviction orders.

Even though the DALO Act seeks to facilitate access to social housing for persons in difficulty, its effects are still limited and there seems to be a lack of information for the potential beneficiaries. In addition, there are indications that the quotas of housing units reserved for priority households are only 45 000 a year for the 600 000 to 800 000 households concerned and are distributed unevenly across the territory.

The Government has launched a major priority programme for 2008-12 for accommodation and access to housing for homeless people and persons suffering from housing exclusion based on the following principles: stepping up the fight against substandard housing (the goal being 15 000 housing units in 2008), preventing evictions of tenants, preventing homelessness for those leaving an institution, offers of decent accommodation solutions, making use of all existing housing, meeting the objectives set for the construction of very low-cost social housing units (20 000 a year) and of places in relay houses (9 000 over the period). This multi-annual investment plan amounts to €250 million.

Following three successive plans from 2006 to 2008, the capacity of temporary accommodation increased significantly in conjunction with the development of social alert services. This system includes a general sector divided into emergency (29 639 places), stabilisation (7 871 places) and integration accommodation (30 957 places) and a sector comprising 33 094 places for asylum-seekers⁶². The economic recovery plan adopted at the end of 2008 provided for an additional 1 000 places. Specific solutions are provided for women, in particular those who are victims of violence. In addition there is a supply of temporary housing (social residences, houses managed or sub-leased by NGOs etc.). Bridging the gap between temporary accommodation system and access to permanent housing are intermediate solutions, such as relay or boarding houses (7 160 places). Despite a constant increase in the supply of housing over the last 20 years, it is still insufficient to meet demand and sometimes has the perverse effect of keeping people in temporary accommodation. This is due to rigidities in the system and lack of flows between temporary accommodation and

⁶² Data from 30/09/2009.

permanent housing, in particular because of the congestion of supported transitional accommodation, which is supposed to be an intermediate stage. In the new national strategy adopted for 2009-12, access to housing is a priority. Given the inadequate results of a system that does not form a whole and where the actors are too dispersed, the new strategy aims to set up a proper public service for temporary accommodation and access to housing in order to smooth the way.

39.2. Quality

The National Urban Renewal Programme (PNRU) set up by the Law of 1 August 2003 aims to rehabilitate 530 vulnerable areas (dwellings, public facilities and urban renewal) accounting for four million inhabitants by the end of 2013. The national programme for upgrading old degraded areas for 2009-16, provided for by the MOLLE Act, supplements the PNRU on 100 sites featuring insalubrious housing or a high proportion of empty housing units. The housing section includes a programme for the construction of social housing, renovation and demolition.

600 000 housing units are affected by a lack of comfort or as substandard, which accounts for approximately one million people. The National Pole for the Fight against Substandard Housing set up a specific plan which includes the identification of substandard housing units and the obligation on prefects to enforce the legislation on substandard and hazardous housing. The Fund for Aid to Emergency Relocation aims to encourage the relocation of households living in hazardous housing.

A national quality framework indicates the nature and the quality criteria of services provided by reception, accommodation and inclusion centres.

40. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Homeless people benefit from the same type of support as all persons suffering from severe social exclusion. They are therefore potential beneficiaries of the newly implemented Active Solidarity Income (RSA), which guarantees an income progression to the recipients of minimum income (RMI) or of the lone parent allowance of the allowance for lone parent taking up employment.

The Universal Medical Cover (CMU) gives free access to health care to persons with very low incomes, even though out-of-pocket payments remain very high for optical equipment and dentistry.

In addition to accommodation services, homeless people can benefit from a first help (in particular through a dedicated helpline for homeless people), and from day centres offering showers, restrooms, soup kitchens, cultural services, administrative and social assistance and a postal address.

41. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The law provides for an internal and external evaluation of accommodation centres.

In the context of the LOLF, the publication of the indicators attached to the objectives should help to measure the results of policies implemented in this field. However, no scientific

evaluation of homelessness policies is available yet. Many bodies deal with the subject in various reports and working papers raising the following issues: lack of smooth flow between accommodation and housing, which keeps many households in precarious situations, insufficient knowledge of the people concerned and their needs, inadequate quality of facilities, shortcomings in monitoring and evaluation.

More generally, the 2009 report from the *Conseil d'Etat* stresses the need to develop statistics in the field of housing, notably to improve knowledge of demand and be able to adapt policies.

ITALY

1. CURRENT SITUATION

In Italy there is no official recognition of homelessness, and no official definition. Different surveys estimate the number of homeless people to be between 17,000 and 64,000 people, others around 80,000 people, plus another 40,000 “invisible” homeless people, who have no contacts with voluntary associations⁶³. Recently Caritas wrote that there could be up to 120,000 homeless people⁶⁴. This data brings the number of homeless to roughly 0.2% of the total resident population.

The profile of homeless people shows a prevalence of men (around 80%); aged around 40; 60-80% unmarried, divorced or similar; 30% also with higher education; 30% in work although mainly in precarious jobs and informal economy; with a clear increase in immigrants 60 - 80%.

11 million people live in Italy in 4,327,617 rented accommodations; and owner-occupied houses amount to about 15,453,656 units for 41 million inhabitants. According to ISTAT, 23.1% tenant-occupied houses belong to a Public Body. The general census by ISTAT assessed that more than 2 million houses were overcrowded, as well as 1.4 million people lived in sub-standard conditions; the demand was estimated at 344,000 new houses.

The share of population living in a household where housing costs represent more than 40% of the total household income was 7.7% in 2007 (EU average: 12.3%). The share of population whose housing cost burden exceeds 40% by tenure status is 25% (tenant's market price) in 2007 vs. an EU average of 25.4%.

The overcrowding rate is high, 23.7% in 2007, compared with EU: 17.3%. As to the proportion of people deprived, it was very similar to the EU average in 2007; the rate of population reported to live in acceptable living standards was 75.6% in Italy, 75.2% in EU.

42. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

In Italy, HHE is a multifaceted issue where several policy fields converge with different levels of responsibility. The Constitutional Law No 3/2001 attributed legislative competence to the regions for social policies, which includes housing and urban planning, vocational training and employment policies. The law attributed a dual converging legislation between the State and the Regions in health and land use policies. The State is required to determine only the essential levels of services concerning civil and social right and is responsible for migration policy and social insurance (e.g. pensions and unemployment benefits). The national objectives are promoted through OMC (open method of co-ordination) mechanisms.

Each region is required to define territorially integrated plans which should promote and implement consistently social policies. There are differences between regions.

⁶³ Tosi A., The construction of Homelessness in Italy, September 2003 (paper)

⁶⁴ Caritas Ambrosiana, *Persone senza fissa dimora*, Carocci, Roma, 2009

As to public housing, the national level allocated resources from the taxation, which are then distributed to the regions according to the number of inhabitants, the regional level plans and implements the interventions and the local levels call for the access to social housing. With the national Law 133/2008, a national housing plan has been launched to increase housing stock for disadvantaged groups.

The National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (NSRSPSI) 2006 – 2008 announced initiatives to face HHE like a national public housing plan and an updated survey on homelessness. In the 2008–2010 NSRSPSI extreme poverty and homelessness are explicit priorities with the following expected initiatives: research on statistics, needs, reasons and services concerning homeless; a national scheme to recognise a legal residence for homeless people (population registry) in collaboration with municipalities and their national association (ANCI) in order to allow homeless to access services devoted to vulnerable people; national guidelines to fight against extreme poverty in the larger urban areas; a national round table open to those experiencing poverty; a national plan for public housing support including refurbishment of existing houses and urban renovation projects.

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Policies with a view to further surveying and investigating this phenomenon in Italy, by improving the collection of statistical data and the knowledge of the needs, causes and progress of these “carriers in poverty”, as well as the services provided to these social groups, decided to launch a quantitative survey in partnership with Istat, Caritas and the Federazione Italiana Organismi Persone Senza Dimora (abbreviated as FIO.Psd), the Italian Federation of Organisations working with Homeless People, the Italian member of the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA). At the same time, an ethnographical survey was launched in 5 among the largest cities in Italy: Milan, Genoa, Bologna, Rome and Bari, on the daily life of homeless people, how they survive, their relationship with reality and their spaces, and, above all, with the homeless care services. The aim of this survey is to further investigate the problem, in order to identify any appropriate policies, targeted actions and projects for improving the living conditions of these people. The related research work, outsourced to several important Italian research centres and universities, was launched in January 2008 and is still under way.

43. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

43.1. Accessibility

Between 2007 and 2008, there was an 11% increase in executed evictions, a percentage similar to those recorded between 2002 and 2003 (+13%) and between 2003 and 2004 (+10%). Measures to mitigate the impact of evictions do not concern evictions for non-payment of rent, but only those for the lease ending (amounting to 20% of all eviction orders in 2008 and 26% of all those issued between 2001 and 2008). These measures (introduced by Law No 431/1998) consist in suspension of eviction orders and in a national fund that includes monetary support to pay the rent. The fund came into operation since 2001 after the identification (made by Law No 388/2000) of the share devoted to economic support and the target groups (vulnerable tenants such as people aged over 65, disabled and terminally ill patients), while the yearly low income threshold was successively fixed at €27,000 per households (Law No 9/2007). A series of laws followed to postpone, year by year, the eviction orders up to the end of 2009, according to the latest act (Law No 102/2009), while waiting for the implementation of a national plan for public housing.

43.2. Quality

In Italy the legal definition of “inadequate”/“unfit for habitation” and “overcrowding” is contained in a Ministerial decree of 5 July 1975. It measures the minimal dimension of housing on the base of the family size. Except for the minimal area for each family member, no other constraints are fixed by this law.

According to the response, the existing links between housing and urban regeneration policies are difficult to analyse due to differences in regional and local plans (only three questionnaires filled by the regional and provincial authorities are annexed for consultation).

Anyway, a clearer general frame is provided by regional and local authorities and by the land registry offices that define standards and regulations concerning housing typologies. Statistically, a dwelling is usually considered as a set of rooms or even a single useful room, but huts, caves, containers and other precarious housing are not recorded; so it is not easy to have an evaluation of this category of possible users.

Basic housing services are generally available in all houses, but in the South and in the islands for instance a percentage of householders don't have heating systems. The overcrowding could be reduced in the next years if the criteria for social dwellings (m.d. 22 April 2008) is applied throughout the national territory and if the national housing plan is implemented, capitalising on significant experiences of urban renovation and fostering new initiatives of sustainable spatial planning that merges social and environmental dimensions.

44. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

The response confirms that local authorities consider homelessness in developing their social plans. The answer mentions also typology and contents of some services (e.g. health, distribution of food and clothing, shelters and dormitories, street units and reception centres), also if this specific theme did not receive a sufficient attention by the national authority.

The national reforms (laws N. 328/2000 and N. 285/1997) favoured the development of integrated local HHE schemes aimed at promoting active inclusion. However, a national plan on HHE does not exist, but local authorities incorporate HHE policies into local welfare systems. Elaborating on the most recent data (ISTAT 2006 published in 2009), expenditure for housing policies represents 3% of the total amount for social services in 2006. Approximately 40% of costs for housing direct services (€6,663) is assigned to poor people and immigrants (17,250 people globally, with €386 per capita). Nearly 53% of housing economic subsidies (€89,483) is devoted to poor people (45%) and immigrants (9%); 95,300 people in all, with €939 per capita. Local authorities spend 4% of their annual budget for welfare policies (€ 5,546) to provide housing support and territorial facilities to poor people and immigrants who constitute the core of HHE issues. Recent acts show that difficulties exist on the immigrants policies. For instance, the recent law N. 133/2008 stated eligibility for a national public housing linked to the minimum permanency time of ten years in Italy or five years in the same region; the so-called social card is reserved only for Italian citizens resident in Italy; a minimum social pension allowance (for people aged over 65) is reserved since the first January 2009 to those who live permanently and have worked legally for ten years in Italy with an income at least equal to the allowance amount. Allowances for families with at least three under age children were not extended to non-EU citizens (Law N. 448.1998).

The most innovative local plans were developed in regions such as Toscana, Emilia Romagna, Veneto and Lombardia, to favour networks between services, partnerships between public institutions, private and social sectors also to rationalise the utilisation of available resources. Data concerning homeless people can be extrapolated from the amount devoted to poor people (€425 million); 81,440 homeless recipients (9% of the poor recipients).

45. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The specific theme did not receive sufficient attention in the national response. However some initiatives are described in the 2006-2008 NSRSPSI.

A first experimentation at national level with methods aimed at promoting participation of people experiencing poverty and their associations in the analysis and assessments of living conditions and schemes for social inclusion was launched.

Monitoring and evaluation on homelessness issues are not systematically developed up until now. The applications of different methodologies produced results that are not comparable.

CYPRUS

1. CURRENT SITUATION

Homelessness is not experienced in Cyprus in the conventional understanding of the phenomenon. Rough sleeping is not observed, and presence of a traditionally strong family support culture minimises the risk of homelessness in most cases. People from certain social backgrounds and specific vulnerable groups (such as large families, low-income families, people with disabilities, immigrants, victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation) are, however, prone to a risk of housing exclusion, which is addressed to some extent through an array of housing support schemes provided by the Government.

Overall share of the population with excessive housing cost burden (cost exceeding 40% of household income) is observed at 1.9% which is by far the lowest figure among EU27 countries. This in part relates to high levels of home ownership among the Cypriot population.⁶⁵ When data is segregated by tenure status, it is seen that the percentage of people facing excessive housing cost burden increases to 12% for those who reside in rental accommodation, while only 0.2% of 'home owners' and 1.5% of 'home owners with mortgage' face a similar burden. Although those residing in rental accommodation face a relatively higher burden than home owners, the figures are still largely favourable in comparison to the rest of EU27.⁶⁶ Cyprus also has the lowest overcrowding rate among EU27 with 1.5%.

When data is segregated by risk of poverty, it is seen that excessive housing cost burden stands at 8% (38.1% for EU27) and the overcrowding rate increases to 4% (26.8% for EU27). These are still some of the lowest figures in Europe. Considering that Cyprus has been facing a challenge due to high rates of poverty risk especially among the elderly population, it is of importance that the HHE indicators signal a positive situation. Figures imply that a large proportion of people under risk of poverty are not exposed to further risks due to housing-related problems.

Available indicators do not segregate data by nationality, country of birth, or residency status. As such, it is difficult to assess whether the immigrant population is facing a relatively higher risk of housing exclusion due to their vulnerable status in the labour market. As indicated in LFS and national labour statistics of Cyprus, there is an increasing number of foreign-born participants in the labour market, and currently around 18% of the known labour force is foreign-born. Most of these workers are employed in relatively low-paid sectors (private households, hotels and restaurants, construction) and unlike the local population, they may not always have a strong family network to depend on for support. With unemployment expected to increase to 6% in 2010 due to economic slow-down especially in tourism and construction sectors, the risk of housing exclusion and possible problems of availability, accessibility, and quality of housing faced by immigrants needs to be monitored more carefully.

⁶⁵ 68% of all homes are owner-occupied according to the 2001 Population Census of Cyprus. 14% is under rent, 6% is vacant. The rest is mostly composed of certain housing schemes provided by the Government.

⁶⁶ Respective figures for excessive housing cost burden for EU27 is 25.4% for tenants, 6.7% for home owners, and 8.6% for home owners with mortgage.

46. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

Housing policies of the Cypriot Government focus on strengthening access to adequate housing, especially for certain risk groups. Large families, low-income families, people with disabilities, persons residing in rural areas, the Roma, and people displaced following the Turkish military operations in 1974 are in the centre of Government policy. Division of building plots, provision of special grants and loans for purchasing or building homes, provision of grants for home repairs, subsidisation of rents are some of the available support measures for different risk groups. While the Ministry of Interior is responsible for housing policy, Social Welfare Services (SWS) of the Ministry of Labour also get involved in the provision of certain housing support benefits (such as rent allowance for recipients of public assistance).

2009 annual budget for housing policies implemented by the Ministry of Interior amounts to around €170 Mio. Majority of the budget is devoted to various housing schemes operating in big cities, and other support schemes in the form of subsidies, loans, and grants provided for construction, maintenance and repairs. Two housing projects for the Roma are also included within this budget.

It needs to be noted that the changing demographic structure of the society, partly due to increased migration, may lead to the emergence of new risk groups, other than those already addressed by Government policy. In this regard, development of a uniform risk identification framework in the area of HHE could prove valuable in strengthening the continuity of the Government's success in ensuring access to adequate housing.

47. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

47.1. Accessibility

Access to adequate housing is not a problem for a majority of the population, mainly due to high levels of home ownership. There are also no major problems regarding accessibility of rental housing. Rent Control Law of 1983 establishes rent-controlled areas where the market price of rental housing is kept under control according to limits established by two-yearly Council of Ministers Ordinances. The Law also prohibits eviction of tenants unless ordered by the Rent Control Court. Recipients of public assistance can qualify for a special rent allowance under the Public Assistance and Services Law of 2006. Low-income households can qualify for grants and low-interest loans as assistance towards purchase of a home. Large families and people with disabilities are also eligible for a variety of grants and loans under the Unified Housing Scheme of the Government.

47.2. Quality

When housing deprivation indicators are taken into consideration, it is seen that Cyprus has largely favourable housing quality standards in comparison to the rest of EU27. It is only with regards to leaking roofs that Cyprus experiences a deprivation proportion of 30.1% which is the second highest value among all Member States. This is indeed a very surprising result, considering the overall positive performance maintained in other HHE indicators, and may be attributed to how the respondents perceived the relevant question of the EU-SILC

questionnaire⁶⁷. Certain home repair benefits are available to low income households, and the consumer price index for household equipment and supplies has seen little inflation over the past few years.

As to the quality of housing available to immigrants, more indicative data is needed to conclude whether the overall favourable housing quality situation is maintained within this social group as well.

48. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

In the absence of rough sleeping and severe forms of housing exclusion, Cyprus does not operate emergency reception centres or special housing services for the homeless. Various temporary accommodation services are, however, available in specific cases. Association for the Support of Prisoners is known to provide a certain degree of assistance to those recently released from prisons in finding accommodation. People who have been under the care of the Social Welfare Services are eligible for different forms of further assistance after they cease to be under SWS care. A reception centre provides a degree of temporary accommodation for asylum seekers until alternative accommodation is found. The 2008-2010 National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion for Cyprus also reports that a State Shelter was opened in 2007 for victims of sexual exploitation. It could be of great value if a uniform monitoring and evaluation framework could be devised to establish standards, and assess the extent to which all these separate services function purposefully, effectively, and provide the persons in need with adequate protection they require.

49. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

As Cyprus has not traditionally experienced homelessness and severe housing exclusion, there are no national or regional regular reporting structures in practice. There is also no evaluation or study carried out regarding the policies addressed to homelessness and housing exclusion. In the case of homelessness, this is understandable as severe forms of housing exclusion, such as rough sleeping, are not relevant to the Cypriot context. However, considering the changing demographic composition of the Cypriot population – which impacts upon the traditional reliance on family support structures in society – monitoring and evaluation instruments may need to be developed to pre-empt possible problems of housing exclusion before they begin to occur, especially among vulnerable social groups.

⁶⁷ Specifically, the instructions for the relevant question from 2005 to 2007 were: “Whether, **in the judgement of the household respondent**, the dwelling has a problem with a leaking roof, damp ceilings, dampness in the walls, floors or foundation or rot in window frames and doors”. From 2008 onwards, the instructions were modified with a view to getting an **objective measure** of the condition of the dwelling. The modification of the instructions started to have an impact on the result, which decreased to 26% in 2008. Although it is still high, more objective results are expected to be recorded from 2009 onwards.

LATVIA

1. CURRENT SITUATION

Latvia's population of 2.270 894 people (in 2008) has been on a declining trend. This will continue according to population projections reaching 1.745820 by 2055. In 2007 there were 868 000 private households (compared to 954 in 2001). The size of households is also on a decrease, while the number of single person households is increasing.

The housing stock is dominated by comparatively small apartments in urban or densely populated areas and by comparatively deprived houses in rural areas. It is mostly privately owned. The share of households with mortgage is high (24.8%). Latvia has the second highest EU-27 indicator after Slovakia (the EU average rate being 8.6%). This indicator may reflect the high rent and housing prices in Latvia as well as the comparatively easy access to loans during the boom. Considering the current bleak social and economic developments, this indicator might even be on a growing trend, unless the difficulties in the banking sector hamper the possibilities to obtain mortgage. The demand for social housing is growing.

In terms of affordability, 9.5 % of the population had a housing cost burden of more than 40%, which seems low compared to the EU average of 12.3%. However, the poorest population (the 1st income quintile) is overrepresented (31.4%), especially if compared to Estonia and Lithuania. Data on social assistance reflect the rapidly growing numbers of beneficiaries of the housing benefit and the high proportion of social assistance expenditure for this type of support. There is also a marked difference between 'owners' and 'tenants', with 24.8% of the former (with a mortgage) exceeding the 40% threshold (compared to 8.5% in the EU). Tenants seem to perform well below the EU-27 average, but this result would deserve a cautious interpretation.

The total overcrowding rate (59.1%) is the highest in the EU and compares badly to the average of 17.3%. This situation could be linked to historical legacy of soviet period and limited public investment afterwards. The highest overcrowding rate (77.6%) can be observed in smaller towns, where the housing stock has undergone depreciation and the construction of new housing has been at its lowest. Overcrowding almost equally affects the poor and non-poor, with tenure status making no significant difference. The category 'others' performs badly and would require attention. Overall, the children live in overcrowded conditions most often (72.1%). The median of the distribution among the individuals of the share of housing costs in the total disposable income in 2006 is slightly lower than the EU average. However, it should be taken into account that during 2008-09 payments for rent and utility prices have substantially increased. Also, no data are available on the possible impact of housing allowances.

In 2007 the population living in dwellings deprived at least by one item represented 17.9%. The highest share in the EU or 3.1% is deprived of 4 items. A formal definition or typology of homelessness and housing exclusion has not been adopted. Only those people who do not have a declared domicile and use the services of night shelters or shelters are deemed to be homeless. Thus, the actual number of the homeless could be higher than the data on temporary housing suggest. In Latvia data on the number of evictions as well as number of persons without any shelter or in insecure and inadequate accommodation is not collected. In

2008 the local governments provided temporary housing for 208 persons (according to the legislation such premises can be leased for a period up to one year).

Severe economic crises and surging unemployment together with decreasing wages, benefits and pensions are among causes for growing homelessness in 2009. Some of the developments in legislation (lifting of 'ceiling' for rent of housing and the land where the house is built, if belonging to another private owner) might further contribute to difficulties. Currently those overburdened with debts, the unemployed, orphans, ex-convicts and individuals suffering from addictions evicted from their apartments are the most frequent clients of night- shelters.

50. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

Latvia has not elaborated a national strategy on homelessness. The Ministry for Economics is responsible for developing and implementing the housing policy (including tackling housing exclusion and social housing policy). Policies related to benefits addressing poverty risk and provision of social care and rehabilitation services are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Welfare. However, the responsibility for actual provision of housing (social included) and housing benefits rests with the local governments. Under the anti-crises measures (Social safety net activities) it is intended to earmark 20% of the total housing benefit amount in the state budget to provide support to individual local governments unable to ensure a full payment of housing benefits due.

The current approach to homelessness problem is narrow and more linked to the provision of night- shelter services. Thus, in accordance with the *Law on Social Services and Social Assistance*, shelter and night shelter provides services for persons without a definite place of residence. However, a more ambitious approach during the current fiscal adjustment and economic contraction period could not realistically be expected.

51. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

51.1. Accessibility

In the current economic situation households are facing increasing difficulties in paying their mortgages. To address this situation, there are discussions on the possibilities to draft legislation supporting the people overburdened by debt and in danger of losing their only home. The difficulties to proceed with this initiative are linked to lack of financial resources. There are no special measures to support people under the threat of eviction (for utility, rent and other debts) except for some protection for families with minor children. Also, to protect lower income groups from eviction, housing benefit has become mandatory part of social assistance in 2009.

There were intentions to provide financing for overall housing policy instruments in 2009, 2010 and 2011 in the amount of LVL 12 million per year, but due to the crisis the initiative has been significantly reduced. In 2009 the central government participated (by providing 50% of financing) in a support scheme administrated by the local governments. This support targets the tenants from denationalised houses who have to vacate the residential space. For this purpose LVL 1 599 713 were spent. Additional LVL 251 091 were allocated for helping the owners of apartments to improve energy efficiency. In 2010 measures for improving energy efficiency will continue (LVL 554 thousand allocated).

Temporary accommodation for the homeless is provided by means of shelters and night-shelters. Night shelter provides lodging, dinner and personal hygiene opportunities for people with no place of residence or those in crises situation. Shelter is a social institution that helps persons without a defined place of residence or people in a crisis situation with the possibility of short-term residence, food, opportunities for personal hygiene and the services provided by social work specialists. In 2008, there were 15 municipal night shelters, 3 shelters for homeless persons operated by non-governmental organisations and 2 private night-shelters. As example, currently the night shelter of the Rzekne local government is able to shelter 30 people, but during the cold months of the year up to 56 people. The Riga shelter is able to shelter 170 people, but if required, during the cold months of the year even up to 230 people. The growing number of the homeless in Riga exceeds the number of places in this shelter therefore in 2009 the local government purchases services already from five NGOs.

51.2. Quality

Requirements for service providers to ensure quality standards in shelters and night-shelters are defined in the *Law on Social Services and Social Assistance*. The Cabinet of Ministers has adopted "*Requirements for Social Service Providers*" already in 2003. The concept of residential space suitable for living is defined by the *Law on Assistance in Solving Apartment Matters*: a lighted, heated room suitable for long-term human accommodation, for placing household items and complying with the construction and hygiene requirements set by the Cabinet of Ministers. The quality of housing is mostly linked to the purchasing power of households. The share of the population living in dwellings deprived at least by one item was 17.9% in 2007 compared to 18,1% on average in the EU. 26.3% lived in dwellings with a leaking roof, 22.1% had no bath or shower, 19.5% had no indoor toilet. The total overcrowding rate was the highest in the EU: 59.1% compared to the EU average of 17.3%. In the current social and economic situation population and local governments lack financing even to fully cover expenditure for current quality.

52. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Homeless people are entitled to the basic general services as all other residents of Latvia. They can register in the State Employment Service and take part in all active labour market measures, including the ESF supported complex aid measures. This includes psychological, consultative and employment aid for the unemployed facing special social exclusion risks (like disability, low level of education, addictions or dependencies).

Social workers in shelters, night shelters and crisis centres work with clients. Also street-work with people sleeping rough is provided in some municipalities, mostly during winter.

In addition, anti-crisis measures (social safety net activities) that have just been introduced, apart from improving access to income-tested benefits in local governments, will also improve access to healthcare for the poor.

53. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Housing policy issues are not subject to systematic monitoring and evaluation. Data are accumulated and published on the housing stock and its quality as well as the information provided by local governments concerning assistance in housing matters. However, a clear institutional mechanism using this data for coherent policy development does not seem to be

in place. Currently there is a fragmentation, as each line ministry concentrates on the sector under its responsibility. Also, the EU-SILC data on housing seem to be neglected in the process of policy monitoring.

LITHUANIA

1. CURRENT SITUATION

In 2008 Lithuania had a population of 3.3 million people. They lived in 1,413 thousand households. The dynamics of the demographic situation and the changes in the number of households can be characterised by reverse trends. While the population shrunk by over 100 thousand people, the number of households increased by 236 thousand in 2003-2008. The demand for social housing grew by 20% per year on average, while the availability of the social housing stock increased only by 2.3% yearly in 2004-2008. In 2008, there were 23,761 pending demands registered for the rent of social housing.

The housing stock is dominated by private ownership. Over 97% of residents lived in privately-owned dwellings in 2008. The share of households with a mortgage is comparatively low. The housing stock is dominated by comparatively small apartments in urban or densely populated areas and by comparatively deprived houses in rural areas or thinly populated areas. In 2007 the population living in dwellings deprived at least by one item represented 40.4% compared to 24.8% in the EU. The total overcrowding rate in Lithuania was 51.8% (56.5% in 1st and 40.9% in 5th quintile) compared to the EU average of 17.3% in 2007. Very high overcrowding rates in all quintiles reveal overall shortage of housing in Lithuania. Households with dependant children and tenants' household were overcrowded the most, 66% of children aged 0-17 (EU: 22.1%) and 80.2% of tenants at market price (17.6% in the EU) lived in overcrowded households. The overcrowding rate was lower for people aged over 65 and for households without dependent children.

The share of population living in households where housing costs burden exceeded 40% of the total household income was relatively low at 4.9% in 2007 (EU average: 12.3%). That can be linked to a very high share of privately owned dwellings, comparatively low share of households with mortgages and sharing of utility and other costs among a larger number of people because of high overcrowding rate. Housing costs exceeded 40% of income among 20.2% of poor people and only among 1.2% of the rest of the population (EU: 38.1% and 7.2%). That reflects large income inequalities. Housing costs burden exceeded 40% of income among 32.6% (EU: 25.4%) of tenants at market price compared to 4% (EU: 6.7%) among outright owners and 5.1% (EU: 8.6%) among owners with mortgage. However, the housing costs burden for owners with a mortgage can increase significantly due to the rise in unemployment, deteriorating people's incomes and high interest rates for mortgages in the national currency (LTL). By different population groups, housing costs represented the highest share in the income among lone parents, single households, people over 65, tenants and people at risk of poverty.

The official data on the number of homeless people is from the 2001 population census where homeless people were defined as people who had no fixed place of residence and lacked funds to rent or buy at least minimal housing. The data was collected in the gathering places of homeless people, sewage and heating structures, landfills and other random places. In the 2001 census, 1,250 homeless people were recorded, of which 75% were men, 63% lived in towns, and 93% were aged 16-65. The number of people provided with a temporary shelter in homeless hostels and crises centres was 600. According to the Lithuanian authorities, the

estimated number of homeless people with no permanent place of residence reached 3,000 – 4,000 people in 2008.

54. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

Lithuania does not have a national strategy on homelessness. There is no formal definition of homelessness beyond the definition used in the 2001 population census. It is not addressed in the Lithuanian National Report on Strategies on Social Protection and Social Inclusion for 2008-2010. On the operational level, funding is being allocated in the municipal social services plans for temporary shelters in the homeless hostels and the crises centres and for social services in those shelters. Temporary shelters and social services to homeless people are provided by municipalities and by NGOs.

The issue of housing exclusion is to some extent addressed by the Social Housing Fund Development Programme 2008-2010 which is an integral part of the Lithuanian Housing Strategy. Entitlements to social housing are given to people whose income and property are below the limits established by the Government. The Ministry of Environment is in charge of supervising the implementation of the housing strategy. In addition, there are 6 other ministries and 60 municipalities which are involved in the implementation of this strategy. Social housing units are owned by municipalities. Their function is to provide social housing to people entitled to it.

55. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

55.1. Accessibility

In 2007, the social housing stock counted 26,000 flats according to the authorities. The objective of the Social Housing Fund Development Programme 2008-2010 is to increase the current share of social housing in the total national residential housing from 2.4% to 3% in 2010 and to 4-5% by 2020, which would account for 25-30 thousand new social housing apartments. In the period 2007-2013, 11.8 million EUR from the European Regional Development Fund will be allocated to the development of social housing and the improvement of its quality.

Supply of social housing has been substantially outdistanced by demand. In 2004-2008, the demand increased 2.8 times. It grew by 20% per year on average, while the size of the social housing stock increased only by 2.3% yearly. In 2008, there were 23,761 pending demands (people or families) registered for the rent of social housing, 821 demands were satisfied and, in addition, 429 households received state supported mortgages. The average waiting time for a social housing is 10-15 years, in some big cities it can take about 20 years. Social housing can be provided to people whose income and property are below the limits established by the Government. The priority groups are young families, families with many children, former orphans (or persons left without parental care), disabled people and families caring for a disabled person who do not own any accommodation or whose accommodation's living space is less than 10 sq meters.

Since 2008, the difference in private and social housing rent for households eligible for social housing according to the Law on State Support for the Acquisition or Rent of Housing and Modernisation of Apartment Houses can partly be reimbursed by municipalities. There is no data on the number of people who have made use of this facility. It also has to be taken into

account that the housing rental market (housing available for rent) is considerably smaller in Lithuania compared to the EU average. Furthermore, families with low to medium income can hardly afford the rent in some regions with higher employment opportunities due to a high rental and wage ratio.

The social housing policy does not address homeless people directly. Homeless people can be provided with temporary housing for up to six months (extendable at certain conditions) in the homeless hostels. People in a crisis situation can be provided with a shelter in the crises centres for up to three days. In 2008, there were 22 homeless hostels and 24 crises centres. The demand to stay in homeless hostels was satisfied for 97% (1,900 people lived in those hostels) according to the national authorities. The crises centres were offering 1,168 places.

In the current economic downturn, households are facing increasing difficulties in repaying their mortgages. To address this situation, the Lithuanian Parliament is debating a draft law on bankruptcy of natural people and an alternative draft law on the possibilities to suspend the repayment of debts of natural people for up to three years. Both proposals are facing fierce opposition from the banking sector. There are no measures to support people under the threat of eviction (for utility, rent and other debts), except for families with under age children. For such families, debt repayment schedules are developed by social workers.

55.2. Quality

National legislation regulates the size of social housing units. The maximum space provided per family member cannot be bigger than 14 sq meters. The size of a one-room apartment should be at least 26 sq meters. Exceptions are applied, subject to the actual size of the social housing units under the disposition of the municipalities and a need to provide separate rooms for certain groups of people. Social housing is governed by general construction and other norms (hygiene, fire safety, etc.).

The share of the population living in dwellings deprived of at least one item was 40.4% of the total population in 2007, compared to 24.8% on average in the EU27. 25.2% people lived in dwellings with a leaking roof, 18.2% had no bath or shower, 20.1% did not have indoor toilet. The total overcrowding rate in Lithuania was 51.8% compared to the EU average of 17.3% in 2007.

56. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

There are no special social services designed for homeless people at national level. Homeless people are entitled to the basic general services as all other residents of Lithuania who do not have social and health insurance. They can register in the Labour Exchange and take part in all active labour market measures: upgrade or acquire new qualification, participate in public works, etc. There is no data on how many homeless people have made use of this facility. In case a homeless person does not have a personal identification document, he or she would be precluded from registering in the Labour Exchange. Homeless people are also entitled to first aid and emergency assistance free of charge.

Municipalities and NGOs provide social assistance to homeless people. The availability and variety of services provided to homeless people differs in the municipalities. For example, in the municipality of Vilnius homeless people can receive information, counselling and

intermediation services, free food and bathing coupons, people released from the penal institutions are provided with lump sums of money, etc.

57. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The official data on the number of homeless people is from the 2001 population census. A new population census will be conducted in 2011. Another source of information about the homeless people is the annual statistical reports about social services provided in the municipalities aggregated at national level. Those reports include data on the occupation rate of temporary shelters and the breakdown of their residents by age, gender, periods and reasons of staying in the shelter. The groups which stayed in the shelter were: people released from the penal institution, victims of domestic violence, underage mothers, orphans without housing, victims of natural disasters, victims of trafficking, persons released from social and psychological rehabilitation institutions, people deported from foreign countries, asylum seekers and people without housing.

In 2007-2008, the National Audit Office carried out a performance audit of the Social Housing Fund Development Programme. One of its findings was that it is not sure that social housing is provided to people who need it most. Concrete changes in the legislation were recommended to address this situation. Another important recommendation to the Government was to integrate the issues of social housing into social policy and to make the Ministry of Social Security and Labour the institution in charge of it.

LUXEMBURG

1. CURRENT SITUATION

When assessing and dealing with homelessness and social exclusion, Luxembourg adopted the formal definition or typology of ETHOS. Luxembourg chose to apply the ETHOS typology from the beginning in order to facilitate the comparability with other Member States.

The recent trends of the housing market is given by figures of the Public constructor for Social Housing "Fonds du Logement" in 2008:

55% of renting-applicants are between 35 and 55 years

25% of renting-applicants are people benefiting from the minimum income scheme "Revenu minimum garanti"

26,5% are couples with one child

23% are couples with 2 children.

The demand in general decreased by 8.4% in comparison to 2007 and almost 6% of the housing opportunities of the National Agency for Social Housing is rented by different NGOs.

In 2008 the National Agency for Social Housing had 53 collective sleeping places at its disposal and reserved for political refugees and immigrant workers. Compared with 2007 there is also a slight decrease (-2.9%) of the average monthly rent which amounts to €345 in 2008.

According to the Ministry of Family and Integration, there were 715 people experiencing extreme housing exclusion in 2006. The main reasons for HHE are different for women and men. For women, personal purposes prevail followed by financial and economic causes, whereas for men this order is inverted. For both sexes, there is a strong relationship of the mentioned reasons with health problems and predominantly addictions.

58. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

In its declaration on the general politics in 2005, the government earmarked housing as an "important" issue. It was decided to stress a new and more efficient collaboration between the local bodies and government in order to increase the supply of housing availabilities. At national level, the Ministry for Housing ("Ministère du Logement") is in charge of legislation and directives to ensure a sufficient number of housing opportunities at an affordable price.

The Ministry for Family is in charge of homelessness and works with the National Agency for Social Housing or the municipalities. Specific tasks are managed by the Ministry for Equal opportunities (a.o. domestic violence) or of Ministry for Health (a.o. addictions, mental illness).

Homelessness is a small scale issue in Luxembourg where subsidising is actually mostly done through the government and additionally by the two main cities of Luxembourg and Esch-sur-Alzette.

The main ministries in charge of financing and monitoring the implemented measures are the Ministry for Family and Ministry for Health. The measures offered to the public are managed by NGOs working with the ministries through coordination groups. A working partnership approach between ministerial departments, municipalities and non-governmental institutions has been established.

Currently, the right to housing is not part of the constitutional rights but will be available through the fact that municipalities must ensure as far as possible housing of all persons living on their territory. The law modified on 25th February 1979 eases access to housing for less favoured people by reserving the state aid to those who belong to families with modest wage with children. In 2008, the state subsidized these policies with €67 Mio.

There are also specific policies for disabled people, for young persons, for families with small income, for migrants as well as for aged people.

Concerning the "Social Real Estate Agency" (*Agence Immobilière Sociale*) targeted at households with low effective income and people facing multiple problems, the State is co-financing in certain cases the dwellings as well as their running costs; it is also in charge of the personnel's and employee's salaries.

59. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

59.1. Access to housing

Policies are available to reduce the risk of eviction and to support people in threat of eviction through:

- social services at regional and municipal level,
- the conditional benefits of guaranteed minimum wage,
- the possibility of an additional housing allowance,
- the existence of a yearly allowance to support the increasing cost of living ("allocation de la vie chère") and
- legal proceedings as protection against the negative effects of over-indebtedness.

The Ministry for Family and Integration and the Ministry for Equality provide temporary lodging whereas different NGOs are in charge with the service. Different types of accommodations (emergency, medium and longer term +/- 2years) are available and cover the country.

People with a low income looking for an independent living place have a hard time to find an accommodation and are therefore obliged to rent one on the open market. To increase the access to housing for this group of people, a law was introduced in November 2002 which enables the State to help tenants responding to the criteria fixed by that law with the financing of rental guarantees required by property owners.

The government decided to support the "Social Real Estate Agency" (*Agence Immobilière Sociale*) created in September 2009 and targeted at households with low effective income and

people facing multiple problems. The goals of this structure integrate the following aspects: real-estate prospection, rental management (intermediate role on rental contracts and control of payments), technical assistance (repairing of accommodations), role of ombudsman between owners and tenants, and if needed collaboration with social services.

Concerning the "Social Real Estate Agency", 21 dwellings were offered by the end of 2009 and an increase of 50 accommodations per year is foreseen . In the middle-term, about 500 accommodations should be available in Luxembourg.⁶⁸

To promote access to housing the "*pacte logement*" has been adopted on the 11th of June 2008. Efforts to ensure a social mix are part of the "housing pact" by the government which foresees that municipalities are advised to guarantee that 10% of buildings are set aside for low cost ones.

59.2. Quality of housing

The policy and standards to safeguard an adequate level of housing are legally based on a regulation ("*règlement grand-ducal*") according to the modified 25th February 1979-law which is defining the average standards for habitation and security.

Housing policies are strongly linked to urban regeneration policies. According to chapter 4 of this modified law, the Ministry for Housing is promoting the renewal of neighbourhoods in insalubrious areas. That is a very important issue in the program of social housing in which 4 so-called regenerated areas, intending to generate 1400 housing units are planned.

Only indirectly linked to urban renewal and housing for deprived peoples is a financial aid for renovating buildings. It is accessible to all owners of accommodation that meet certain requirements and not specially addressing small incomes.

Regarding dark dwellings Luxembourg's situation is slightly below the EU27 average (12% in LU and 11% EU27). The number of housing with leaking roofs, damp walls, floors of foundation is low in Luxembourg (21% in LU and 26% EU27).⁶⁹

60. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Integrated strategies for tackling homelessness are rare in Luxembourg. Currently *Caritas Accueil et Solidarité* are implementing such strategies. A pilot project called DECLIC aiming at improving the instruments used for evaluating and improving the competence of the users as far as the housing structure is concerned as well as the professional development. Other experimental efforts have been undertaken in this field by different NGO's beforehand with considerable efforts and financing.

The system of supported accommodation distinguishes between two levels accordingly to the intensity of the follow up. Intensive follow-up ("*logement encadré*") means that social workers are available on location during working hours whereas low level follow-up ("*logement accompagné*") means that social workers are accessible for advice on demand and at scheduled times. The objective is to accompany the people on their way to a self-managed

⁶⁸ NAP-Inclusion 2008

⁶⁹ EUROSTAT 2008

life. Health services are sometimes offered on place, but most of the time dispatched by medical services outside.

61. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The current implementation of a new reporting system in the framework of the community MPHASIS programme (Mutual Progress on Homelessness through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems) is a positive approach. This programme enables to get reliable information at short notice on the exact number of people excluded for housing reasons. The solidarity department of the Ministry for Family and Integration is responsible for the coordination and the payment of this project.

According to the new law on social aid and the obligation of reporting on the at-the-risk accommodations it will be possible to provide a prevention programme. The objective is to reduce the number of very low standard accommodations and get started with adequate measures and projects on time.

HUNGARY

1. CURRENT SITUATION

The Hungarian population has decreased steadily from the 1980s to approximately 10 million in 2005. The number of households was slightly above 4 million, with an average household size of 2.5 people. The stock of housing units counted 4.2 million in 2007, which is a result of an increase of 200,000 since 2001.⁷⁰

Housing exclusion has been an ever increasing social problem in Hungary since the collapse of the socialist regime in 1989, and is being particularly aggravated by the current economic downturn. According to a comprehensive survey conducted in 2007 on institutions providing services for homeless people, approximately 9,000 people spent the night in various types of accommodation for the homeless.⁷¹ Each year on the same date, a data survey routine is performed in the capital and in other large cities about people living rough. The 2009 survey reports ca. 2,800 homeless people sleeping without any shelter in winter conditions, half of them in Budapest.⁷² According to the latest surveys, the average proportion of people living rough or residing in accommodation for the homeless is 0.2% of the population; it ranges from 0.1% to 0.39% in the largest cities. The majority of people living without shelter are men, though the rate of homeless women has shown an increasing tendency in the past two years.

The main reason for housing exclusion is the affordability of housing costs that represents a serious problem for low-income groups. Although the share of the population whose housing costs burden exceeds 40% of the total household income is below the EU average (7.3% in HU against 12.3% in the EU), the average price of an apartment is 5-6 times higher than the average yearly income in comparison with the corresponding 3-4-fold figure in the EU. As a consequence, the number and volume of housing loans is very high and increasing. In 2008, the actual stock of housing loans was almost four times larger than in 2002, and amounted to 839,000 contracts of a total value of €15 billion.⁷³ As a negative effect of the crisis, the conditions of housing loans are stricter and stricter, with many mortgage holders facing serious difficulties in redeeming instalments.

The overcrowding rate is 46.2% (2007) which is one of the highest rates in the EU (average: 17.3%), but does not deviate significantly from the EU-12 average. 73% of the population lives in acceptable living standards (EU average: 75.2%). However, broad segments of some disadvantaged groups, e.g. the Roma, are particularly affected by difficult housing conditions. The room for manoeuvre of social housing has narrowed significantly over the last years, since the proportion of lease apartments owned by local governments has dropped from 22% to 4% due to the privatisation in the 1990s, resulting in an unmet need of 300,000 social housing units.

⁷⁰ Central Statistical Office, Hungary (CSO); www.ksh.hu

⁷¹ Public Foundation for the Homeless; www.hajlektalanokert.hu

⁷² 3rd February Task Force; www.bmszki.hu/f3/2009f3

⁷³ CSO

62. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

The main responsibility for homelessness issues at national level lies with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour coordinating social services and benefits, other aspects of housing belong to the scope of the Ministry of Local Governments. Two national NGOs, namely the Public Foundation for Homeless People and the 'Solidarity' Public Foundation for the Houseless and Homeless in Budapest, play important roles in implementing government programmes under the supervision and monitoring of the Ministry. According to the Social Act⁷⁴, the provision of services for homeless people falls under the responsibility of local governments. Related tasks are financed partly by their own, and partly by governmental resources. In 2007, 53% of temporary accommodation services, 63.3% of residential institutional services and 72.2% of day-care services for the homeless were provided by NGOs.⁷⁵ These NGOs have come together under two umbrella organisations; in Budapest the 'Council of Ten' and nationally the 'HAJSZOLT' Association. Housing issues, except housing exclusion, is the responsibility of the Ministry of Local Government. The Act regulating all forms of dwelling ownership⁷⁶ delegates several tasks to local governments also concerning housing.

The first national Strategy for Homeless people was prepared as an expert document in 2007.⁷⁷ The key objectives of the strategy were the prevention of homelessness, primarily by means designed to strengthen the financial security of housing; the revision of the financing and legal regulation of the institutional system of services to homeless people in order to improve result-oriented operation and the reintegration of homeless people in the labour and housing markets; and finally the transformation of the operation of current institutions for homeless people aimed at encouraging the admission of people living rough and facilitating housing and employment reintegration. The strategy has not been approved by the government but, on the basis of the document, the Municipality of Budapest prepared its Strategy for Homeless People in 2008. Furthermore, in 2007, a separate government decree specified certain measures and quantified targets concerning homelessness for 2007-2013.

63. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

63.1. Accessibility

In promoting access to housing, prevention plays an important role. Beyond a set of legal instruments for the protection of people under threat of eviction, cash benefits (e.g. housing support) and social services (e.g. debt management service) are available especially for housing to alleviate liquidity problems of people in need. In response to the crisis, and as a result of the amendment of the respective law, the state can act as bail instead of mortgage holders in need as of August 2009. For those mortgage holders that lost their jobs as a result of the crisis, temporary loans are available with a state warrant of up to 80% of the amount. For those who have already lost their homes, local governments have pre-emptive right for purchasing real estates to be sold at auction, thus former owners have the possibility to stay in and rent it back from the local government. The estimated amount of governmental housing

⁷⁴ Act III of 1993 on social administration and social services

⁷⁵ CSO

⁷⁶ Act LXXVIII of 1993 on certain rules concerning the leasing of apartments and other premises as well as their alienation

⁷⁷ In Hungarian: <http://bmszki.hu/tanulmanyok/strat>; in English: www.bmszki.hu/english

allowances as a percentage of the GDP doubled between 1999 and 2006 to 1.1%, but shrank again to 1% by 2007.

As a temporary solution for those in trouble, there are night shelters. Another type of temporary accommodation provides services for assisting the homeless with their social, individual and housing problems, including ensuring accommodation. These temporary services operate across the country in larger cities, and have a capacity of 7,500 people. Minimum conditions prescribed by law are often not met. In order to assist people in these institutions in finding permanent solutions, a special government programme is available for supporting social integration of homeless people and offering housing opportunities outside institutions. The programme provides the so-called 'integration support' with 12-month follow-up assistance. In 2006-2007, the independent housing of some 1,000 people was addressed.

As for social housing, the respective law⁷⁸ forces local governments to ensure social housing services for those in need only if the housing unit had been destroyed by natural disaster. However, the act empowers local governments to determine rental conditions of apartments of their own, including applying the so-called 'social fees' of a reduced amount.

63.2. Quality

The Housing Act⁷⁹, together with other regulations on technical construction, defines requirements for different types of housing units and all structures suitable for housing purposes. National goals or standards for ensuring minimum quality of housing have not been specified. The 5th highest overcrowding rate of the EU (46.2%) is particularly high for children under 17 years (60.6%). 27% of the population does not live in acceptable living standards.

The Population Census collects data also on housing conditions, primarily on the number of people living in non-housing units. According to the latest census in 2001, more than 3% of the population lived in apartments less than 20 square meters, 17% lives in apartments with walls made of loam or wood.⁸⁰ Moreover, latest data show that, in 2007, 10.5% of people live in a dark dwelling, 3.2% has neither bath/shower nor toilet for the sole use of the household.

64. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

No integrated national strategy has been adopted so far for fighting homelessness. The homeless are addressed as an eligible or exclusive target group under active inclusion policies and programmes for disadvantaged people. The first programme of this kind was launched in 2000, and more followed later, financed mostly by the Labour Market Fund and the Structural Funds. Employment programmes support job-seeking services, social work, mental-hygiene training, supply of equipment needed for work and, lately, contribution benefits to employers employing homeless people. According to the Social Act, basic health care services are universally available also for the homeless even if they are not insured; however, the enforcement of this right in their case is not always carried through. The National Health

⁷⁸ Act LXXVIII of 1993 on certain rules concerning the leasing of apartments and other premises as well as their alienation

⁷⁹ Act LXXVIII of 1997 on forming and protection of built environment

⁸⁰ <http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/eng/index.html>

Insurance Fund also operates general practitioner services for homeless people; 1 in each region and 8 in the capital.

In 2008, daily 6,300 people visited one of the 93 daytime facilities available for the homeless for cleaning of cloths, washing or having a meal. Besides, street social workers in 85 service centres help identify people living rough, offering different services for them and encouraging them to use institutional services. Quality standards for social services are defined in a Ministerial Decree⁸¹. Services also for homeless people can be provided only by institutions meeting these infrastructure and human resources requirements.

65. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Hungarian Statistical Office collects fundamental data on social services but these are available only with an 18-month delay. More up-to date data are provided by the register of social services set up in 2006 and the regional homeless dispatcher service network collecting data on a daily basis on the available capacities of institutions concerned. Efforts have been made to channel this information together with the data collected by the individual institutions in one comprehensive database.

The State Audit Office published its report on the 'Control of the institutional system for homeless people' in 2006⁸². Its main findings state that tasks in this field are not in line with the needs and services actually rendered. The modification of the relevant regulations is not coherent and sometimes even contradictory. No national up-to-date data are available. Local governments only partly have the means and motivation to prevent or tackle homelessness, however, in the capital and bigger cities information base and coordination of tasks has significantly improved.

⁸¹ Decree No. 1/2000 of the Ministry for Social and Family Affairs on tasks and operational conditions of social institutions providing personal care

⁸² [www.asz.hu/asz/jeltar.nsf/0/3ebeaafce0cc7b21c125719400463d36/\\$file/0613j000.pdf](http://www.asz.hu/asz/jeltar.nsf/0/3ebeaafce0cc7b21c125719400463d36/$file/0613j000.pdf)

MALTA

1. CURRENT SITUATION

Malta is a country that, given its geographical characteristics and the number of inhabitants (410.000 in 2007), doesn't have a sizeable problem of homelessness. There is no official recognition of homelessness, no definition and thus, not many programmes to alleviate the phenomenon. The problem of homelessness is essentially hidden under the façade of strong family ties, community cohesion and the State.

There are no visible signs of homelessness in Malta similar to what can be seen in the other European Union countries, yet there are few hundred homeless who stay in shelters and another few thousand households that are at risk of being homeless. Nevertheless, the combined effect of a constant, inexorable growth of unemployment rate (forecast to 7.6% in 2010), with at-risk-of-poverty threshold practically unaltered in the last years (14% in 2007 against EU average: 16%), could involve a potential growth of people affected by homelessness.

The share of the population living in a household where housing costs represent more than 40% of the total household income was 2.6% in 2007 (EU average: 12.3%). By tenure status, the share is bigger for tenants paying a market price rent (33.1% vs. an EU average of 25.4%): the average monthly rent for a home in Malta was € 2.10./m² in 2007. The overcrowding rate is very low (3.6% in 2007, EU: 17.3%). As to the proportion of deprived people, the data is good and higher than the EU average in 2007 (the rate of population reported to live in acceptable living standards was 90.7% in Malta, 75.2% in EU). Maltese's social protection benefits expenditure destined to housing benefits (% of total benefits) was 0.5% in 2006 (EU27: 0.9%).

66. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

With the Housing Authority Act (1976) (amended in 2007) Malta created the main public agency accountable for implementing all Government programmes to provide affordable housing to those people who need it. This statute and the Home Ownership (Encouragement) Act of 1988 are the most important rules concerning housing policies. Nevertheless, apart from the two acts indicated above, and the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Minimum Standard) Regulations (LN320/05), that are functioning as legal guarantee to housing, in Maltese legislation the provision of housing to homeless people is largely a matter under the responsibility of the Housing Authority (hereinafter "HA").

The HA aims are to reduce homelessness, promote living conditions that are more independent, delay the admission to institutional care and provide a safer accommodation environment for its clients.

Together with the HA, the voluntary organizations and NGOs play a vital role when reaching out to the more vulnerable and disadvantaged⁸³. In fact, the current National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2008-2010) establishes the objectives, among others, of reinforcing the debate on the disadvantaged groups (included homeless) with the social organizations and of subsidizing itinerant multidisciplinary social attention programmes, in cooperation with NGOs. The support given enables the vulnerable people to live as independently as possible within the community and thus combats their social and housing exclusion. The National Housing Authority gives assistance to the organizations operating in the social field which provide housing services to people in housing need. This should empower the NGOs to reach the above-mentioned common objectives and obligations in the best interest of the individual and the community.

In substance, as a part of the social services area, support policies to the homeless are a competence of the HA, the State Agencies (APPOGG and SAPPOR) in cooperation with the most significant NGOs. The central Government supports the HA, as coordinator among the different public and private subjects operating in this field.

67. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

67.1. Accessibility

Even if the current legislation is included in a few rules, the HA has proposed several measures to promote access to housing, including increasing the proportion of land earmarked for protected housing. For example: issue units for sale at facilitated prices targeting families with children and couples to help them purchase their home; making 10% of these units reserved to people with disability; and help the first time buyers to access affordable housing by paying a grant⁸⁴.

The HA has not only competence for launching initiatives but also for managing financial aids addressed to citizens facing the risk of eviction. In this case the NGOs submit their request of aid – as for example premises, by sale or lease, cash grants for alterations or repairs to premises owned, etc...- to the Authority, which evaluates them and takes a decision. Furthermore, also in order to tackle the effects of the global economic crisis, the government continues to support the HA to invest in urban renewal projects which provide accessible housing. Temporary lodging for homeless people is not regulated by specific rules, apart when it comes to asylum seekers. On the other hand, the policy of support covers different types of temporary accommodation and target groups: residential homes for children and young people; shelters for people who are victims of domestic violence; semi-independent living for people with disability or mental difficulties. In these cases the HA works in cooperation with NGOs and the Government agencies SAPPOR and APPOGG. Consequently, as previously mentioned, the provision of social services for the homeless is shared between the Housing Authority, NGOs and the Agencies SAPPOR and APPOGG.

⁸³ During 2008, the Housing Authority has assisted different organisations as YMCA, Dar Terza Spinelli, Dar Patri Leopoldo, Richmond Foundation, etc...

⁸⁴ The 'Grant on Loan Repayment scheme' provides for a grant up to a maximum of 30% of the annual loan payments given by a financial institution to the applicant and which does not exceed the amount of 850 Euro per year. This grant will be given for a period of 10 years.

According to the last data, Malta's housing boom of 2003 and 2004, which was characterized by tremendous house price increases and sharp rises in construction activity, now seems officially over. The over-all house price index fell by 0.8% in Q1-2008 from a year earlier. When adjusted for inflation, house prices actually fell by almost 5% over the same period. This was in sharp contrast with the impressive price increases of 20.3% (17% in real terms) in 2004 and 13.3% (11.8%) in 2003. The price of apartments in Malta averages around €3,042 per sq. m.

67.2. Quality

In Malta there is no legal definition of "inadequate"/ "unfit for habitation" and "overcrowding". However the HA has developed its own standards to implement its policies.

In many cases, when the HA carries out inspections to verify the conditions of house units, it checks different conditions, such as:

- Presence of structural hazards;
- Inadequate sanitation;
- Inadequate plumbing;
- Unsafe electricity;
- Inadequate ventilation;
- Faulty weather protection;
- Damp;
- Inadequate habitable space for occupants (>2.5 people per bedroom);
- Inadequate accessibility for occupants' needs.

When evaluating applications for alternative accommodation, the HA looks at the current housing conditions of the applicants and applies a scoring system with a high number of points meaning that the housing conditions are bad.

The HA invests in urban renewal projects with the objective of regenerating disadvantaged areas and improve the quality of life of residents. Very old blocks of apartments are, if in a state of disrepair, pulled down and rebuilt; if historically valuable, they are restored. These social housing units are eventually allocated for rent. The Authority is also partner in an integrated urban regeneration project for the Cottonera funded under the ERDF 2007-2013. This project incorporates measures in line with accessibility measures for people with disability, embellishment of public areas, energy efficiency measures and housing renovation. Currently a Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) is being carried out - the implementation of the project is dependent on the results of this CBA.

At 3.6% in 2007, the overcrowding rate is considerably lower than the EU average (17.3%). As to the proportion of people deprived, Malta with 5.4% is widely below the EU average of

18% regarding bath / shower, indoor toilet and leaking roof. Concerning dark dwellings, Malta is doing better than the rest of the EU (4.3⁸⁵ % respect 8.1% EU).

68. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Even if there is no clear definition in the Maltese legislation of homelessness, the number of people covered by this phenomenon are around a few hundreds. Although social services are a State competence, the central Government secures homogeneous services and assistance through the already mentioned HA and is responsible for housing solutions, among other measures.

In 2008 the HA assisted, with the support of NGOs, 564 homeless people who were victims of domestic violence, people suffering from mental problems, etc.... The number of shelter places available given by NGOs is around 150 beds, with a waiting list for alternative accommodation of 149 homeless people, 1061 shared accommodation, 54 household living under threat of eviction, 643 applications living in unfit housing, 893 applications with overcrowding. .

In the framework of the European active inclusion strategy and its National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2008-2010), Malta has put forward as one of its priority objectives the promotion of active inclusion. Housing forms an essential part of this policy. The report makes reference to the EQUAL "Headstart" project targeting the living conditions of young people. The project includes the provision of affordable accommodation to young men and women between 16 and 25 years who have spent at least two in the past five years in residential care.

69. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The HA is currently working to develop a national database on homelessness. The database aims at identifying the demand for shelter and the causes of homelessness, which will ultimately assist the Authority to develop better policies to meet the needs of these people. An independent study on homelessness and housing exclusion entitled 'Counting the homeless in Malta' has been carried out by Cyrus Vakili-Zad (2006). However, it seems that the inexistence of a complete register, drawn up not only on the basis of specific demand (people calling in for help) but on the basis of an outreach/research programme, remains an open gap in social welfare provision in Malta.

⁸⁵ The concept used by Malta for this variable is not harmonised with the other countries. The question is whether the building and the lightening installations can provide adequate light for acceptable living standard in the house..

NETHERLANDS

1. CURRENT SITUATION

Since different definitions and estimation methods are used, estimates of the total number of homeless people differ in the Netherlands. According to the Salvation Army, who provides approximately a quarter of the provisions for the homeless in the Netherlands, its headcount is decreasing: it was estimated at 42.000 in 2007, while in 2005 it was estimated at 50.000 and in 2003 at 65.000. The number of young runaways was estimated at 6.000 in 2008⁸⁶.

In the four biggest cities roughly 21.800 people are living in a precarious situation. This group is split into a group of 10.000 actual and residential homeless people and a group of 11.800 people who are not or not yet all visible in the care and assistance sector, but who do belong to the group of the socially vulnerable people.

The main problem on the Dutch housing market (in certain regions) is the shortage of affordable housing for the lower and middle income groups. As a result the through-flow in the housing market is not fast enough and it takes longer for certain groups to realise their wish to move (for instance the young, who have to continue to live longer at home with their parents).

The housing shortage amounts to just 2%, approximately 140.000 houses. Apart from this, there is an estimated demand for 500.000 houses as a result of population growth and individualisation in the period 2010-2020.

Approximately one-third of the housing stock in the Netherlands is made out of social housing. The housing corporations jointly own over 2.4 million social housing units. Of these, 29% are cheap (rent up to €339), 65% are payable (rent between €340 and €520) and 6% are expensive (rent above €520). For each social housing unit offered for rent there are on average 60 interested parties. The average waiting period for a social housing unit is 2.9 years. According to national data⁸⁷, the number of evictions by housing corporations increased in 2007 by 14% to over 8.500. By far the major reason for eviction was rent arrears (78%). At the end of 2007, more than 237.000 households had rent arrears, compared to 203.000 households in 2006.

The share of population living in a household where housing costs represent more than 40% of the total household income was 18.6% in 2007 (EU average: 12.3%). By tenure status, this share is the biggest for tenants paying a market price rent (28.5%) and lowest for tenants paying a reduced price (1.4%).

In 2007, the overcrowding rate was very low (1.5%) compared to the EU-average (17.3%), while the proportion of people deprived was very similar to the EU average (18.3% against 18.0%). The proportion of the population reported to live in acceptable living standards was 78.0% (EU average: 75.2%).

⁸⁶ National Audit Office.

⁸⁷ Aedes, *Meer uitzettingen door huurachterstand*, 12 December 2008.

70. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

On 1 January 2007 the Social Support Act (Wmo) came into force in all municipalities in the Netherlands. Under this Act, municipalities are now responsible for setting up social support. In the Social Support Act the concept of social support has been expressed in nine performance areas, of which 3 are relevant in combating homelessness (social relief, public mental healthcare and addiction policy).

Social relief includes activities consisting of temporarily providing shelter, guidance, information and advice to people who because of one or multiple problems, have left their home, either forced or not, and who are not able to cope in society by their own. Many decisions on service provisions are taken on the local or regional level. The main task of the national government in this field is providing funding.

Together with the four biggest cities (Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht), the Dutch government presented the '*Strategy Plan for Social Relief*' in 2006. The Strategy Plan entails an integral approach to the issue of homelessness. It is based on two pillars:

A person-oriented approach by using individual programme plans and client managers linked to individual people.

A one hundred percent sound chain co-operation between all the involved parties and institutions under the direction of the municipality and the care office.

Early detection of payment problems is a key concept in the approach. In 2008, in order to realise national cover, a start was made to extend the Strategy Plan to the other 39 central municipalities under the title of Municipal Compass.

The Subsidised Rented Sector Decree (BBSH) includes the regulations which must be observed by housing corporations and municipal housing departments. The BBSH has six performance fields: quality of the houses, letting of the houses, involving occupants in the policy and management, financial continuity, quality of life and living and care. Moreover, the BBSH includes rules about financial reporting and the supervision of housing corporations.

71. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

71.1. Accessibility

The government supports citizens in finding appropriate housing accommodation by the following measures: rent allowance, rent policy, social housing, housing allocation on the basis of the Housing Allocation Act, promoting home ownership.

By means of an income-dependent rent allowance, the Government makes sure that the affordability of good quality rented housing accommodation is guaranteed for households which because of their income situation cannot themselves provide or cannot sufficiently provide for affordable housing accommodation. About 1.1 million households are in receipt of rent allowance. This represents approximately 2 billion euro per year.

The Housing Allocation Act offers municipalities the option to intervene in the housing allocation and the composition of the housing stock in order to promote a balanced and justified allocation of housing in short supply. Municipalities are able to designate specific target groups at local level, who experience difficulties in finding housing accommodation

due to their low income or other circumstances. Housing corporations have to give priority to accommodating people who belong to these target groups, for example former delinquents, disabled or elderly people who need houses with special facilities.

In the Housing Allocation Act, refugees with a residence status are specifically designated as a target group. On the basis of the number of inhabitants, municipalities have a duty to find accommodation for these refugees. There is no such housing provision for labour migrants. Migrants can register at a municipality and apply for social accommodation options. However, many cities have a waiting list, which does not make it easy to find accommodation in the short term. This results in labour migrants moving on to quicker ways of finding accommodation. As their numbers are increasing and they tend to prefer cheap housing/lodging, it is a point of attention for the Dutch government to prevent them from illegal housing situations, which are often overpopulated and unsafe.

The Cabinet not only supports tenants but also (first-time) buyers by means of various regulations such as the Promotion of Homeownership Act (BEW) and first-time buyers' loans.

71.2. Quality

Minimum quality requirements regarding safety, health, usefulness and energy saving are set on buildings by the Buildings Decree.

Together with municipalities, housing corporations, inhabitants and other relevant players, the Dutch government has dedicated itself to improve the situation in 40 so-called '*Districts needing attention*'. These are districts in which - because of an accumulation of problems - the quality of the living environment trails badly behind in comparison with other districts in the city. These districts have formulated long-term ambitions for living, working, learning & growing up and integrating, as well as for safety. Departments, local professionals and inhabitants are busy as partners to achieve progress within 8 years in all policy areas. Their ambitions are focussed on: good quality housing for lower income groups, a varied housing supply in the districts, more people in work, stronger district economy, more extended schools, less school drop-out, Centres for Youth and Family, more policemen on the beat, meeting places for inhabitants and district-oriented integration. In doing so this '*District approach*' focuses simultaneously on encouraging the social rise of the inhabitants in the district, on properly affordable houses for the lower-income groups as well as on encouraging a varied housing stock in the districts. Knowledge and experience are widely spread, so that other districts can also benefit from these.

72. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

There are many different sheltered facilities in the Netherlands, which vary from 24/7 living accommodations to low-threshold day or night shelter facilities. 24/7 activities are usually linked to the provision of assistance, care, (psychosocial) guidance or treatment. The policy responsibility regarding shelter for the homeless is decentralised to 39 so-called centre municipalities. These large and medium sized municipalities are responsible for policy and practise of homeless shelters in their regions, for which they are in receipt of special funds from the central government. During the period 2000-2008 the national budget for the specific payments for social relief, addiction policy and public mental health care rose from 140 million euro to 257 million euro.

In 2003, an Interdepartmental Policy Survey into social relief was conducted to achieve proposals for more effective and efficient operation of the social relief chain. The provisions in the social relief chain did not synchronise well with each other and the pressure on social relief increased. Despite the growth in capacity there was a growing shortage of sheltered facilities and the provision of care sometimes appeared to be difficult to access.

Arrangements were made to ensure that the supply of sheltered facilities covers the demand better. There has been extra dedication to the expansion of existing accommodation and proper development of new types of accommodation. For instance, more permanent living accommodation has been constructed as well as sheltered facilities for the homeless with addiction problems where the use of drugs is allowed. In addition, 'Skaeve Huse' have been realised according to the Danish example. This type of accommodation is intended for single people who are excluded from corporation houses or who cannot or can no longer be placed in regular social relief due to their highly anti-social behaviour. Guidance and treatment is offered on an individual basis. The objective is that a perspective is being offered.

73. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

In the Netherlands efforts are being made to improve the existing registration systems. Institutions to which financial resources are granted for social relief, must register their activities and client details. This has been legally provided for in the Social Support Registration Regulation. The picture of social relief is improving but the rules of the Registration Regulation about client registration in social relief can still not be fully applied. Data technical and organisational problems hamper the proper implementation of the Registration Regulation.

It is expected that the information provision will improve because of the Strategy Plan for Social Relief in the four biggest cities. At the request of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport the progress and results of the Strategy Plan are annually reported. The Ministry also intends to start monitoring the progress of the Strategy Plan in the other 39 central municipalities. In addition, there are various monitors at regional level with regard to the demand, the supply and the occupancy rate in social relief.

AUSTRIA

1. CURRENT SITUATION

Overall, the problem of homelessness and housing exclusion in Austria may be seen as less prominent than in other countries. Housing appears to be fairly affordable, although in the past 10 years rents have increased twice as much than the consumer price index. The share of population whose housing costs burden exceeds 40% is 5.4% compared to 12.3% for the EU (2007). Among poor people the share amounts to 31.6% (EU: 38.1%). The overcrowding rate is overall slightly below EU average (14.8% in 2007, EU: 17.3%). It is, however, considerably higher than EU average for lone parents with dependent children (29.7% in 2007, EU 22.5%).

Social housing (owned municipalities) and subsidised non-profit housing in Austria constitute a fairly large share of the total housing stock (around 20%) and the majority of rented dwellings (70% of all newly allocated non-owner occupied dwellings). Subsidised housing is targeted at the majority of the population, with the aim of damping the price level of housing on the private market, and thus fostering social cohesion. As a result, social segregation in housing is generally relatively low in Austria. People with very low incomes may, however, face difficulties in accessing subsidised non-profit housing, as in some cases, substantial accession costs have to be paid. As a consequence, the latter often have to rely on the private housing market where only partial and complex regulations on maximum rents are in place. Access to affordable housing is particularly difficult for migrants in Austria.

A number of facilities and services are provided, mostly by NGOs, to prevent homelessness and support the homeless. Their availability, however, varies a lot from one federal province ("Land") to the other. Services are most developed in larger cities, whereas rural areas are generally not well covered.

74. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

In Austria there is no integrated approach to tackling homelessness and housing exclusion. A nationwide common framework does not exist. The system of responsibilities and competencies regarding housing policies and support to the homeless is rather fragmented, resulting in considerable regional differences in service provision, as well as in a lack of available comparative data.

Responsibility for providing benefits, services and programmes to the homeless lies largely with the Länder. Rules on financial support and legal provisions for providing accommodation for individuals in need are set out in the Länder's social assistance legislation. This includes responsibility for new housing developments and the renewal of flats, residential buildings and residential homes, as well as housing benefits. As a result, legal provisions and social services differ substantially from one federal state to another. A more integrated approach for planning and implementing facilities and services for the homeless has notably been adopted by Vienna, Upper Austria and Vorarlberg, and to some extent also by Lower Austria. In the federal province of Burgenland, assistance to the homeless is not established as an independent policy field at all.

The national state, on the other hand, has the responsibility for civil law regarding housing, including landlord and tenant law, condominium law and regulations on 'limited profit housing associations'.

NGOs play an important role not only in the delivery of services for the homelessness, but also in the dissemination of data and evaluations with the aim of putting homelessness and housing exclusion on the (national) political agenda.

The right to housing is not as such recognised by law or under the Constitution in Austria, but people in need are in principle legally entitled to most benefits from the social assistance scheme of the Länder to secure their subsistence needs, including housing benefits. The system is, however, fairly non-transparent and leaves a large scope for administrative discretion. A lack of information and possibly also social stigmatisation lead to a high non take-up rate. This means that in practice, a large number of people do not receive social assistance, although they would in principle be legally entitled to.

The lack of a standardised nationwide definition and lack of coherent data collection do not allow for a sound analysis of the respective policies and their impact. Clear common targets are missing. Monitoring and evaluation of this policy area, as well as co-ordination between relevant actors appear to be underdeveloped. A more integrated approach would be desirable to facilitate policy planning, monitoring and evaluation.

75. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

75.1. Accessibility

Six out of Austria's nine Länder have introduced early warning systems to avoid evictions. Around 5,600 evictions were executed in 2008, with a particular concentration in Vienna. Transparent and consumer-friendly legal provisions concerning the termination of rental agreements are aspects which would deserve particular attention in this context.

A number of actors provide support for people leaving institutions, such as prisons, hospitals or children's homes, but there are not enough data available for a closer analysis. It appears that the housing situation of people leaving penal institutions is to some extent problematic.

Temporary accommodation and supported accommodation are provided under the Social Welfare Acts of the Länder. Services include counseling and outreach supervision to prepare clients for moving to flats of their own; support to enable residents of socially supported housing facilities to live independent lives; debt counseling; assistance for visiting doctors or hospitals, etc. Access to these facilities and services varies considerably between the Austrian provinces, as well as between urban and rural areas. The full range of support is not available in all provinces and generally not in rural areas. Empirical evidence about the availability of such facilities is, however, largely missing.

The most important instruments to facilitate access to independent housing is social housing provided by municipalities (9% of all dwellings in Austria), subsidised dwellings built by Limited Profit Housing Associations (10% of all dwellings in Austria), and housing benefits under social assistance law of the Länder.

Furthermore, a regulation on maximum rents applies to parts of the private housing market. However, this regulation offers considerable margin for discretion, and does not cover large

parts of the private housing market. In practice, due to a lack of alternatives and knowledge and resources regarding the legal enforcement of their rights, people may accept higher rents.

Social housing and subsidised non-profit dwellings in Austria are targeted at the majority of the population, as relatively high income ceilings are applied for means testing. On the one hand, housing segregation is therefore relatively low in Austria, but on the other hand, people with very low incomes may find it difficult to access subsidized housing, as sometimes considerable one-time access costs have to be paid, such as down-payments amounting to a certain percentage of construction cost.

Access to affordable housing is particularly difficult for migrants in Austria, who, as a consequence, often live in insecure and unacceptable housing conditions. Discrimination against migrants is a widespread practice in the private housing market. Access to social housing is also more difficult for migrants, in spite of the fact that social housing is in principle open to everyone with permanent residence in Austria who meets the other relevant criteria. A lack of information about often complex and fairly non-transparent rules, both regarding rental agreements as well as regarding the entitlements for housing assistance, aggravate the problem.

75.2. Quality

Municipalities and limited-profit housing associations have made substantial efforts to refurbish social housing in the last decade. In these types of housing, indicators for overcrowdedness and precarious housing conditions, based on EU-SILC, are applied.

In Austria, around 2% of all people do not have a toilet/bathroom in their flat. Around 9% have problems with humidity and mildew and around 6% report dark living space (see Statistik Austria 2009⁸⁸). These problems are more often found on the private housing market than in social housing, which is of relatively high quality in Austria. Low income alone does not lead to a significant increase of such problems. However, if other indicators of financial deprivation apply as well, then poor quality housing is significantly higher among those groups.

76. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

In Austria, there is a whole range of services provided to alleviate and fight homelessness. These include streetwork, easy-access day centres, emergency hostels, transitional housing and socially assisted forms of living. There are, however, considerable regional differences in the provision of such services, which are especially well developed in Vienna.

At present, most homeless individuals have no access to active labour market measures. This is due to the institutional gap between social assistance delivery and the Public Employment Service training measures. However, a reform of the social assistance schemes towards a means-tested guaranteed minimum income is planned to be implemented in 2010. It is foreseen that the new scheme will provide support for the (re)integration of recipients of social assistance into the labour market, unless they are not able to work. It will also provide coverage under the statutory health insurance for all recipients. It will be a challenge to

⁸⁸ Statistik Austria (2009). Einkommen, Armut und Lebensbedingungen. Ergebnisse aus EU-SILC 2007, Vienna

improve the administrative provisions of social/housing assistance and increase its take-up rate under the new scheme.

Specialised health care services are available in Austria's three largest cities Vienna, Graz, Linz. Furthermore, social services to prevent homelessness and to assist the homeless are provided by a number of NGOs with public and/or private funding. The availability of these services varies, however, greatly from one Land to another. The highest grade of facilities is available in the big cities, whereas in many Länder rural areas are not well covered. However, no sound and systematic information is available on these aspects which would allow for a more detailed analysis.

77. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Data and information on homelessness and housing exclusion are extremely sketchy in Austria. No systematic monitoring and evaluation is in place. So far no comprehensive attempt has been made at national level to collect data and analyse these problems.

POLAND

1. CURRENT SITUATION

Over the past few years the developing building industry and relatively easy access to mortgages resulted in an increasing supply of dwellings in Poland. Between 2002 and 2007, the average annual supply of new dwellings was above 100 thousands, reaching over 165 thousands in 2008, which means a 24% increase in relation to the previous year.⁸⁹ This resulted in a 5% increase or more in the number of dwellings over the last years. Still in the 1st half of 2009 an almost 10% increase in the number of new flats was noticed in comparison to the same period in 2008. However, due to decreasing number of new investments and construction permits granted (in 1st half of 2009 they have decreased by 28% and 23% respectively, in comparison to the same period in 2008), it is not expected that similar trends will be observed in the nearest future.⁹⁰

Irrespective of the progress mentioned in the construction industry, the scales of the investments and supply of dwellings have not met the significant housing needs. The overcrowding rate in Poland (51.6%) is one of the highest in Europe and much above the EU average of 16.9%. The highest rates are noted among the young and the poor. At the end of 2007, the average living space was 69.8 sq metres (23.8 sq metres per person), and the average size of household was 2.9 people. Although the average size of dwellings completed in 1st half of 2009 (100 sq metres) was relatively high in comparison to the above figures, the decreasing trend should be noted here (107 sq metres in 2007).⁹¹

Due to the fact that over the last years the majority of mortgages were granted in foreign currencies, the decline of national currency has negatively influenced the situation of the borrowers who - in result - suffered from the overall increase of the loans' values. This effected in a – relatively slight - increase in the share of "at-risk" mortgages (payment delays over 60 days) which, at the end of July 2009, was equal to 1.2% (1.1% in 2008) of total value of mortgages. On the other side, the recent peak of value of mortgages affected by pay-off delays was stopped and a declining trend was observed in 2nd and 3rd quarter of 2009. As a result of the above circumstances and of the global economic crisis, the banks' policy towards loans granting is now stricter. This followed an increase of formal requirements for those applying for loans, especially in foreign currencies, and of the value of their own resources expected to co-finance the credited investment. In effect, the value of mortgages granted in 1st quarter of 2009 was approx. 40% lower in comparison to the same period of the previous year. The recent 2009 monthly data shows however, that the value of credits granted is increasing again e.g. the value of mortgages contracted in June was almost 65% higher than in January 2009.

At the end of 2007, there were 13 million dwellings in Poland, 59% of them owned by individuals, 26% by housing cooperatives, and over 9% belonged to municipalities. The share of housing cooperatives, municipalities and social housing societies among housing investors

⁸⁹ Report on construction activity in 2008, National Statistic Office, March 2009

⁹⁰ Information on construction activity 1st and 2nd Quarter of 2009, National Statistic Office, September 2009

⁹¹ ibidem

is decreasing over the last years, as the main housing investments are conducted by the individuals and real-estate developers.

According to the 2002 National Census data, 35.5% of the population lived in poor or very poor housing conditions: 6.5 million in sub-standard conditions (lack of sewage, or water supply; old buildings in poor technical condition), and in addition 11.9 million people lived in overcrowded spaces (more than 2 people per room). In Poland, 70 % of people between 18 and 29 lived with their parents. In 2006, 1.8% of total social protection benefits were dedicated to housing and social exclusion (EU average: 3.6%).

The share of the population whose housing cost burden exceeds 40% was 10.5% (below EU average of 12.3%). By tenure status, the share is bigger for tenants paying market price rents (32.3% against 25.4% EU average). In the past several months, the prices of dwellings have dropped by 5-10% (depending on the region) and similar changes were observed as regard the costs of renting. Due to the decrease in number of new building investments one should not exclude that increase of housing prices and rentals will continue in the next years.

According to official data – collected by local social assistance institutions - there are around 35-45 thousands homeless people in Poland, while the data provided by NGOs increases this figure to over 100 thousands.

78. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

The Constitution of Poland states, that *public authorities shall pursue policies conducive to satisfying the housing needs of citizens, (...) combating homelessness, [and] promoting the development of low-income housing.* In general, the housing policy is implemented both by central and self-governmental (local) authorities and is stemming from regulations included in several acts on social policy and local administration. In practice, most decisions related to housing are taken at local level and local authorities create and regulate their own housing policy, although it must be consistent with national housing programmes.

Local authorities should respond to the housing needs of communities. An obligation was imposed on them to plan and implement respective actions in the area of housing policy, including addressing the housing needs of low-income households, as well as provision of social substitute dwellings.

The tasks of the Ministry of Infrastructure within the scope of national housing policy includes the development of programmes aimed at supporting the creation of social housing resources and social, night shelters and homeless hostels. One of the programmes implemented by the Ministry is called *Family on its Own* and offers financial support (in form of subsidised interest rates on loans) to individuals who intend to purchase or build their own flat or house. By the end of November 2009 over 38.5 thousands families benefited from this programme and the value of loans was over €1,500 Mio. The *Programme of financial support for housing construction addressed to the poorest* provides the possibility of obtaining financial support, approx. 30–50 % of investment costs, by e.g. municipalities or NGOs that assist people in need. The eligible actions include renovation or reconstruction leading to setting up shelters or hostels for the homeless.

The draft *National Programme of Coming out of Homelessness and Development of Social Construction for years 2010 –2015* was prepared in 2009. Its strategic objective is to improve

overall policy towards homelessness through implementation of quality standards of services addressed to people in need, wider use of social activation tools in measures addressed to homeless people, developing statistical instruments, certification of entities providing assistance to homeless people, and introducing legal changes facilitating the process of social dwellings construction. However, due to the current economical situation and financial shortages further works on this Programme have been suspended.

In 2006 the *Act on financial support for setting up social flats, night shelters and accommodation centres for the homeless* was adopted. Within 2 years (2007-2008) a financial support of €23,3 Mio was allotted for setting up 4,268 social apartments and 331 accommodation places in shelters for the homeless.

79. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

79.1. Accessibility

In order to protect tenants, and particularly those in difficult financial situation, an obligatory system of housing allowances was introduced. Eligible to a housing allowance are those with a per capita household income of less than 175% of the amount of the lowest old-age pension (in a single person household) and 125% of that amount in a multi-member household, provided that the floor space of the housing unit does not exceed defined norms. The allowance amount represents the difference between the amount of housing costs for the floor space falling within the norm and 10-20% of the household income, depending on household size and its income. In 2008, the amount of housing allowances paid was €200 Mio and its average value was less than €36. Since 2004, they are financed by local authorities.

As supported accommodation in Poland one can classify the social housing units, mainly for people evicted under court order. The obligation to ensure social units falls onto local authorities. Within the programme of social units launched in the years 2007-2008, municipalities submitted applications for creating a total of 4,595 social units (5,428 including spring 2009 edition for submitting applications) whereas the shortfall of social units is estimated at 120 – 130 thousand units.

Protected housing for specific groups in need is a form of social assistance, preparing people accommodated in such units, under tutelage of specialists, to independent living or replacing stays in a facility providing round-the-clock care. Protected housing ensures conditions for independent functioning in the community, and for integration within the local community. It may be operated by local social assistance institution and non-public entities.

It is estimated that the stock of social housing units held by municipalities meets no more than 1/5 (1/6 in big cities) of the needs. Waiting lists of people to whom municipalities awarded the right to social premises due to difficult financial circumstances, but who due to shortage of housing stock cannot move in, are so long that the waiting time extends to many years.

79.2. Quality

Social units are units of reduced standard and provide floor space of no less than 5 sq. m. (no less than 10 sq. m. for a single household). Temporary accommodation facilities for the homeless are not required to meet any specific standards (other than meeting general safety rules). Currently, there are plans for introducing standards of service to be provided by such facilities. In reality, the insufficient standard of temporary accommodation is noticed. As a

result of special inspection action carried out in 2009 by the Central Office for Building Supervision, 100 social buildings were ruled to be shut down and another 41 partly shut down as unfit for habitation. 609 summonses were issued for immediate fixing or elimination of faults.

It is planned to introduce specific legal changes in a future to facilitate the process of social dwellings construction; in addition the expected ERDF 2007-2013 contribution for social housing is €243 Mio.

80. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

The number of homeless people in Poland varies from 35 thousands registered by the local social assistance institutions to over 100 thousands reported by NGOs.

Local authorities are obliged to provide assistance to homeless people and to allocate financial resources for various forms of support: counselling, meals, clothe, care services. They may also be covered by *individual programme for lifting people out of homelessness*. This programme consists of supporting homeless people in addressing life problems, in particular those relating to family and housing, and assisting in securing employment. The programme is designed by a social worker, jointly with the homeless person concerned. In 2007, such programmes were provided for 2,713 homeless people⁹². The beneficiaries are covered by health insurance, providing with free access to health care services. Other homeless people may be covered by one-time health procedure funded by the social assistance institution or covered by health insurance at the request of local authorities. In addition, some shelters for the homeless have their own staff doctors (nurses). It should be also noted that programmes counteracting homelessness are offered also by some NGOs helping homeless people.

Social assistance statistics specify the existence of 662 overnight lodging establishments, shelters and homes for the homeless offering 22,772 places (2008 data). It is estimated that help was given to 33,794 homeless persons⁹³.

So far services for homeless people have not been standardised but introducing of standardisation will be among measures planned for implementation in the future.

81. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy collects data on homeless people collected and delivered by local social assistance institutions. The monitoring of implementation of specific programmes and actions is also conducted by the Ministry. A comprehensive set of statistical database on homeless people is lacking, but its development in cooperation with the regions is planned.

Poland has experience in operating programmes for lifting people out of homelessness, but so far no adequate standards have been developed for working with homeless people. Work on such standards and on monitoring homelessness is to be carried out now as part of projects co-financed with ESF resources.

⁹² Data from regional governors' reports

⁹³ Ibidem

PORTUGAL

1. CURRENT SITUATION

A national definition has been approved under the framework of the 1st National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People (NSIHP), and concerns those who are in the following situations:

Rooflessness - without a shelter of any kind, sleeping rough.

Houselessness - with a place to sleep but temporarily in institutions or shelter.

The definition contained in the National Strategy is based on ETHOS categories (1, 2 and 3) but does not cover all the houseless categories in ETHOS.

It should be stressed that until March 2009 there was no official definition of homelessness in Portugal and the adoption of a national definition is a positive development in this field, even if all ETHOS categories are not covered.

In Portugal, an accurate number of homeless people is not known. However according to a study carried out in 2005⁹⁴ the homeless people in Portugal are, above all, men of active age (30-70 years), single and divorced, Portuguese citizens, with basic schooling, distributed essentially throughout the large metropolitan areas (Lisbon and Porto), followed by the mid-sized cities of Setúbal, Faro and Braga, Coimbra and Aveiro. Another emergent trend has been the growth of immigrants in their ranks, namely Eastern European migrants. Women are also affected by this phenomenon but are not as visible as they more often resort to other informal network support but also because institutional services for victims of domestic violence and for young mothers are not considered as services for the homeless.

The structural causes of homelessness seem linked to drug addiction, alcoholism and mental illness or family relationship rupture, often related to other causes like low levels of education, informal work market, unemployment, insufficient health system responses and difficulties in the individual's access to adequate and affordable housing.

82. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

The Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity is responsible for the recent National Strategy on Homelessness, represented by the Institute for Social Security (ISS, I.P.). The Ministry responsible for housing policies is the Ministry of Environment, Planning and Regional Development (represented by the Institute of Housing and Urban Rehabilitation (IHRU). Other Ministries involved in the National Strategy are: the Ministry of Health, of Internal Affairs, of Justice, and the Chairmanship of the Council of Ministers. In 2010, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Education and the National Statistics Institute will also sign a

⁹⁴ Instituto da Segurança Social (2005) Os Sem-Tecto: realidades (in)visíveis. Lisboa.

commitment to participate in the implementation of the National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People.

The national strategy recognises the existence of local dynamics in the provision of services not only in homelessness, but also regarding the promotion of social inclusion and thus provides guidelines for the implementation of local homelessness plans, which will be defined and implemented within these local social networks. These entities are expected to present and implement local plans according to the strategy's orientation. One of the challenges facing the implementation of the national homelessness strategy is the continued strong involvement of the wide range of stakeholders (public and private). The national level Group for the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy is responsible for disseminating the guidelines, and for providing support to the local networks and units responsible for designing those plans.

The two main strategic axes comprise measures aiming at:

1) achieving more evidence-based knowledge on homelessness, namely by the use and dissemination of an agreed definition of homelessness, and of a shared information and monitoring system; promoting sensitisation initiatives addressed both at the school and the media environments to tackle the social stigmatisation of the homeless population;

2) promoting quality in the provision of homelessness services and responses, namely by eliminating the need to sleep rough, by increasing the quality of temporary accommodation, by preventing the lack of accommodation and support upon discharge from an institution, by reinforcing permanent housing solutions, by improving access to social benefits, by improving access to health care (namely to mental health care services), by promoting training and qualification opportunities for workers in this field, by enhancing the drafting of local homelessness plans, and by promoting the adoption of specific methodological orientations in intervention practices.

The strategy defines three specific areas to be tackled by the different measures proposed under the two strategic axes:

a) a focus on preventative actions in order to avoid situations of homelessness arising from eviction or discharge from an institution;

b) direct intervention in situations of homelessness focussing on the clarification of procedures and responsibilities within a specific intervention model, and also on the experimentation of innovative projects;

c) and the follow-up of situations, ensuring the continuity – when needed – of support after resettlement.

Special importance is given to the implementation of:

a) an information and monitoring system, with service providers and clients registers

b) an integrated and client-centred approach , with individual insertion contracts

c) local diagnosis including risk indicators

d) local homelessness plans within the *social network program* and homelessness strategy 's framework

A budget of €75.000.000 is dedicated for this Strategy. Nevertheless an identification of the costs related to many measures needs improvement.

83. ACCESS TO HOUSING

The main objective in this area is to promote local diagnoses which include the identification of risks factors in order to prevent homelessness .The biggest challenge is to create efficient communication system with different bodies, namely the justice system.

In Portugal there are three main types of accommodation as follow: 1. Temporary accommodation; 2. Integration Community; 3. Reintegration Apartments.

To create professional support in the transition from emergency or temporary accommodation to more permanent solutions is one of the National Strategy specific goals. Emergency situations are covered by the existent measures but there is a lack of responses that give continuity to individual's trajectory of reinsertion, and it deserves a special attention. For the moment any assessment can be done in this area.

Supported housing – a *Housing First Project* is being implemented in Lisbon since September 2009 involving 50 homeless people with mental illness that are placed in houses for rent with permanent technical social support. However other examples of supported accommodation already existing in Portugal, addressed to people having drug addiction or HIV problems.

Access to independent housing – Programmes to facilitate access to independent housing have been carried out by the Public Services: programmes for supporting families facing serious housing problems (access to controlled cost housing, rehabilitation programmes, direct financial support in emergency situations); promotion of the rental market particularly aiming at young people; specific programmes in particularly disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Affordability – For many years rents were frozen, promoting a non-competitive rental market and increasing considerably home owning. In the present days new rents are very expensive and this phenomenon leads people to buy accommodation instead of renting. There is no system to control rents. A housing allowance can be asked for by people under 65 if the family gross annual income is less than 3 minimum wages or by people over 65 having a family gross annual income inferior to five annual minimum wages. This allowance is decided by the IHRU.

Quality of housing – A specific programme – Prohabita (Financial Programme of Housing Access) – was created for those living in shanties or in buildings lacking adequate conditions and/or with no viable rehabilitation as well as situations of destruction of the dwelling and situations of overcrowding witch represented in 2007 15.5 % of the total population . The Program is executed through the establishment of cooperation agreements between IHRU and public regional and national services, such as municipalities or associations of municipalities, public institutes and the entrepreneurial public entities

84. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Homeless people as any other vulnerable groups can benefit from the available measures/programmes of training and employment as well as the existent Portuguese National Health Care.

The direct engagement of the Ministry of Health and the Institute for Employment and Professional Training in the process leading to the conception of the Strategy and their commitment towards specific measures in order to promote access to opportunities and services which although existing where not reaching the homeless population may enhance improvement in these areas, depending on how these measures will be implemented.

85. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Portugal is still in an initial phase of implementation of the national strategy. A first evaluation report is foreseen in December 2009. An intersectorial group, with representatives of the Ministries and other stakeholders is responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the National Strategy.

ROMANIA

1. CURRENT SITUATION

There is no official definition of homelessness in Romania, where it is a relatively new concept. Access to housing has been guaranteed by the State to all citizens since around 1990. Local authorities, which are mainly responsible for programs to fight homelessness, have often come to develop operational definitions of the phenomena. The lack of a common definition and understanding of homelessness hinders the proper quantification of the problem. According to different national statistics available, the number of homeless people varies from 5 554⁹⁵ to 15.000⁹⁶. The main causes of homelessness include financial difficulties, the restitution to former owners of dwellings nationalised during the Communist period and insufficient number of dwellings for the people evicted, changes to the legal status of the land and natural disasters. Vulnerable groups include the young, people with disabilities, large families, the Roma, the unemployed and people living on low income⁹⁷.

In Romania social housing is scarce and targeted at the very poor. There is also a large gap between supply and demand for housing, especially for affordable dwellings.

According to EU statistics, Romania is one of the EU countries with a high proportion of home ownership. However, most apartment buildings are in bad conditions due to insufficient maintenance over the years and lack of investment in renovation. Romania is also the country with the highest overcrowding rate in the EU (54% against 17,3% on average in the EU in 2007). 18.4% of the population live in a household for which housing costs represent more than 40% of disposable income, one of the highest rate in the EU (compared to 12.3% on average in the EU in 2007). The high cost of energy and heating, low income, natural disasters and the bad condition of buildings are all factors contributing to housing exclusion and homelessness.

2. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

Romania does not have a specific policy to address homelessness, even though a number of measures have been adopted to face the new challenges of society in this area. Overall objectives of the Romanian government for the 2009-2012 period in the area of housing are: 1. to increase the state budget dedicated to rural infrastructure, roads and social housing (the country report does not provide further details); 2. to implement the national programme for the construction of social housing; 3. to build social housing for young people at national level, initially attributed through rental contracts.

The general framework for the development of policies to prevent housing exclusion is based on the constitutional right to social assistance for the vulnerable groups (e.g. the young,

⁹⁵ Statistics from the Ministry of Administration and home affairs indicate a decrease in the number of homeless people between 2004-2008 from 7.879 to 5.554 people;

⁹⁶ The Quality of Life Institute (2005) evaluates that there are between 11.000 and 14.000 homeless at national level, of which 10.800 are in urban areas and approximately 5.000 in Bucharest.

⁹⁷ The Quality of Life Institute (2005), Housing in Romania – the right to housing, Adrian-Nicolae Dan,

people evicted following the restitution of their dwelling to the original owners, the Roma, people on low income, people with disabilities, young people living in institutional care, etc.). Romanian housing legislation foresees the right to "*free access and without restriction to housing and to an adequate standard of living*" for all citizens. The legal framework for social housing includes 3 laws: the law on housing 114/1996 (which recognizes the right to housing and defines social housing), law 116/2002 on preventing and fighting social exclusion and law 48/2002 against all forms of discrimination. The law on housing defines the income threshold under which people are eligible for social housing, but the actual criteria to attribute social housing are defined at local level. The law limits the maximum rent level to be paid to 10% of the tenant's income and provides for the local authorities to finance the difference.

Responsibility for housing is divided between several institutions and levels of government. At the national level, the main actors are the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection (in charge of the coordination of social inclusion policies), the Ministry of Regional Development and Housing (in charge of housing policy, including social housing), the National Roma Agency (including the "housing" strand) and the National Housing Agency which is responsible for the coordination of the financing of housing construction. At the local level, local authorities are responsible for the management of social housing, and together with the increasing support and active involvement of NGOs, are the main service providers for the homeless.

3. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

3.1. Accessibility

In the field of prevention, the country report focuses on the legislation aimed at protecting people at risk of eviction, notably those evicted during the restitution to former owners of dwellings that were nationalised. Support is aimed at providing accommodation for the people evicted and at offering solutions to allow them to buy or rent accommodation at below-market prices. The document lists a number of on-going construction programmes, but the information provided remains descriptive and doesn't allow for a detailed analysis.

Concerning people that are temporarily without accommodation, the Nomenclature Of the Romanian Social Assistance Entities foresees two types of institutions night shelters and emergency centres. At national level, there are 69 emergency centres, 35 night shelters and 123 public or private providers of social services for the homeless. These figures appear modest, even for the Romanian authorities which acknowledge the lack of official quantification of the number of homeless people. Such quantification is essential to allow a proper estimate of the need for this type of accommodation.

An important issue facing the Romanian authorities is ensuring the transition from emergency centres and night shelters to permanent and stable accommodation. At the moment, solutions seem limited and largely depend on the volume of social housing, either existing or currently being built. Another issue concerns how to motivate local authorities to make building land available. Currently, local authorities tend not to make their land available for the construction of social housing because it is not profitable for them.

3.2. Quality

2007 SILC data points to problems with the quality of Romanian housing: 29.5% of the population live in houses with a leaking roof, as against 18% on average in the EU-27; 42%

of Romanians live in a dwelling without bath or shower, as against 3.3% on average in the EU-27; 44% live in a dwelling without in-door flushing toilet for the sole use of the household, as against 3.6% on average in the EU-27. Another worrying indicator is the percentage of people living in an overcrowded accommodation which is the highest in Europe (54% as against 17.3% on average in the EU in 2007). The country report indicates that a significant share of Structural Funds (notably the FEDER) will be used to improve, rehabilitate, modernise, develop and fit out social infrastructure.

4. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

The main instrument to promote access to services is the National Strategy for the Development of the National System of Social Services. Even though homeless people are consistently mentioned among the vulnerable groups in most national strategic documents (e.g; the National Strategy Report for Social Inclusion and Social Protection), their actual access to services remains very limited especially for those who do not have official identification. Access to employment also seems limited and there is no specific and individualised program for these people. While homeless people can receive free meals from social canteens, their access to health care is limited to emergency care (which sometimes also offers temporary shelter for these people, substituting for social assistance services). Specific attention needs to be paid to the imbalance between the services available in urban areas and in rural or remote communities.

5. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Data on homelessness or housing exclusion are still difficult to find and most figures available are produced by NGOs. The Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection is responsible for the national coordination of social policies in Romania and also has responsibilities for the monitoring and evaluation . The monitoring and evaluation of social policies are based on decision n° 488/2005 of the government concerning the national system of social inclusion indicators. Up until now, indicators in the field of housing cover four dimensions: housing quality (adequacy), access to utilities (water, electricity, heating); basic necessity durables (fridge, phone); and overcrowding (households where there are more than 2 persons per bedroom). There is a need to improve the data collection system.

SLOVENIA

1. CURRENT SITUATION

The term social housing itself has not been in use in Slovenia since 2003, and the concept does not exist anymore. When used, it is only for “practical reasons”. However, there are three types of housing in Slovenia: profit, non-profit and temporary emergency accommodation.

Slovenia has not adopted the typology of HHE and there is no reference to ETHOS typology. Homeless people are not recognised as a separate group. Therefore, they are in the same position as any other person applying for non-profit housing.

According to the share of population whose housing cost burden exceeds 40% by income quintile and poverty risk status in 2007, Slovenia is well below the EU average (EU27: 12.3%). This share is 5.1% in total, out of which 16.1% in the first quintile and 0.5% in the fifth quintile.

According to the share of population whose housing cost burden exceeds 40% by tenure status in 2007, with 2.9% Slovenia is well below the EU average (EU27: 6.7%) for the outright owners; Slovenia is also below the EU average for tenants with reduced price or free rent (5.5% for Slovenia and EU27: 13%). However, with 16.5% Slovenia is well above the EU27 average (8.6 %) for owners repaying a mortgage, while when it comes to tenants with market price rent, it is close to the EU average (Slovenia 25.5% and EU27: 25.4%).

Slovenia is much above the average according to the overcrowding rate in all households (Slovenia 39.1 % and EU27: 17.3% in 2007) and also above the average when 1-person households are excluded (Slovenia 40.1% and EU27: 18.1% in 2007).

With regard to the proportion of people deprived in 2007, Slovenia is close to the average when considering the item ‘leaking roof’ (Slovenia 17.5% and EU26*: 18% in 2007), ‘dark dwelling’ (Slovenia: 9.7% and EU26*: 8.1% in 2007), ‘indoor toilet’ (Slovenia: 1.1% and EU26*: 3.6% in 2007), and ‘bath or shower’ (Slovenia 1% and EU26*: 3.6% in 2007).⁹⁸

86. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

The Slovenian Constitution acknowledges that the State should set possibilities for citizens to gain access to adequate housing. The Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MoESP) has the overall competency for housing policy.

The two main legal instruments are the "Housing Act" and the "National Housing Programme". However, none of these documents includes homelessness, which is mainly the domain of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (MoLFSA). Moreover, there is no consistent intersectional policy or co-ordination in the area of Homelessness and Housing

⁹⁸ * No data for Bulgaria.

Exclusion. MoESP does not integrate the HHE in housing policy and MoLFSA can offer only accommodation in the form of residential units and shelters. There is no joint governmental plan for tackling homelessness.

In 2008, national budget allocated €5 Mio for the acquisition of non-profit housing. However, the Cohesion Policy funds have not been used in any housing projects and it is not envisaged in the future.

The State prescribes the conditions for housing allocation, the amount of the highest non-profit rent and subsidy amounts. It also invests in the construction of new rental housing through the Housing Fund of the Republic of Slovenia together with municipalities. Local communities provide housing and assign residential units and subsidies to tenants. The cooperation of local communities with NGOs is in place. MoLFSA is also funding the work of NGOs in this area and 16 NGOs have received funding in year 2009.

The main objective in the field of housing is to provide suitable housing to a maximum number of citizens in need of accommodation, giving the priority to handicapped people, young families, and families with several children. However, there are no objectives set for the homeless. There is also no gender dimension within housing policy, for example tenders published for non-profit housing did not give any priority to single mothers, since they are not treated as a family according to national legislation.

87. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

87.1. Accessibility

Housing shortage for people with low incomes is most evident in larger cities. Housing legislation was therefore changed on 1 January 2009 to include subsidies for persons who reside in apartments rented at market price, yet meet the requirements for renting non-profit housing. Funds for non-profit housing are provided from the State and municipal budgets. The Housing Act entitles tenants of non-profit rented accommodation to unlimited tenancy for a low-income rent. Consequently, tenancy agreements cannot be terminated as long as the tenant complies with all the provisions of the agreement. Tenants cannot be evicted if defaulting due to difficult economic situation, provided they also applied for subsidy.

Temporary residential units are intended as a temporary solution for the most socially disadvantaged individuals. It is not known whether the number of these units is sufficient, as local communities have to provide them and as there is not central monitoring of supply.

A network of accommodation options for the homeless is currently set up in eight different cities in Slovenia. In addition to accommodation options (such as shelters and temporary residential units), various support programmes have also been set up (first care services for people without health insurance, hygiene treatment, food distribution points), and field work with the homeless. MoLFSA funded 16 programmes for homeless people, some of which also offer accommodation.

87.2. Quality

Rules on renting non-profit apartments prescribe the apartment size according to the number of household members. The minimum level of quality is defined under the Rules on minimum

technical conditions for the construction of apartments. The standards are high and satisfactory.

Temporary emergency housing in cases of no transfer to permanent housing remains an issue of quality. The standards for temporary accommodation are very low and situations where a family with several children end up in a single room with shared bathroom and shared kitchen still occur. Such situations are only an option for a short period of time.

88. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Homelessness is not a political priority, therefore no specific comprehensive homelessness policy or approach exists. Homelessness in its most acute form – sleeping rough – is still relatively hidden and it is not very widespread. Nevertheless, some improvements have been made in increasing the quantity and quality of housing provided to vulnerable groups. In 2008, there were 107 places available in shelters and 78 places in the programmes of admission centres and day centres.⁹⁹

The issue of homelessness is partially addressed also in the field of social care. Homeless people can claim social benefits under the same conditions as other Slovene citizens. They can obtain social assistance under the Social Security Act to cover basic survival needs, and in extreme circumstances, additional financial aid may also be authorised, either as a one-off aid or on a periodic basis. Homeless people cannot get any additional financial aid to cover costs such as health care or transportation. The rights of the public health care are accessible to anyone with proper health insurance; however, a recent research¹⁰⁰ conducted for the Ministry of Health showed that the majority of homeless people do not have such insurance. They mostly go to two voluntary health centres that have been set up by retired general practitioners.

There are currently no national standards in place for the quality of social services dedicated to homeless people.

89. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Currently, there are no statistics available and no systems of monitoring or evaluation put in place. It is difficult to find data on rent subsidies since they are the responsibility of local communities and there is no central register.

The lack of data poses a serious problem to policy makers; therefore it is crucial to establish a national data base which would enable better monitoring and evaluation.

⁹⁹ National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008-2010.

¹⁰⁰ Razportnik, S., Dekleva, B., Brezdomstvo, zdravje in dostopnost zdravstvenih storitev (Homelessness, health and accessibility of the health care), Ljubljana, Ministry of Health, 2009.

SLOVAKIA

1. CURRENT SITUATION

Access to housing has been severely influenced by the suspended State support to the housing construction in the 1990's and its relatively slow increase in this decade. In 2001¹⁰¹, the population accounted for 5.4 Mio people distributed among 1.6 Mio households. The number of dwellings was 1.9 Mio out of which 1.7 Mio were permanently occupied.

The lack of housing confirmed in the 2001 Census also revealed that the proportion of flats with two and more households was 18.8% compared to 11.8% in 1991. According to estimates, there was a shortage of ca. 230-250,000 flats in 2005. Available data indicate that the owner-resided housing, representing 85% of the dwelling stock, is not an option for young households, due to a mismatch between housing prices and household incomes. The financial crisis has even worsened this situation. Even though housing prices have slightly decreased¹⁰² (from €1,511 per sq. meter in 2008 to €1,342 in 2Q 2009), with the unemployment rate rapidly increasing (12% in July 2009 vs. 9% in August 2008), housing sales are on the decline.

Though the housing shortage has not been compensated by a more generous funding in the building sector, the importance of investing in social housing, declared at political level, has strengthened in the last years: since 2004, the emphasis on the development of social housing is in all strategic documents, such as NAP/inclusion or National Reform Plan. By way of example, 17,184 flats in total were completed in 2008, out of which 2,632 represented rental flats.

The share of population living in a household where housing costs represent more than 40% of the total household income was 18.9% in 2007 (EU average: 12.3%). By tenure status, the share is higher for the tenants paying a market price rent (37% vs. EU average 25.4%). In 2005, the net expenses for housing per capita per month were 68 EUR, while the average monthly wage was 573¹⁰³ EUR (with substantial differences between regions). The overcrowding rate is fairly high (41.1% in 2007, EU: 17.3%). As to the proportion of people deprived in 2007, it was below the EU average – the rate of population reported to live in acceptable living standards was second highest in the EU at 89.8% vs. 75.2% in the EU.

However, some groups threatened by social exclusion, in particular Roma, still face important challenges in terms of basic housing quality. There are no official statistics on homeless people. According to estimates by the NGO "Proti prádu"¹⁰⁴, there are around 2,000 homeless people in Bratislava.

¹⁰¹ 2001 Census, carried out every 10 years

¹⁰² Source: National Bank of Slovakia, www.nbs.sk

¹⁰³ Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

¹⁰⁴ Information cited in the National report on strategies of social protection and social inclusion 2006-2008

90. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

The Slovak constitution does not acknowledge the right to housing, though it guarantees the inviolability of the residence. Slovakia did not commit to Article 31 Right to housing in the revised European Social Chart in 2008. The development of SK legislation has gradually reduced the warrants of safe housing, the most important amendment being probably the change of the Civil Code in 2001 which considerably weakened the legal position of tenants in municipal apartments.

The overall housing policy, in particular creating a market environment for the provision of housing, is in the competence of the Ministry of Construction and Regional Development (MCRD). The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (MLSaF) is in charge of establishing the social instruments such as a provision of social services or housing allowances. The responsibility for social services facilities is split between the MCRD, which provides resources for their re/construction and the MLSaF, which does the same for their running.

The present key objective of housing policy presented also in the National Strategies Report (NSR) 2008 is to support the affordability of (rented) housing and the construction of apartments intended for vulnerable groups. However, the exclusive focus on rental housing in NSR neglects the complexity of the issue of homelessness.

Due to the high degree of decentralisation in the housing policy, the responsibility is shared at all three levels of the administration (national, regional, and local). The state budget allocations for housing support consisting of mortgage loan interest subsidy, home savings bank bonus, and State Housing Development Fund have been steadily decreasing in the last years, reaching level of 0.24% of GDP in 2007. Following the decentralised policy, the local governments are free to design and implement their own housing policies since the early 1990 without being obliged to follow any common standards. Some of them started the process of pushing low-income families (very often Roma) out of central parts of towns and villages to their immediate outskirts, concentrating rent-debtors in the same neighbourhoods, thus creating local ghettos. The long-term concept of low-standard housing for marginalised groups was elaborated (a flushing toilet or basin is not required); however the participation of municipalities in the programme is voluntary.

91. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

91.1. Accessibility

The homelessness prevention is the issue of a complex multidepartment approach (4 Ministries, 8 self-governing regions, NGOs, all under the administration of the Deputy Prime Minister) that risks being too complex to be correctly implemented into practice.

Three categories of social housing are established (rental flats in the public rental housing sector, flats for low income families, and flats of lower standards for non-payers of rent). However they are not interconnected and generally not very accessible, partly because there are not enough of them (only 5 % of occupied dwelling stock is for rental¹⁰⁵) and partly because of their relatively high monthly rent. Other services provided depend on the towns:

¹⁰⁵ Housing statistics in the EU

for instance, some of them operate overnight facilities for the homeless in winter (in 2006, 18 homeless people had frozen to death in Bratislava, as there was not any low threshold shelter); others may financially support NGOs working with the homeless.

As a rule, the tenancy contracts are time limited. The rent regulation adopted by the Ministry of Finance effective as of 1 May 2008 concern only flats returned to original owners on the basis of restitution, while in municipal rental flats the "market" rent is set up. The prices of utilities, which represent another serious problem (90.5% of the total population are able to pay total housing costs only with difficulties or great difficulties)¹⁰⁶, are with some exceptions not regulated at all. The coverage of the housing allowance established in Act 599/2003 on assistance in material need is considerably limited by the strict conditions of eligibility on the one side (members of Roma marginalised communities as well as homeless people are in principle not covered at all due to problems with official approval of ownership and other legal difficulties), and on the other hand, by fairly low amounts (€52.12 monthly for 1 person, €83.32 for a family). For the above reasons, jobless families often cannot afford to rent a standard social flat. Social housing is not seen as a core solution for homeless people, as the requirement of a permanent residence and often certain income level exclude this possibility.

The main institutional tool for provision of housing for low income groups is the State Housing Development Fund, established in 1996. It allocates funds annually for the construction, reconstruction and purchase of flats and houses, intended for individuals, legal entities, municipalities, as well as for NGOs. In 2008, the Fund spent ca. €160 Mio for the support of the housing development, out of which 99% represented a loan.¹⁰⁷

New Act No 448/2008 on Social services defines 6 temporary types of housing, namely overnight facilities, shelters, halfway houses, low-threshold day centres, emergency housing facilities, and low-threshold centres for families and children. These types of housing facilities still need to be more significantly translated from the law into daily life. The supply of temporary accommodation differs from region to region, for example in Bratislava the demand substantially exceeds the capacity of available facilities. The programmes of transition from emergency accommodation to more permanent or safe housing do not exist.

Limited social assistance and social work may have contributed to increasing debts in some cases; the municipalities routinely use the non-payment of rent as the reason for evicting tenants. In some districts, the town curators do not have any other tools for helping people released from prison than their advice.¹⁰⁸

91.2. Quality

Minimum conditions for adequate housing were introduced in Act 355/2007 on the protection, support and development of public health, and Order 259/2008 of the Ministry of Health on the details and requirements for the internal equipment of buildings and minimum requirements for lower standard flats and housing facilities. As a matter of fact, Slovakia's legal system does not include the exact definition of the term "inadequate housing". As stated above in part II, the low standard housing being built for marginalised groups in the framework of the long-term concept require only the technical possibility to install facilities for cooking, a flushing toilet, or a basin (their actual fitting is apparently up to the tenant).

¹⁰⁶ EU SILC 2008

¹⁰⁷ Official webpage of the State Housing Development Fund, <http://www.sfrb.sk>

¹⁰⁸ Personal research experience of EC expert

The quality of housing is not mentioned in national key strategic documents, neither covered by targets and indicators in NAP/incl. 2008-2010. The quantitative approach is the basis of Slovakia's policy, based on the factual overcrowding of dwellings. The issue of improving the quality of housing depends on the availability of financing, which is limited as the rent defaulting is deeply manifested in vulnerable groups.

At 41.1% in 2007, the overcrowding rate is considerably higher than the EU average (17.3%). But there is a considerably smaller proportion of people deprived on all five indicators than the EU 27 average (leaking roof, bath or shower, indoor toilet, dark dwelling, and bath and toilet). It is worth mentioning however that the poorest households, coming from segregated Roma communities, are under-represented in the EU-SILC sample.

92. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

The standards of the provision of social services are established by Act 448/2008 on social services – shelters and over-night facilities should provide temporary accommodation, social counseling and conditions for basic personal hygiene and preparation and provision of food. The Act 576/2006 on Healthcare provides good access to health care for homeless people, with exception of dental care.

The Government has no official estimates available of the total number of homeless people in Slovakia.¹⁰⁹ Unofficially their number is estimated at 2-3000 people¹¹⁰ in Bratislava, it could be half in the second biggest city Košice. According to the SK Statistical Office¹¹¹, as to 31 December 2007 Slovakia offered the services of 12 establishments of protected housing (available places: 246), 26 houses for lone parents (available places: 611), and 69 shelters (available places: 1,754).

At the local level, at the beginning of 2009¹¹², 360 clients used the services of the lodging house, 9 clients used the low threshold daily centre, and 22 clients used the low threshold daily centre for families and children. At the regional level, 0 clients used the services of the half-way home, 7 persons used the facility of the emergency housing, and 0 clients used the services of the integration centre.

93. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The key negative aspect is the fact that local governments have no reporting obligation about the housing situation and/or data collection on homeless people in their municipalities. There is no regular monitoring or research, leading to a significant lack of data, a non-existence of standards, and a lack of co-ordination.

Currently, it is officially only possible to monitor social services facilities according to the type of social service provided (shelters, etc.). Any other (isolated) monitoring and evaluation

¹⁰⁹ NAP/SISP 2008

¹¹⁰ Estimation from February 2006 by the Initiative of ten NGOs stated that the highest number of homeless in Slovakia was in Bratislava, ca. 2-3 000 persons.

¹¹¹ Report on the social situation of the population of Slovakia in 2008 by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family

¹¹² The Institute for the Research of Labour and Family: First monitoring of the implementation of the Act 448/2008 on social services for the period 1 January – 31 March 2009.

is run by NGOs and funded by human rights organisations. There are plans to build a database on the housing situation and for monitoring housing needs at national and regional levels.

FINLAND

1. CURRENT SITUATION

According to the latest report by the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland, the number of single homeless people is estimated to have declined from over 18 000 people in the end of 1980's to about 8 000 people (November 2008). The number of homeless families has declined to 300 from 1 370 in 1987. The largest group of homeless people is those living temporarily with friends and relatives (almost 5 000 people). In addition, it is estimated that about 1 500 people are living in different kinds of institutions. Furthermore, approximately 1 000 people live in shelters, whereas the amount of people living outdoors is very small.

The share of women is about 25% and nearly as many young people are without permanent dwelling. Immigrants represent about 4-5% of single homeless, and about 15% of homeless families. The data on immigrants is, however, imperfect as not even all the biggest cities estimate the share of immigrants in the data. It has been estimated that one third of all homeless are long-term homeless, approximately 2 500, of whom approximately 2 000 live in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. Long-term homeless are considered to be people whose homelessness is classed as prolonged or chronic or is at risk to be that way, because conventional housing solutions fail and there is an inadequate supply of other solutions.

The Finnish homelessness survey does not count as homeless those living under threat of eviction or under threat of violence. Nor does it include people receiving support for accommodation, as this is seen as a permanent solution to homelessness. The survey is done by the municipalities based on examination of the situation on a one single calendar day (15.11.). Although there are guidelines, there can be some differences between municipalities in how they count the homeless. The guidelines have also changed a bit and municipalities have themselves changed the principles what to exclude and what not, which may reflect in statistics independently of real change.

Recently the number of homeless people has visibly increased. Mainly because the municipalities in growth centres have not produced enough rental accommodations, especially small flats with reasonable living cost, although the demand has been increasing. The economic recession and increasing unemployment (8.9% in 2009 and 9.3% in 2010, ECFIN Spring forecast) is likely to make the situation worse.

The overcrowding rate is low (5.7% in 2007) compared to the EU average (17.3%) and even lower when one person households are excluded (2.8%; EU27: 18.1%). The share of population reported to have acceptable living standards was 88.9% in 2007 in Finland, whereas the EU27 average was 75.2%. However, the share of those living in acceptable conditions among the older people is somewhat smaller.

6. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

According to the Constitution of Finland, the authorities shall promote the right of everyone to housing and the opportunity to arrange their own housing. The Act on the Development of Housing Conditions aims at guaranteeing all people residing permanently in Finland an opportunity to reasonable housing corresponding to the size of the household and the personal

needs. The dwellings should be appropriate, safe and well-functioning. In addition, housing costs should be reasonable in proportion to the size of the household and its disposable income. It is the responsibility of municipalities to ensure measures to improve the quality of housing especially for the homeless and the deprived. A subjective right to obtain a dwelling arranged by authorities does not exist, except in the cases of severe disability and when child welfare interests are concerned.

The Ministry of the Environment has the responsibility of planning and monitoring matters concerning overall housing conditions, strategies, special programmes, counselling and other preventive measures. Municipalities alone or municipalities in regional co-operation are responsible for the implementation of these tasks on local level. Ministry of Social and Health Affairs is responsible for social and health services related to housing, e.g. home care, subsistence income, housing allowances. Municipalities or municipalities in regional co-operation are the implementing bodies and regional State authorities are the supervising bodies. The Prison Service of the Ministry of Justice is responsible for release plans of prisoners, which include arrangements for accommodation.

The overall policy and actor framework is fairly comprehensive. It is a combination of State, local and private actors, including NGOs, which have at their disposal general and specific measures to prevent and reduce homelessness. General measures are available for the whole population. Special measures are delivered according to the need.

The current government's housing policy includes a programme for the years 2008-2011. Its objectives are to reduce long-term homelessness by 50% and to enforce measures preventing homelessness. The programme includes for the first time funding for increases in personnel needed to produce support services. The objectives are met by producing at least 1 250 new supported flats/places and by giving more resources to counselling and developing new concepts for support services in order to attain earlier interventions.

Special accommodation for women and families exists, but do not meet the needs. Many of the new units are available both for men and women, but the programme concentrates on measures to help men, who constitute the majority of the homeless people.

7. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

7.1. Accessibility

Rental accommodation funded by the state is allocated to individuals according to their income, property assets and need. Homelessness is naturally evaluated as an urgent need. Social housing is considered to be the most important solution for homeless, especially for people and families who can manage with normal economic and social support. Most of the long-term homeless, however, need special housing solutions and more intensive, round-the-clock support with supervisory staff.

Social mix in the planning, construction and maintenance of housing areas has been the mainstream ideology in Finland since the 1960's. Public grants have been used to acquire rented accommodation from owner-occupied housing stock, i.e. housing companies, to avoid concentration of social groups. The estimation is that there are about 40 000 supported flats of this kind. Social housing can be built or acquired by local authorities or other public bodies e.g. municipalities, insurance companies, other organisations designated by the competent authority, and limited liability companies of various type in which one or more of the three

previously mentioned organisations have direct dominant authority. In most cases such a limited liability company is owned by a municipality.

According to national statistics, the nation-wide availability of State-subsidised rental dwellings has gradually improved between 1999 and 2006.¹¹³ However, the shortage of affordable rental units is a constant cause for complains in major growing urban areas. More effort is needed among both central and regional policy makers to increased production of state-subsidised rental accommodation.

Rent control in Finland was done away with gradually during 1992-1995. There are three parallel systems for granting housing allowances. These are targeted to different population groups according to the phase of their life-cycle. The housing allowance system is means-tested, i.e. the allowances are available only for households on small incomes.

7.2. Quality

The quality of housing is regulated by the following legislation: The Law on Land Use and Building, which includes the general requirements of residential buildings and other habitations, the Decree on Housing Design containing more detailed provisions to the law, and the National Building Code, which includes regulations on the essential technical requirements of buildings.

A dwelling with all basic amenities has piped water supply, drains, supply of warm water, indoor plumbing toilet, washing space (shower/bathroom or sauna) and central or electric heating. The share of residents in such dwellings has continuously increased, being 90% in 2004. Among over 70-year-olds, the share is 85%, which is a result of some aged people living in old one-family houses in the countryside without all the basic amenities mentioned above.

In Finland households are considered to live in overcrowded dwellings when there is more than one person per room, including the kitchen. The number of such households has decreased among both owner-occupied and rental dwellings to 4.3% (2003) of all dwellings.

In its judgment on client places on institutions providing care for demented people, the Supreme Administrative Court ruled that a prerequisite for home-like living conditions is to provide a room of his/her own, and that each client's right to privacy, irrespective of the form of housing, is safeguarded as a basic right. The Court considered that, as a rule, it is not justifiable to place two strange people in one room, or to have an increased number of client places on economic grounds.

8. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

The Finnish legislation on social welfare and health emphasises the so called normality principle, which entitles the homeless to same social security benefits and social welfare and health services as other permanent residents. Eligibility for benefits depends on the individual's needs for services. In accordance with this principle, there has been no good reason or need to draft separate norms or quality standards for social welfare services for the homeless.

113

A separate social care office solely for the homeless only exists in the city of Helsinki. A new reception and assessment unit for the homeless, a first of its kind, was recently established in Helsinki offering both social welfare and health services. Normally, however the homeless use the municipal services available for everyone, e.g. health care centres. Homeless people, who are also long-term unemployed, can engage in vocational rehabilitation based on an individual activation plan drawn up jointly by the social welfare authorities and the employment office. Since a large share of homeless in Finland has multiple problems and they do not often turn to the available services for help, the main challenge is to reach them. Day centres for the homeless and search work locating those who live outdoors is organised in the largest cities. The number of the homeless people living outdoors (mainly in huts in the woods) in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area is between 50 and 100 people, depending on the time of the year. There is also an NGO carrying out search work during night time in Helsinki.

9. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland is responsible at national level for gathering monitoring data on homelessness. Data concerning the numbers of homeless people is collected by combining the data from the housing and social welfare authorities with information provided by other organisations involved. Improvements in the system have been done mainly by stepping up cooperation in data gathering at local level.

The Programme to Reduce Long-term Homelessness involves a detailed monitoring process, in which data is collected on measures taken in the cities with respect to individuals and in the context of projects.

In 2006 an external evaluation was conducted on the National (2001–2005) and Helsinki Metropolitan Area (2002–2005) Action Plans to Reduce Homelessness. The programmes improved local cooperation among the various authorities and the awareness of the necessity to offer support services connected with housing/accommodation. However, the programme did not much increase the stock of low-rent accommodation essential for reducing homelessness. On the basis of the recommendation presented in the report a new programme to reduce long-term homelessness begun in 2008.

¹ Statistics of Social Housing. Housing Fund of Finland, Housing Indicators, 25.6.2007

SWEDEN

1. CURRENT SITUATION

According to national data, 17.800 people were considered to be homeless in Sweden in 2005. Among them, approximately 3.600 were sleeping rough, or were referred to shelters or other emergency accommodation such as women's refuges. The majority of the homeless were people who currently have somewhere to stay but whose housing situation is uncertain in various respects, such as people about to be released from correctional facilities or treatment institutions without having any accommodation arranged before being discharged, or people in temporary and transitional supported accommodation provided by social services or others.

The most recent mapping showed an increase of 2.000-3.000 people since the previous mapping five years earlier. About 75% of the homeless were men, and while the majority were born in Sweden, there is an over-representation of people born outside the country. Women and people born outside the Nordic countries are the groups where the proportion of homeless people has increased most. While most of the homeless were reported to be single, a third was parents of children under 18 years of age. The average age of the homeless population was 41; about 37% were between 30-45 years old, 24 % 18-29 years old and 23% 46-55 years old.

The average yearly rent for a home in Sweden was SEK 842/m² (EUR 83/m²) in 2007.¹¹⁴ The share of housing costs in disposable income ("net" of housing allowances) is at 15% lower than the EU average (19%). However, for people at-risk-of-poverty, the share is, at 41%, among the highest in the EU. The share of population living in a household where housing costs represent more than 40% of the total household income was however, at 7.8%, lower than the EU average (12.3%). By tenure status, this share is biggest for tenants paying a market price rent (21.6%) and lowest for owners with mortgage. Sweden's social expenditure attributed to housing benefits (% of total benefits) was 3.6% in 2006 (EU27: 2.3%).

When it comes to quality, housing deprivation is less of a problem in Sweden than the EU average, as 87.2% of the population is reported to live in acceptable housing standards compared to 75.2% in EU27. Although the overcrowding rate in general is low in Sweden (9.5% in 2007, EU27: 17.3%), confined living conditions exist to a greater deal in big cities.

10. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

There is no general right to housing in Sweden, but according to the Swedish General Social Service Act, everybody should be guaranteed a fair standard of living. This lies within the responsibility of local authorities and hence the 290 self-governed municipalities are responsible for ensuring that people in need are offered emergency night accommodation. The work to prevent homelessness and housing exclusion is consequently put into practice at local level, and in many places NGOs and religious bodies make an important contribution.

In 2007, the government presented a three-year national strategy to combat homelessness and exclusion from the housing market, comprising four objectives:

¹¹⁴ http://www.scb.se/statistik/BO/BO0406/2007A01/BO0406_2007A01_SM_BO39SM0801.pdf

Everyone should be guaranteed a roof over his/her head and be offered further coordinated action based on the needs of the individual.

There shall be a reduction in the number of women and men who are in prison or at a treatment unit, or have supported accommodation and who do not have any housing arranged before being discharged or released.

Entry into the ordinary housing market shall be facilitated for women and men who are in temporary and transitional supported accommodation provided by social services or others.

The number of evictions shall decrease and no children shall be evicted.

The main purpose of the strategy is to establish a structure that clarifies the responsibility of multiple actors at national, regional and local level, that have a role to play in the work to address homelessness and exclusion from the housing market. The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs is responsible for coordinating work in the government office. The National Board of Health and Welfare is commissioned to lead and coordinate the monitoring and implementation of the strategy, in consultation with relevant authorities (such as the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, the Swedish Enforcement Service Authority) and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the county administrative boards and other organisations working in the field.

Apart from encouragement of partnerships and enhanced coordination, other key elements of the strategy are mutual learning of evidence-based practice and development of methods of collecting and monitoring data on homelessness. Action to implement the strategy covers both incentives for local development work and commissions to government agencies to develop knowledge and working practices.

11. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

11.1. Accessibility

As part of the national strategy on homelessness and housing exclusion, the government also has an overarching objective of making it easier for people to establish themselves in the housing market. In a bigger context, this is linked to the government's overall objective to break patterns of social exclusion by creating conditions for more jobs. In other words, the direction of housing policy is to seek to establish people on the labour market so as to be able to establish long-term stable conditions for housing ownership and construction.

Unlike most countries, Sweden does not have social housing. However, the tradition of public housing and the regulated rental market aim at providing affordable housing. The production of public housing has however been on the decrease for some time, creating a shortage of affordable rental apartments in larger cities. The share of public dwellings¹¹⁵ in completed buildings has decreased from 24% of all dwellings in 1987 to 16% in 2007,¹¹⁶ and in 2008 the number of vacant rental apartments was 26,412 (including both public and private), the lowest since 1992. The total dwelling stock was 2.4 Mio by the end of 2007. Many people fall outside the general rental market as a consequence of not being accepted as tenants (often due to not having sufficient income or lacking references from previous landlords). Municipalities

¹¹⁵ In Swedish: "Allmännyttiga bostäder"

¹¹⁶ SCB: Bostads- och byggnadsstatistisk årsbok 2009.

can in these cases rent apartments to sublet (this is referred to as a "secondary housing market") and if a person is eligible, social assistance will also cover the housing cost.

As part of its *National strategy to combat homelessness and exclusion from the housing market*, the government aims to decrease the number of evictions and totally eliminate the eviction of children. This seems to have had some effect, as the number of evictions has decreased annually from year 2000 onwards. In 2008, there were 3000 cases of evictions, whereof 700 concerned children (the number of individuals behind the figures is however unclear). The work to prevent eviction varies among the municipalities, but many are actively using co-operation between different stakeholders to do so.

As the work on homelessness and housing exclusion is handled at local level, the way in which temporary accommodation for the homeless is provided for accordingly varies from municipality to municipality. Accessibility conditions and limitations in terms of use also differ from accommodation to accommodation. Since no data are aggregated at national level, it is not possible to get an overview and the government is not able to produce any information as to the adequacy of supply of such accommodation. The municipalities' housing support for homeless people often follows a "staircase model", where people successively over a period of time are moved from emergency accommodation to supported accommodation, aiming at a permanent solution in the regular housing market.

In Sweden, there is a growing interest in the so called housing first model. There are some municipalities who, within the frameworks of an innovation project, are willing to test housing first as a model for solving the homelessness situation.

11.2. Quality

Laws and regulations on construction set up basic requirements concerning safety, accessibility and habitability of buildings. It is the municipalities that have the responsibility to supervise that rules are followed and to ensure the quality of all forms of accommodation (also emergency accommodation for the homeless), under the supervision of county administrative boards. The proportion of people reported to live in acceptable living standards is among the highest in EU (87.2% in 2007).

At 9.5% in 2007, the overcrowding rate is lower in Sweden than the EU average (17.3%). The poor and lone parents are, however, considerably more prone to confined living conditions with overcrowding rates at 28.2% and 24.2% respectively.

12. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

The causes of homelessness are multiple and complex and seem to be a mixture of individual and structural problems. Clear gender differences also exist. The latest mapping showed that 60% of the homeless had addiction problems and 40% some form of psychiatric disability (often a combination of the two). One of the reasons pointed out for the increase in homelessness is an increase in heavy misuse in combination with deficiencies in health and social care for substance abusers and people with psychiatric problems. The number of women in women's refuges has more than doubled since the previous mapping. Naturally, there is also a connection between homelessness and the housing market in the sense that municipalities without homelessness rarely have a shortage of accommodation, while municipalities with many homeless people find it hard to meet the housing needs of the homeless. Connected to this is also the lack of affordable apartments.

Services for homeless are thus varying depending on the individual's situation, and as access to such services rests within the responsibility of municipalities with a multiplicity of actors involved in the work, it is hard to get an overview of the situation on the ground.

Since Sweden has a general welfare system, homeless people as well as all other people can benefit from health care, social services and services in the employment domain. However, the fact that homeless people often have multiple disadvantages creates special needs for this target group. As stated, the government encourages partnerships and enhanced coordination, and integrated strategies seem to exist in many places at local levels. In some cities there are specific day centres for homeless people, sometimes combined with outreaching activities especially for people sleeping rough. In some places, there are also health services specialised in homeless people.

13. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

There is no regular reporting system put in place for monitoring homelessness but national mappings of homelessness are carried out approximately every five years.

The National strategy to combat homelessness and exclusion from the housing market includes commissions to government agencies to, among other things, develop statistics on eviction orders and knowledge summaries on the effects of different methods to integrate homeless people on the regular housing market. The National Board of Health and Welfare and the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning were also commissioned to do a mapping of the "secondary housing market", i.e. housing that municipalities sublet to people who cannot get into the regular housing market. Furthermore, the National Board of Health and Welfare was commissioned to present a plan for how to continuously monitor the extent and character of homelessness.

As the current strategy plan covers 2007-2009, the National Board of Health and Welfare is to deliver a joint report from the government agencies no later than 1 July 2010 that includes the question of how local development work has helped to achieve the above mentioned objectives set up (the strategy does however not include any indicators for monitoring the development, except for eviction orders). This report will also form a basis for future priorities set by the government.

UNITED KINGDOM

1. CURRENT SITUATION

The number of people accepted under the statutory scheme as being homeless and owed a duty to secure accommodation (“homeless acceptances”) (see section II for description of the statutory scheme) rose steeply in the UK in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, in recent years, the number of homeless acceptances reduced in all four UK nations, with the most remarkable reduction in England (with the total halving by 2007/2008). The number of statutory homeless acceptances is significantly higher in Northern Ireland and in Scotland.

Around half of the applications for assistance considered under the statutory scheme are not accepted as being owed a duty to secure accommodation. Some of these cases are accepted as ‘homeless’, but they are not included in the figures for ‘homeless acceptances’, mentioned above. Equally, no data is available for those who may be homeless but have not been considered under the statutory scheme (“non-statutory” homeless people). However, an indication of the number of non-statutory homeless people is the 55.239 households with which services, funded under the “Supporting People programme” worked in England alone in 2007/2008. These services mainly work with single men, while families with dependent children, most of them single mothers, and pregnant women are captured under the statutory homelessness definition (2/3 of households in England and half in Wales and Northern Ireland).

The numbers of people sleeping rough, based on nationally conducted street counts¹¹⁷, show a downward trend and are relatively low for three UK nations (England: 502; Wales: approx. 150; Northern Ireland: 10). These figures are based on street counts whereas in Scotland, which asked homeless applicants whether they slept rough the night before, reports 3,370. Rough sleeping by migrants, particularly economic migrants from the EU, is currently of major concern.

According to EU indicators, housing costs are a significant issue in the UK. For 16.9 % of the population in the United Kingdom, the housing cost burden was more than 40% in 2007, which is one of the highest shares in EU 27 (EU average: 12.3%). Of these, 46.1% fall within the first income quintile (higher are only EL: 65.8%; RO: 47%; EU average: 35.2%), while 46.6% are classed as ‘poor’ (compared to 38.1% in EU). Furthermore, the proportion of “owners” and “tenants” with a housing cost burden of more than 40 % are substantially higher than the EU average: 14.5 % of owners with a mortgage in the UK exceed the 40 % threshold (EU average: 8.6 %), and 42.2 % of tenants paying market prices (EU average: 25.4 %). Moreover, the UK, with 24.7%, has the highest share of tenants with reduced rent or free accommodation in the EU 27 with a housing cost burden of more than 40% (EU average: 13%).

The median share of housing costs for the population as a whole was 23% (compared to 18% in EU) falling to 21% when housing allowances are taken into account. The highest median for different groups of the share of housing costs in household income was for households headed by a lone parent (40%) or classed as ‘poor’ (45%) – compared to 32% and 36% respectively in the EU. The UK is about the EU average in terms of deprivation indicators

¹¹⁷ Figure supplied by national authorities in reply to SPC HHE questionnaire

with the largest reported problem being a leaking roof (14.75) and 'dark dwelling' being the only above EU average indicator (11.2%). At 5.6% and far below the EU average of 17.3%, overcrowding is not a serious issue in the UK.

14. OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

Under legislation first introduced in England and Wales in 1978 and subsequently extended to other parts of the UK, local authorities (the Housing Executive in Northern Ireland) must ensure that accommodation is made available to homeless households who fulfil certain criteria: eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and fall within a priority need group. People are defined as statutorily homeless in England and Wales, if, broadly, they do not have accommodation that they have a legal right to occupy, which is accessible and physically available to them and which it would not be reasonable for them to continue to live in (for example, because that is likely to lead to violence against them or members of their family). The definition of homelessness in other UK nations is very similar. Further more, persons who are likely to become homeless within the next 28 days (2 months in Scotland) are defined as being "threatened with homelessness". Reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that applicants who are eligible for assistance, unintentionally threatened with homelessness and who fall within a priority need group do not cease to have accommodation available.

The definition of "rough sleepers" in England is: "People sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air (such as on the streets, or in doorways, parks or bus shelters); people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or "bashes", that is temporary self-built shelter)". Wales and Northern Ireland have a similar approach, whereas Scotland defines a rough sleeper as anyone who has slept outside in a place not specifically designed for human habitation at least once in the last seven days.

In relation to the ETHOS typology, depending on their particular circumstances, people who are "homeless" within the UK statutory definition could fall within any of the ETHOS categories. However, due to the unusually strong statutory homelessness safety net in the UK, people who are recorded as unintentionally "homeless" and within a "priority need" group would be owed an immediate duty to secure accommodation and would therefore no longer be homeless. That duty continues until an offer of a settled home can be made. People "threatened with homelessness" within the UK statutory definition are likely to fall within the ETHOS definition: "living in insecure housing". People who fall within the UK definition of 'rough sleeper' would come within ETHOS category: "rooflessness". However, the ETHOS category of "people in accommodation for immigrants" does not appear to be explicitly covered.

People who are homeless (or owed a duty under the statutory scheme) are legally entitled to "reasonable preference" in the allocation of local authority housing (in Scotland they are entitled to reasonable preference in housing association allocation). In practice, this means they must be given reasonable preference for "social housing". Apart from NI (where legislation is currently in train), applicants are entitled to request a review of local authority decisions and, if dissatisfied with the review decision, can appeal to the courts on a point of law.

Responsibility for homelessness policy and legislation is wholly devolved to Scotland and Northern Ireland, and partly devolved to Wales. England and the Devolved Administrations

each have their own homelessness strategy (a strategy to end rough sleeping is only mentioned for England and Wales). A common objective is to reduce homelessness. In England, a target has also been set to halve the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010) and a commitment made to end the long term use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds (long term use of B&B accommodation for families was ended in 2004). Scotland has committed to abolishing the statutory 'priority need' criteria, so that all unintentionally homeless people would be entitled to settled accommodation by 2012.

Implementation of housing and homelessness policies rests principally with local housing authorities (the Housing Executive in Northern Ireland) and, to a lesser extent, a range of other organisations, such as housing associations, health authorities, and NGOs.

Local authorities receive mainstream funding from central government for the provision of services, including homelessness services, in the form of a block grant and since 2002 this can be supplemented through homelessness grants, such as "Supporting People" funding. By removing certain restrictions on how these grants can be used, local authorities in Scotland have the right to decide themselves how to spend the funding. The removal of this restriction is also under discussion in England.

15. ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HOUSING

15.1. Accessibility

Schemes are in place to prevent eviction/re-possession or litigation in cases where a tenant or a home owner faces difficulties in paying his/her rent or mortgage. "Mortgage rescue" schemes aim at helping home owners in difficulty to become tenants or shared equity owners (established in England and Wales in 2009). Homeowners Mortgage Support help households in temporary income shock to defer their mortgage interest payments (UK wide). Through the Repossessions Prevention Fund (£20m), English local authorities can grant small loans or one-off payments to households at risk of repossession or homelessness because of repossession. Should a mortgage holder become unemployed, they can receive financial support via the welfare benefits system in the UK (Support for Mortgage Interest). Also, from October 2009, mortgage lenders are required to notify a property against which repossession action is being taken addressed to the "occupiers/tenant", and to send this notification to the local authority where the property is located.

All four UK nations have established various protocols and working arrangements to improve access to housing for people leaving institutions. Particular attention has recently been given to improve housing and other conditions for ex-prisoners and young people leaving care, and also to ensure a level playing field for access to housing for ex-service personnel.

At the end of June 2009, just over 60,000 households were in temporary accommodation in England awaiting a settled home. Of these, three quarters were in London (Scotland: roughly 5,000, Wales: 1,000, no information on NI). Although there is no time limitation on how long households may remain in temporary accommodation, the policy aim is for people to be offered settled accommodation as quickly as possible. In England, numbers have reduced from a peak of 101,000 in 2005 and authorities are well on the way to meeting the Government's target of halving the numbers by 2010.

The "Supporting People programme and funding" is an important service provided to vulnerable people in social and private housing and includes support in gaining life skills (maintaining a tenancy, budgeting and cooking), in accessing health/social services, benefits and in gaining training and employment.

All four nations recognise the importance of social housing supply and three of them set targets and set funding aside (over £7.5billion is being invested which will deliver over 112,000 new affordable homes in 2009 and 2010). In 2006, the social sector stock was 18% of the total stock in England, 26% in Scotland and 17% in Wales and in Northern Ireland respectively.

People who are homeless or owed a duty under the homelessness legislation must be given reasonable priority in the allocation of local authority housing (along with various other groups of people in housing need).

The UK wide housing benefit system assists some 4 million households in Great Britain which equals approximately 14 % of all households. It is primarily paid to economically inactive households who receive baseline welfare benefits and covers the whole rent in the social rented sector.

15.2. Quality of housing

The minimum standards for housing in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have recently been defined by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and this aims to take into account a wide range of risks, for example, tripping hazards, fire safety and poor repair. In England, overcrowding is defined in the Housing Act 1985 via a "room standard" (no male or female person aged over 10 should have to share a bedroom) and a "space standard" (usually no more than 2-3 persons should share a bedroom). Living space for two persons should not be less than 10.2 metres square. Any overcrowded household must be given reasonable preference on waiting lists for social housing,

Apart from the minimum standards above, all nations have also more ambitious standards for the social housing sector. Both the Scottish and the Welsh standards are somewhat higher than the English ones.

Accommodation secured for applicants under the homelessness legislation in England and Wales must be "suitable" for the applicant and all members of the household. Although not defined in legislation, case law has established that 'suitability' includes factors such as size, condition, location and accessibility. Scotland requires a minimum of physical, safety and proximity standards (distance to health services and schools for families with children and pregnant women).

Offers of accommodation to homeless applicants in Northern Ireland must be deemed 'reasonable' which is a discretionary judgment based on factors such as overcrowding, accessibility, location and condition.

16. HOMELESSNESS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

There are efforts across all four UK nations to improve co-operation among stake holders to support homeless people. The National Health Service provide specialist services adapted to the needs of homeless people across the UK while specific guidance and standard notes have been or are developed in Scotland and Wales. Some of the homeless people will also be targeted by a new programme, led by the Cabinet Office, for those hardest to reach.

Various initiatives and projects set up by NGOs, and funded by DWP, aim at supporting homeless people to find and maintain employment (e.g. "Off the Street and into Work"). In addition, Scotland has a Homelessness and Employability Network and Northern Ireland a Promoting Social Inclusion Steering Group, with subgroups on employment, training and healthcare.

17. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

National reporting is based on returns by local authorities under the homelessness legislation. The information on statutory homelessness is collated by central government in all four jurisdictions. Scotland records data on characteristics and composition of households whereas all other three nations record the number of households assessed.