

LITHUANIA



KEY STATISTICS

The department of statistics (Statistics Lithuania) collects data on homelessness every 10 years within the framework of the general population census. In 2011, the census instructions defined homeless people as those who have no permanent place of residence and no money to rent or buy at least a basic lodging, and for this reason they live on the streets (ETHOS 1), in places not intended for human habitation, in institutions for temporary living (night shelters (ETHOS 2.1 and 3.1), or crisis centres and shelters for mothers and children (ETHOS 4.1). In the Methodology for the census of population and housing for 2021, the definition changed slightly and homeless people are defined as those who have no permanent place of residence and no money (because they don't work) to rent or buy at least basic housing, and whose living place on the census accounting day is in night shelter or in the department of social services institutions providing temporary living.

Statistics Lithuania (<http://osp.stat.gov.lt/>) recorded about 4,015 homeless people in Lithuania over 2019. Of these:

- 1,858 persons were living in shelters for homeless people (ETHOS 2.1 and 3.1);
- 2,157 persons were living in crisis centres and shelters for mothers and children (ETHOS 4.1).

Urban areas usually have the highest rate of homelessness; the largest number (478) of homeless people living in night shelters in 2019 was in the Vilnius district. In the Kaunas district, the second biggest city, there were 426 people in night shelters and 757 people in crisis centres and shelters for mother and children, the largest figure of all the districts.

According to the statistics on housing support provided by municipalities for the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, at the end of 2019 there were 10,993 persons/families waiting for social housing.

INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

The number of residents in shelters for homeless people has significantly decreased to 1,858 in 2019 (annual prevalence) compared to 3,007 in 2018. This number slightly decreased in all districts, but the most significant change in situation was in Kaunas district. It decreased by more than 60 % - from 1,295 in 2018 to 426 in 2019.

Meanwhile the number of people residing in crisis centres and shelters for mothers and children increased by 20% from 2018 to 2019 – from 1,799 (2018) to 2,157 (2019). The biggest increase was in Kaunas district. In 2018 there were 261 residents in crisis centres and shelter for mothers and children, and in 2019 there were 757 residents.

The number of households waiting for social housing slightly increased over the last 3 years. According to the statistics on housing support provided by municipalities for the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, there were 10,486 households on the waiting list for social housing at the end of 2018, and 10,993 at the end of 2019. In June 2020, this figure increased further: there were 11,554 households (23,075 family members) waiting for social housing.

Rental housing assistance is least effective in the case of one-member households (people without family) (Assessment of Financing of Lithuania economic sectors after 2020: improving access to housing for the vulnerable after 2020 case study)¹. Due to relatively low rent compensation, the proportion of one-member households which used this kind of housing assistance, is the smallest (19,4 %), compared to 41 % of three-member households, and 66 % of eight-member households. According to the statistics on housing support provided by municipalities, the social housing also is less accessible to one-member households – single people in 2019 accounted for about 50 % of all those on the social housing waiting list.

According to the head of the housing support department of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the average time people have to wait for social housing in the biggest

cities (Vilnius and Kaunas) is the same - about 10-15 years.

CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

The number of homeless people residing in night shelters for more than 6 months increased from 986 in 2018 to 1,132 in 2019. In 2019 the number of people residing in night shelters for 1-3 months significantly decreased from 1,352 in 2018 to 374 in 2019.

There are no significant changes to the gender balance of the homeless population.

POLICIES & STRATEGIES

National Strategy

There is no specific integrated strategy for tackling homelessness in Lithuania. There is a housing strategy with goals that are linked to homelessness, such as the expansion of housing options to all social groups.

Vilnius has adopted a programme on integration of people at social risk for the period of 2019-2024, covering also accommodation and other services for homeless people.

In 2015 the action plan for the development/expansion of the social housing pool for 2015-2020 was approved. It is EU-funded.

Governance

The Ministry of Social Security and Labour has the main responsibility for issues relating to homelessness, as well as for coordinating governmental policies regarding state assistance for housing acquisition or rental. The Ministry of Social Security and Labour forms the housing support policy, organises, coordinates and controls its implementation, and assigns the funding for current social support programmes to the municipalities. The municipalities provide individuals and families with social housing or partial compensation of taxes related to rental housing. Local authorities are responsible for ensuring the provision of social services. Under the Constitution, the municipalities are autonomous in respect of the development of local policy, hence there are regional disparities in the quality of social services and the infrastructure of services.

There is no specific budget for homelessness interventions. For the period of 2014 – 2020 58.7 million euros were ring-fenced for the projects of the expansion of social housing, of which 49.9 million was provided via

the European Regional Development Fund and 8.8 million via municipal resources. Funds allocated to housing programmes and housing policy implementation agencies are managed by the Ministry of Finance. Social services are financed by municipal funds, specific grants are allocated to municipalities, and personal contributions are given to social services.

REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Positive

The law permitting municipalities to rent housing from private landlords and sublease it for people in need came into force from the 1st September 2019 in order to expand the social housing pool and provide social housing for more people by using fewer financial resources.

The number of people using the compensation of taxes related to lease-purchase of housing and rent compensation is increasing, but slowly. In June 2020 this number corresponded to 7,7 % of the social housing waiting list.

Negative

There is a lack of systematic and concerted action to combat and prevent homelessness as a specific social issue. Existing general social services do not solve homelessness. Specific measures are introduced, but they do not reach the most vulnerable.

Single person households are in the most vulnerable situation regarding housing. Existing housing support (e.g. rent compensation, social housing) fails to meet needs of single homeless people.