Homelessness and Social Work Services in Bucharest, Romania

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PAPER STRUCTURE

- Homelessness management system in Romania
- Homelessness in Bucharest
- Public homelessness social work services
- Private homelessness social work services
HOMELESSNESS IN ROMANIA

- **Official recognition:**

  *the homeless people* represent a social category formed by individuals or families who, because of single or combined social, medical, economic, judicial reasons or due to extreme situations, live on the streets, live temporarily at friends or acquaintances, are unable to maintain rented housing or they are at risk of eviction, they live in institutions or prisons from where they are to be discharged in the following two months and they do not have a home or a residence (Law 292, 2011).

- **Main causes of homelessness:**

  **Structural factors**
  - evictions because of the restitution of the former nationalized housing.
  - evictions due to unpaid housing expenses.
  - long term unemployment.
  - high level of poverty.
  - lack of affordable and social housing.
  - increased informal economy.

  **Individual factors**
  - familial conflicts.
  - domestic violence.
  - exit of the institutional system of special protection.
  - substance addictions (alcohol, drugs).
  - mental illness or physical disability.
  - release from prison.
NATIONAL SOCIAL WORK POLICIES

- 2007 – the first national program: “Ending the social exclusion of homeless people through opening emergency social centers” (6 years long):
  - 50 emergency social centers in Bucharest and in each major city in Romania;
  - social services for 10 000 homeless people: accommodation, care, counseling, social reintegration (employment, housing, training courses, health education);
  - assessment and monitoring of rough sleepers.

- Public Social Services:
  I. Emergency services: emergency and night shelters, social canteens, social bathrooms, social guidance, primary health care;
  II. Social day centers and temporary shelters, counseling;
  III. Transit housing, social housing and protected employment, social benefits.

- Private Social Services:
  I. Emergency services: street canteens, social bathrooms, social guidance, primary health care, social ambulances;
  II. Social day centers and temporary shelters, counseling;
  III. Transit housing.
HOMELESSNESS DYNAMICS IN BUCHAREST

- NGO’s statistics:

![Graph showing homelessness dynamics from 1996 to 2015.]

- The homeless people gender in Bucharest:

  - Men: 64%
  - Women: 36%

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EUROPEAN RESEARCH CONFERENCE
Homelessness and Social Work in Europe
Copenhagen, 23rd September 2016
BUCHAREST SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

- 2008-2012 – advanced period of ongoing programs and actions for ending homelessness:
  - 4 social canteens – 3200 people/month: homeless people, people in severe poverty;
  - 1 municipal social center for adults: emergency shelter (only November-March for people outside Bucharest; 1 year for former Bucharest residents), residential center (1 year for former Bucharest residents), center for the elderly (over 60 y.o., unlimited time), shelter for families (6 months only);
  - 5 Sector emergency shelters;
  - 1 polyclinic (public-private partnership) – health, psychological and social services: homeless people and people at risk of homelessness (people in severe poverty – people without health insurance, low income elderly people);
  - 1 social polyclinic;
  - 1 social hospital;
  - 3 social laundries (public-private partnership);
  - 2 municipal residential centers for the elderly.

- Systemic issues – low rate of access to social benefits (1% of the homeless people):
  - limited types of social benefits for the homeless people;
  - insufficient funds for the social benefits of the homeless people;
  - excessive bureaucracy to access the social benefits;
  - lack of information on the social benefits for the homeless people;
  - lack of efficient counseling on the social rights of the homeless people.
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BUCHAREST SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

- 2008 – the first municipal residential service:
  - emergency shelter; winter shelter: November-March;
  - night shelter: 19-08;
  - adult homeless people;
  - less accessing bureaucracy;
  - homeless people without access to the existing Sector residential services:
  - limited accommodation capacity;
  - lack of identity paper to prove domicile;
  - domicile outside Bucharest;
  - 80 people/day;
  - 2 meals/day;
  - shower facilities;
  - 299 people attended the shelter, during November-January: 85% males;
  - 66% of 31-60 y.o.
  - 34% outside Bucharest;
  - capacity of 200 people/night starting with January 2010;

- 2010-2011 winter emergency services:
  - 320 residential places; 2 mobile street intervention teams – medical assistance and transport to the shelter.

The network of residential services for the homeless people in Bucharest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Foster homes</th>
<th>Homeless shelters</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>Capacity (places)</td>
<td>Opening</td>
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<tr>
<td>Municipality</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>715</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sector 1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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<td>Sector 2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector 3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sector 4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sector 5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sector 6</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>965 places</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BUCHAREST SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

- 2012 – the first large shelter in Bucharest: 600 places (up to 800 places):
  - emergency accommodation;
  - winter accommodation;
  - regardless of domicile and presence/absence of identity papers.
- street searching and pick-ups with ambulances,
- public-private collaboration – implication of public social services, NGO’s, police and the general population (free phone line for alerts);
- higher level of inclusion – homeless people with alcohol abuse;
- exclusion of homeless people with mental diseases, infectious and contagious diseases, and with chronic immobilization in bed;
- permanent residence – night and day accommodation;
- 20 beds (a separate floor) dedicated for families (fathers, mothers, children);
- social reintegration – employed homeless people may have a permanent residence in the shelter and establish their domicile to get their identity documents;
- additional categories of homeless people:
  - elderly people without a home to be reintegrated as they are employed or a stable occupation – maximum 6 months accommodation;
  - elderly people without a home because of the restitution of the former nationalized housing, without possibility to be reintegrated – permanent accommodation (48 beds);
  - homeless families (including children) because of the restitution of the former nationalized housing – maximum 30 days.
Reintegration policy for the homeless people because of the restitution of the former nationalized housing – social benefit to pay the rent for individuals and families: max. 900 lei (200 euro)/month for 6 months – 2 years.

Rough sleeping prevention policy for the homeless youth – the former foster care children:
- socio-professional reintegration – social benefit to pay the rent (for 1-2 years);
  – courses and programs of professional qualification and counseling;

Social housing policy – residential integration of rough sleepers:
- low rate of success – evictions:
  - provoked housing physical degradation;
  - unpaid housing expenses.

Private residential services – social hotels:
- private owners;
- NGO’s mediation for renting;
- shared accommodation: 4-5 people in a room, with bath and toilet;
- limitations: financial resources, holding a job.
 future management policy – survey to investigate the social services quality and needs:
- qualitative analysis – interviews with different local actors (social services beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries, social protection specialists, specific public institutions representatives, NGOs representatives);
- quantitative analysis – phone questionnaires with a sample of Bucharest general population;
- main categories of interest: Roma people, domestic violence victims, children in difficulty, elderly people, people with disabilities.

Survey conclusions – deficiencies and solutions:
- lack of efficient inter-institutional communication – a common electronic system;
- mainly financial benefits – prevention actions, higher rate of access to social services, more complex social services;
- insufficient (specialized and highly qualified) human resources – increased salaries, qualification programs.

2013 – Municipal Center for Policies and Resources for the homeless people:
- gather, asses and monitor the public and private social services for the homeless people in Bucharest;
- collaboration framework to build prevention and ending homelessness strategies.
PUBLIC HOMELESSNESS
SOCIAL WORK SERVICES
IN BUCHAREST

Public system of social assistance:
- social, residential, medical and counseling services.

Residential services:
- capacity: 900-1000 places.
- availability: 30 days, 3 consecutive months, 6 months during a year.
- only Bucharest residents allowed.
- renting benefits.

Homelessness management evolution:
- positive evolution at institutional level.
- increased services, after 2004.
- better collaboration with the NGO’s.
- improved legislation on homelessness.

Economic crisis influence:
- budget decrease.
- activity diminution.
- reduced number of recipient homeless population.
PRIVATE HOMELINESSNESS
SOCIAL WORK SERVICES
IN BUCHAREST

Private system of social assistance:

- direct intervention – outreach services:
  - health care (medical examination, treatment), social assistance (identity documents, clothes and food), psychiatric assistance (medical examination, treatment).

- mediation of the homeless people interaction with the public institutions – social benefits and services.

- social services and counseling – socio-professional reintegration process – housing and employment, job training and workshops.

- raising material (clothes, food) and financial donations.
TERRITORIAL MANAGEMENT OF HOMELESSNESS IN BUCHAREST

Semi-structured interviews – 8 public institutions and private organizations:

1. activity related to the homeless people:
   - coverage area; actions.
   - homelessness management.
   - gaps in institutional/national homelessness management.
   - institutional/national needs to improve homelessness management.

2. homelessness characteristics:
   - homelessness evolution.
   - causes influencing the homeless people’s dynamics.
   - specific difficulties of the homeless people.
   - mechanisms used to reintegrate the homeless people.
   - efficiency level of the socio-professional reintegration process of the homeless people.

Homelessness in Romania

• increase of its extent and diversification of the categories of affected population – socioeconomic changes of the economic crisis period.

• individual causes: familial conflicts, substance abuse, job loss, low education level and professional qualification, real estate frauds, dwelling sale, bank credits.

• structural causes: instable economic activities, decreased number of jobs, unemployment rate increase, evictions to return the formerly nationalized properties.

• low level of efficiency for the socio-professional reintegration process.
TERITORIAL MANAGEMENT OF HOMELESSNESS IN BUCHAREST

PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

- limited action area
- large target group
- complex services
- systemic deficiencies and limits
  *(legislative, financial, infrastructure, human resource)*

PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS

- large action areas
- limited target group
- partial services
- systemic deficiencies and limits

Homelessness management improvement:

- specialized and larger human resource.
- promotion of the services.
- optimized cooperation between public institutions, between public institutions and private organizations, and between public/private institutions and community.
- developed available services: extended network of residential and medical services, street services.
- improved legislation to reduce limits in accessing social rights.
- diversified social benefits and adapted financial amounts according to different needs.
- homelessness monitoring and prevention.
- implementation of a unitary long term strategy to manage homelessness in Bucharest.
Homelessness in Romania has a high amplitude – large affected population, extended included territories and diversity of spaces involved. Additionally, the Romanian population has a high vulnerability in relation to housing loss – distribution of severe poverty rate and general social and economic characteristics.

Homelessness management structures are in the first stages of forming a specialized social services system.

Lack of a prevention system for homelessness alleviation.

Gaps of regulation and implementation in the homelessness management and social services at different territorial levels.

Homelessness management social services, prevention and coordination present deficiencies that hinder homelessness alleviation in the context of inadequate legislative, financial and institutional measures.

A high need to develop and implement a policy of sustainable management of homelessness in Romania in order to alleviate it but also to reduce the vulnerability of the general population.

Social work policies and services require improvement differentiated on homelessness dynamics and development directions with a view on the successful strategies promoted at European and global levels. In the same time, ending homelessness in Romania asks for powerful legislative and financial governmental support.
Thank you!

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