

# Homelessness and Social Work Services in Bucharest, Romania

Mirela Paraschiv, PhD.

CICADIT (Interdisciplinary Centre  
for Advanced Research on Territorial Dynamics),  
University of Bucharest



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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).*

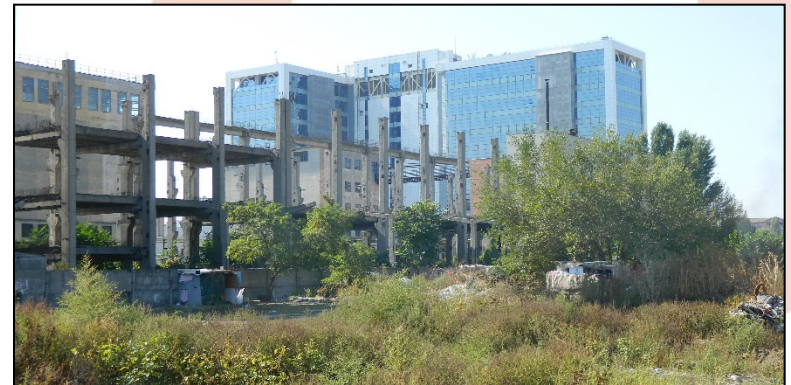
## ■ Main causes of homelessness:

### *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.



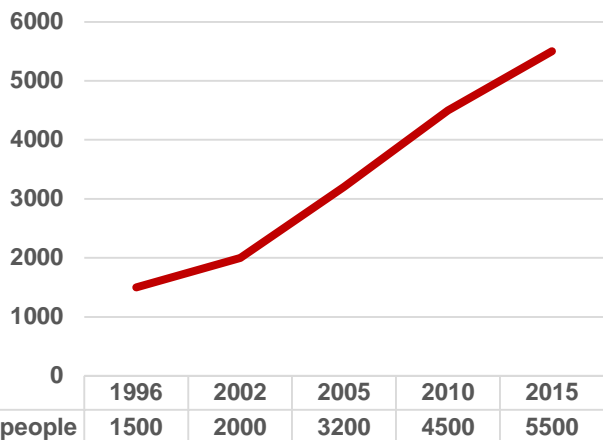
Improvised sheltering in an industrial brownfield space  
Bucharest (October 2012)

# NATIONAL SOCIAL WORK POLICIES

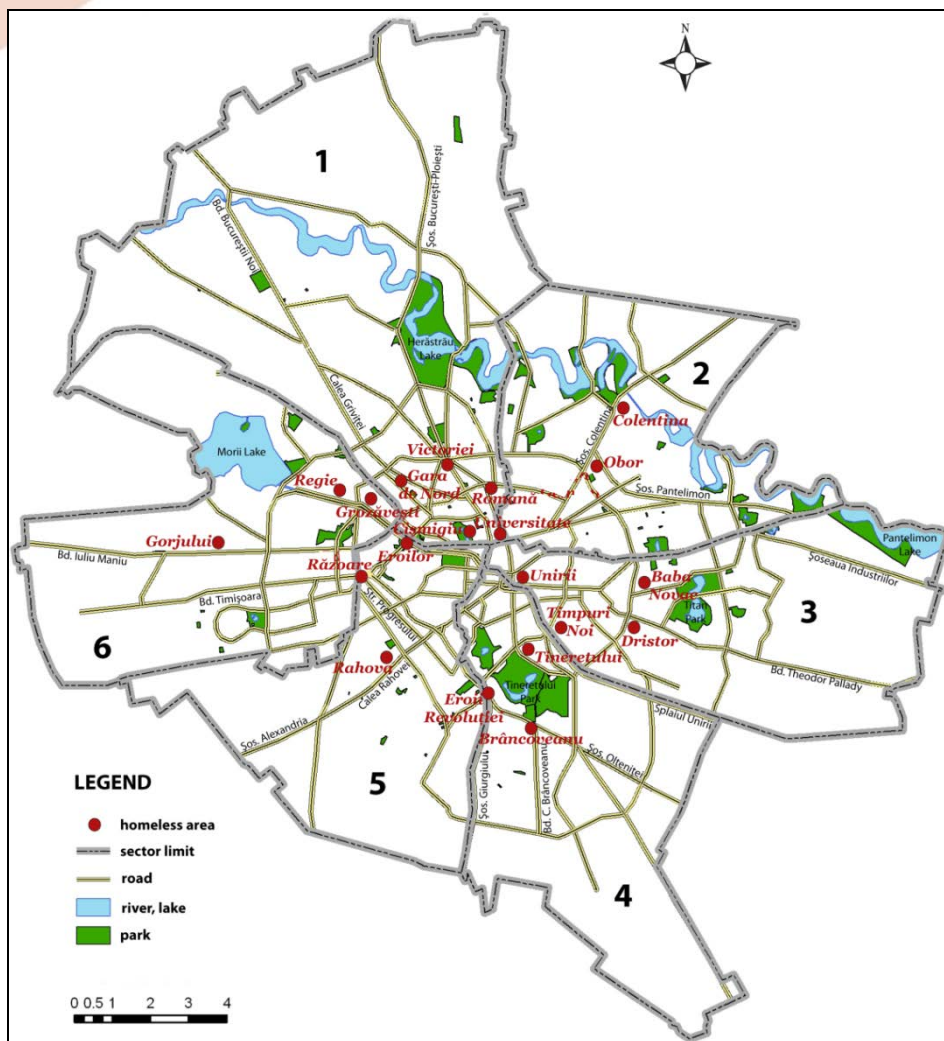
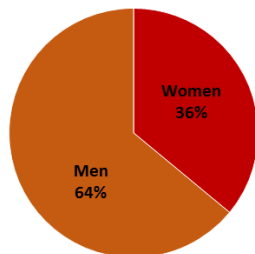
- **2007 – the first national program:** “Ending the social exclusion of homeless people through opening emergency social centers” (6 years long):
  - 50 emergency social centers in Bucharest and in each major city in Romania;
  - social services for 10 000 homeless people: accommodation, care, counseling, 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:



The homeless people gender in Bucharest



# 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.

# 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;

The network of residential services for the homeless people in Bucharest

	Foster homes	Homeless shelters		
		Children	Adults	
			Capacity (places)	Opening
<b>Municipality</b>	-	1	2	
			715	2012
<b>Sector 1</b>	2	1	1	
			100	2003
<b>Sector 2</b>	4	2	1	
			54	2006
<b>Sector 3</b>	3	2	1	
			80	2007
<b>Sector 4</b>	4	3	-	
			-	-
<b>Sector 5</b>	4	2	-	
<b>Sector 6</b>	1	1	1	
			16	-
<b>Total</b>			<b>965 places</b>	

- **2010-2011 winter emergency services:**

- 320 residential places; 2 mobile street intervention teams – medical assistance and transport to the shelter.



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# 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.



# BUCHAREST SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

- **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.

# BUCHAREST SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

- **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, assess 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:

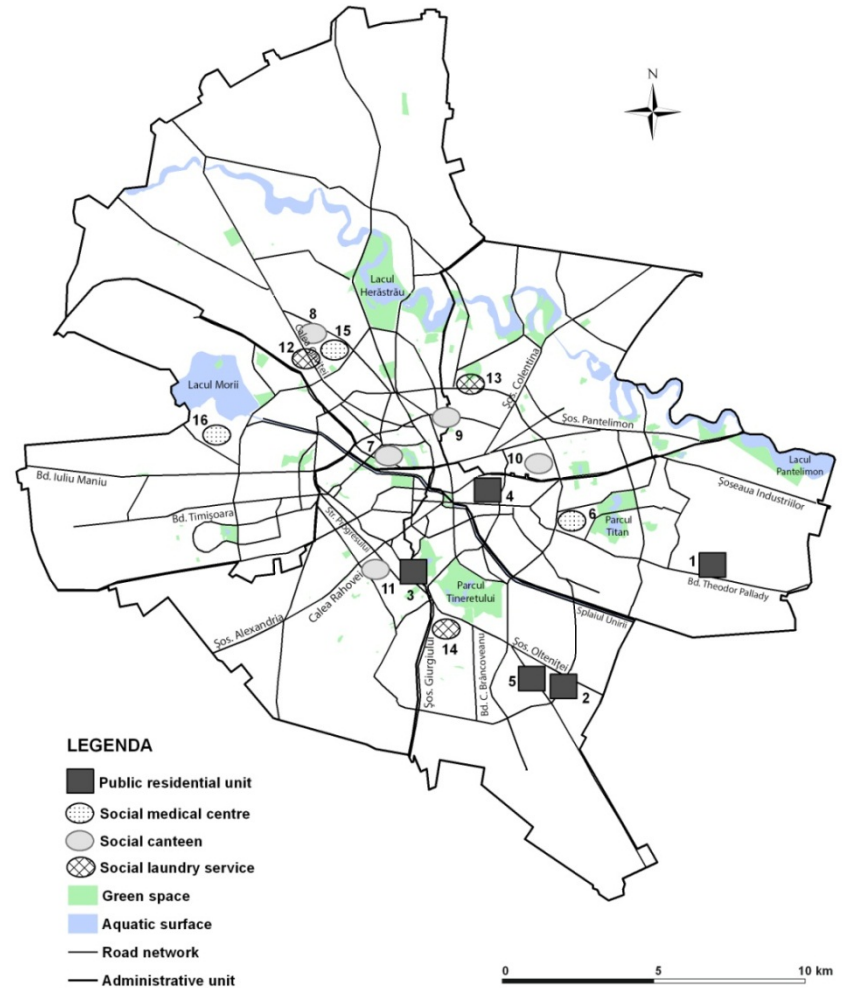
- capacity: 900-1000 places.
- availability: 30 days, 3 consecutive months, 6 months during a year.
- only Bucharest residents allowed.
- renting benefits.

## 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:

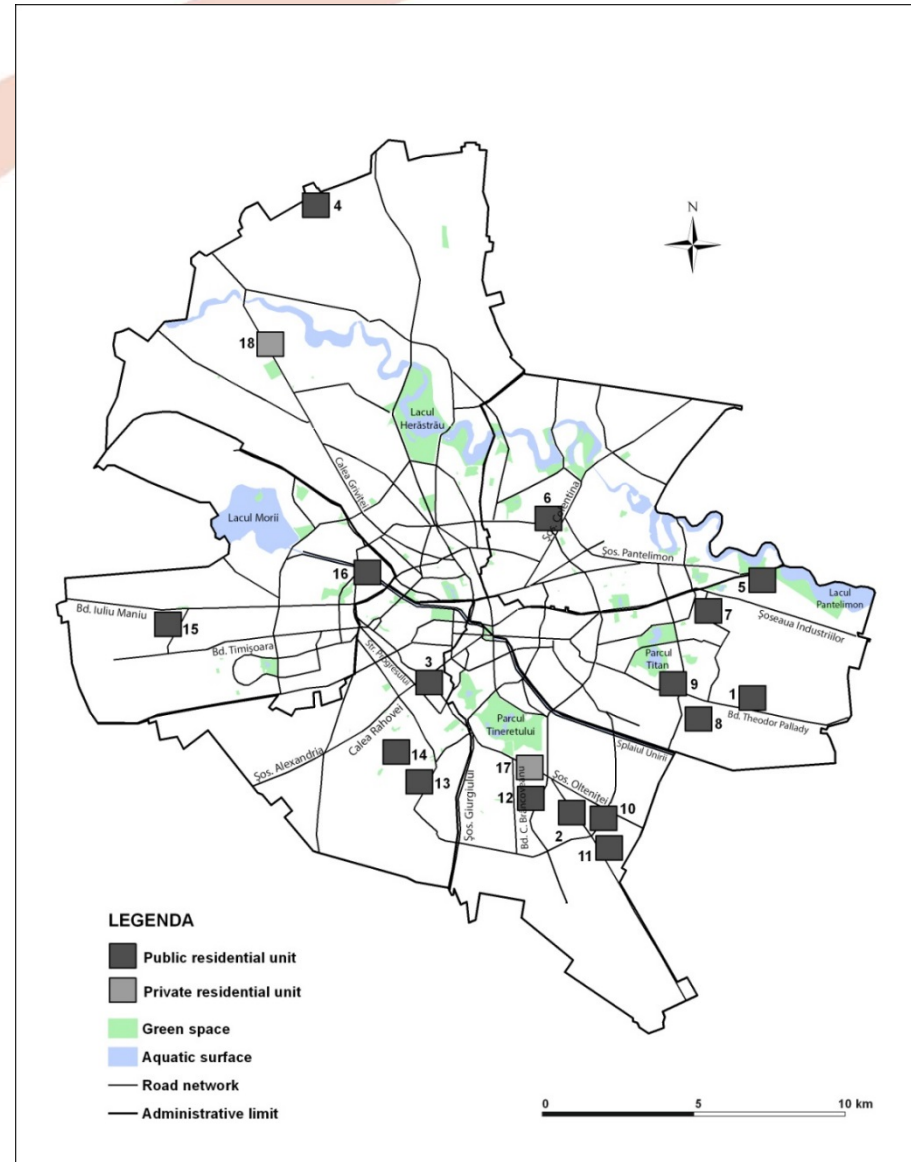
- budget decrease.
- activity diminution.
- reduced number of recipient homeless population.



# PRIVATE HOMELESSNESS 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.



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Public and private residential services  
for the homeless people in Bucharest

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# 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.**

# TERRITORIAL 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.



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# CONCLUSION

- 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!

**Mirela Paraschiv**  
**CICADIT, University of Bucharest**

[www.cicadit.ro](http://www.cicadit.ro)

[mirela.paraschiv@geo.unibuc.ro](mailto:mirela.paraschiv@geo.unibuc.ro)



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