



# **Lithuania - National Report**

## **Housing Solutions for People who are homeless**

FEANTSA Annual Theme 2008

Housing and Homelessness

Prepared by Aurelija Dzedzevičiūtė, Donatas Navickas.

Vilnius archdiocese Caritas' shelter for the homeless,  
2008 Vilnius

## Questions:

### 1. Basic questions about housing market

- % social housing of total housing stock (and give brief definition of social housing)

*In 2004 social housing took 2,4 % of total housing stock. Social housing – non commercial, municipality owned living premises that are rented based on the governmental order of determining the rent fee. They are intended for rent to low income persons and families.*

- % rental housing of total stock

*Social housing is rental housing. In Lithuania there is no other form of support (like rental housing in private housing market for people with low income).*

- % of sub-standard housing (and give brief definition of sub-standard housing)

*There is no statistical data about the sub-standard housing. Also we don't have no official definition to describe sub-standart housing. Here we provide the definition for suitable housing. Thus we can probably say that housing which deviates from this definition can be called unsuitable or sub-standart housing.*

*Suitable housing – housing that is proper for a person or a family to live in and that fulfills constructional and special norm (hygiene, fire safety etc.) requirements and the functional space of which is more than 14 square meters for one person.*

- % of overcrowded housing (and give brief definition of overcrowding)

*There is no official definition of overcrowded housing in Lithuania. Also there is no statistical data about this type of housing.*

- Housing affordability rate (and give short explanation of how it is measured)

*Housing affordability rate shows if housing is affordable for people with average income. To measure affordability the housing value is divided by income and the result is shown in number of periods needed to get an average housing. In 2000 average family could afford to buy a flat in 4 years. And 8,5 years in 2005.*

## **2. Public housing policies**

- What are the aims/objectives of public housing policy in relation to homelessness (if any)?

*To make it more possible to rent a housing, not specifically for the homeless people, but for the socially supported .*

- What (statutory) role for public housing policies in preventing and addressing homelessness (if any different from above)?

*There is none.*

- Which decision-making level leads on the issue of housing (local, regional, national...)?

*An amount of money from the governmental funds is given to the municipalities which are responsible for the further service (social housing) provision.*

- Do housing policy makers have a leading role in addressing and preventing homelessness (in relation to policy development – not service provision!!)? Why (not)?

*No they don't, because there is no homelessness prevention policy in Lithuania.*

- What is the % of the public housing budget spent on homelessness (if you include prevention of homelessness, please specify)?

*It is difficult to evaluate the percent of public housing budget spent on homelessness because as former mentioned there is no homelessness policy in Lithuania.*

### **3. Access to housing as a trigger/cause of homelessness**

- Does housing play an important role in the pathways in and out of homelessness? Please explain.

*Loss of housing is one of the most essential criterion of homelessness in Lithuania.*

- Do you know of any evidence that bad/inadequate housing causes homelessness? Please explain.

*We have no concrete examples and there is no statistic data about this issue.*

- Do you have evidence that homelessness increases when the housing market is stressed (or the other way around)? Please explain.

*After the independence of Lithuania was restored the country switched from socialistic to democratic system. Because of that State property (provided housing) became private property, as a result prices of housing increased and the order of getting housing changed. Before that State was providing housing for it's citizens, now people have to get housing by themselves.*

*Also at that time relative poverty level increased and occupation decreased. There were more people who couldn't afford to get housing, as a result the number of homeless people increased.*

- What are the most important housing related problems that lead to homelessness (if other than the above)?

*In general the most important housing related problems in Lithuania are eviction (inability to sustain housing), too high housing and rent prices.*

- Related to affordability? Please, explain.

*As formerly mentioned housing affordability rate in Lithuania in 2005 was 8,5 year. It shows that not everyone can afford to get housing.*

- Related to the quality? Please, explain.

*In Lithuania factors related to quality of housing aren't so essential when talking about getting housing. Any housing is better than no housing.*

- Related to adequacy of supply? Please, explain.

*There is no shortage of housing in housing market. But number of social housing and municipality owned shelters are not sufficient.*

- Related to insecurity (e.g. anti-social behavior, tenancy law)? Please, explain.

*As formerly mentioned there is no statistic data about insecure housing. However in some night shelter secure living conditions are not ensured (there is a risk to get various diseases etc).*

- Do you see increase/decrease in the importance of housing as trigger of homelessness? If yes, does this changes the profile of the homeless population?

*The importance of housing as trigger of homelessness didn't decreased, and we don't have any data that it did increased.*

#### **4. Role of hostel accommodation**

- Please explain what is the role (if any) of hostels in the transition process to permanent/independent housing for people who are homeless?

*In Lithuania there are only shelters for the homeless and social housing (mentioned earlier). We don't have any other kind of transition process (hostel) housing.*

- Do you believe that shelters are a necessary step towards more independent forms of accommodation for homeless people? Please, explain.

*Yes we believe that shelters are necessary because for the person to be able to reintegrate in to the labour market he needs to regain socially acceptable looks, to be able to rest, if necessary to learn social and hygiene skills. To achieve these goals a transition period housing such as shelter for the homeless is needed.*

- It is often argued that many homeless people (who are on the streets or in shelters) are not capable of independent living. Please explain what shelters (can) do to make homeless people housing ready?

*Shelters can help train necessary social, hygiene and household skills and also responsibility. Shelter's social workers can empower the clients to live independently.*

- Can (certain types of) shelter accommodation be a permanent solution for certain people who are homeless? Please, explain.

*Usually it can't, because in most shelters people can stay only for a limited period of time. Also shelters should be only a transition period housing. But in reality it is quite common for people to be living in shelters for 8 years and more. It is possible because not all shelters limit the time periods that their clients can stay. Also when the time is up it is possible to move from one shelter to another.*

*At the present time there is no casework in any of the shelters in Lithuania. The most that is being done in Lithuanian shelters is food and clothes provision.*

- Do you believe that a housing first approach (i.e. provide immediately permanent independent housing, offer (social) support in this housing and adapt it to the changing needs of the tenant, rather than keep homeless people in temporary accommodation, try to solve their problems through support, and provide independent housing when the person is deemed to be housing ready) can work in your country? Why / why not? Please, explain.

*At the present housing first approach is being implemented in our country. But we believe that the other way around (keeping homeless people in temporary accommodation, trying to solve their problems through support, and providing independent housing when the person is deemed to be housing ready) would be more effective, but at the present there aren't enough recourses to make it possible.*

## **5. Home-ownership**

- Is repossession due to mortgage default an issue in relation to homelessness in your country?

*Repossession due to mortgage default is an issue in Lithuania, but there is no statistical data showing whether it leads to homelessness or not.*

- Has homelessness increased recently because of increasing cost of home-ownership and repossession rates?



*There is no information on this topic because data about homelessness in Lithuania is not being collected.*

- Can home-ownership be a sustainable solution for homeless people?

*Yes it could but only if the person is housing ready.*

- Can you give examples of (state-funded or voluntary) schemes that make home-ownership possible for homeless people (co-ownership, incremental home-ownership, self-built...)? Please explain.

*No.*

- Is extreme poverty amongst home-owners (especially for people without any mortgage duties anymore) an issue in your country?

*Yes, in Lithuania there are home-owners living in extreme poverty conditions, but there is no specific data about them.*

- Do you know of housing situations amongst home-owners that would amount to the experiences of homelessness (e.g. ownership of sheds, extreme overcrowding)? Please, explain.

*Yes in Lithuania there are cases when home-owners live in overcrowded homes, but then again there is no specific statistical information about them.*

- What State intervention is possible/necessary to improve the situation of home-owners experiencing extreme poverty?



*A more sufficient cooperation among State organizations and non governmental organizations could be implemented. For example organizations responsible for tenancy payments could cooperate with State social workers in order to more efficiently identify the potential clients and to begin working with them. It is important to say that this kind of cooperation currently is not being implemented and to do so would require changes in different levels of State organization.*

- (For new member states) Has the transfer of State housing to the tenants after the fall of communist regimes created invisible forms of homelessness (homeless home-owners)? Please, explain.

*Invisible homelessness was more common in the times of communist regime because poor people and people not willing or unable to work were State housed or placed in different institutions (hidden from society). When the independency of Lithuania was restored a lot of those people become homeless, because due to the service price increase they couldn't sustain their homes or couldn't afford to buy new ones.*

- It is sometimes argued that slums reappear - especially in large urban areas. Would this be true for your country?

*No.*

- Why do you think most governments make access to home-ownership a priority of their housing policy and how does that affect the role of public housing policy in relation to homelessness? If this is not the case in your country, how do you explain this?

*It is so because that way the State has less expenditures. Because of this policy social housing gets less State funding.*

## 6. Role of private rental housing market?

*In Lithuania it is not common practice to use the private rental housing sector as means to combat homelessness. So we can't speak about private rental housing when speaking about means to combat homelessness in Lithuania. Homeless people can rent housing (as everyone) but usually the rent prices are too high for people with low income.*

*In Lithuania tenants rarely rent housing following official order of housing tenancy. Therefore it is difficult to get official data about it and to influence over private rental housing market.*

- Do you think that the private rental housing sector can be a genuine actor in the provision of decent and affordable housing for homeless people?

*Yes, the private rental housing sector could be genuine actor in the provision of housing for homeless people. It could make rental housing more affordable for homeless people, especially when there is tenancy concession for homeless people who are housing ready.*

- Do you know of policies aimed at socializing the private rental sector for homelessness people? Please, explain how (and why) they work/do not work?

*We don't know about any policies aimed at socializing the private rental housing sector for homeless people.*

- What are the most common obstacles to convince private landlords to rent out dwellings to homeless people? How can these obstacles be overcome?

*We have no information about it.*

- Do you think rent regulation works to ease housing market pressures and make private rental housing more affordable for very vulnerable groups such as homeless people? Explain why/why not and how it works.

*No, we don't think so. As formerly mentioned in Lithuania there is not common practice to use the private rental housing sector as means to combat homelessness. And there are no tenancy concessions for very vulnerable groups. Usually the rent prices are too high for people with low income.*

- Do you know of successful policies that aim at reducing vacancy rates and making vacant housing available for homeless people?

*We don't know of any successful policies that aim at reducing vacancy rates and making vacant housing available for homeless people.*

- Do you know of effective policy measures to stop speculation in housing?

*One of such policy measures to stop speculation in social housing could be definite criterions to get social housing. There is a list of people who fulfill these criterions.*

- Is very inadequate/substandard housing in the private rental market a big problem in your country?

*We have no information about inadequate/substandard housing in the private rental market in Lithuania. As formerly mentioned in Lithuania there is not common practice to use the private rental housing sector as means to combat homelessness. And in Lithuania tenants rarely rent housing following official order of housing tenancy. Therefore it is difficult to get official data about it and to influence over private rental housing market. Also there is no institution witch would verify if private rental housing meets the requirements for adequate rental housing.*

- Do you know of housing situations (both related to physical standards, bad housing management practice, and housing insecurity) in the private rental market that amount to the experience of homelessness? Please, explain

*We have no information about this.*

- What public intervention/regulation exists to stop very inadequate housing by slum landlords?

*There is no public intervention/regulation to stop very inadequate housing by slum landlords because it is considered as private property.*

- Are homeless people put into cheap hotel accommodation because of lack of other alternatives? Why?

*No, because in Lithuania there is not common practice to put homeless people into any kind of accommodation when the person itself doesn't want to. However as formerly mentioned in some night shelters secure living conditions are not ensured (there is a risk to get various diseases etc) so when person doesn't have any choice of housing he has to choose the only possibility he has to not freeze during the winter.*

- What is the cost (annual cost per country or indication thereof)?

*The annual average rental for flat (50 m<sup>2</sup>) according to prices of three biggest cities of Lithuania is 16.595 Litas (~4807 €) (taxes are not included). And the average annual income in Lithuania is 19.807 Litas (~5737 €).*

- What public measures are taken to reduce the use of hotel accommodation?

*This question is not relevant to Lithuanian homelessness context.*

- Is squatting considered to be an issue related to homelessness? Please, explain.

*Yes. There are not so many squats in Lithuania that it would make it a big issue however some homeless in this kind of housing.*

## **7. Role of social/public housing**

(make difference between both if necessary)

- How is social housing defined in your country and what are the statutory aims?

*The definition of social has been mentioned earlier. The aim is to increase housing affordability for persons (families) who have the right to get social housing.*

- What role does the social housing sector play in addressing and preventing homelessness?

*If a person in a crises situation (home loss) gets social housing the odds that he will become homeless decrease.*

- Do social housing landlords have a statutory obligation to house homeless people? If yes, please explain?

*Municipalities are the owners. Homeless people in Lithuania are not a separate social set thus the municipalities are not obligated to house them.*

- Are you aware of any other policies that help/incite social housing landlords to provide housing to homeless people?

*No.*

- What are the most commonly used arguments for social housing landlords to house/not to house homeless people? Do you agree with these arguments?

*Which people are put in to lists to get social housing is decided depending on some specific criteria that will be described later. We agree with these criteria just partly because homelessness by it's self is not a valid criteria to get social*

- Do you think the social housing stock is large enough to allow social housing landlords to play an effective role in addressing and preventing homelessness? If not, what happens with homeless people during the time more social housing is made available?

*Municipalities are the social housing owners. The social housing market isn't big enough to prevent homelessness so homeless people usually live in the streets or in the shelters for the homeless.*

- Does the funding regime help/complicate social housing operators to focus on homeless people?

*In Lithuania social housing is administrated by municipalities so the issue of funding benefits is irrelevant.*

- On what basis is social housing allocated to the tenants? Do the selection criteria favour/obstruct access to housing for homeless people? Please provide details of the share of the different income groups in social housing – in particular the share of people in the 2 lowest income deciles.

*1. To get the right to get social housing a person (family) mustn't own a housing in the Republic of Lithuania or the functional space of the housing owned should be less than 10 square meters and the person's (family's) annual income and property are less than municipality defined annual income and property maximum for that year.*

2. *A person (family) who already lives in social housing the functional space of which is less than 10 square meter per person or less than 14 square meters per person if there is a handicapped, or a pensioner person in the family and if he has special needs or a person who has one of the chronic diseases listed in the States official chronic disease list.*

### ***The order of getting social housing***

*When a person (family) who has the right to social housing provide a request to get one he is registered in the municipalities. Person (family) along with the request has to provide all documents that prove his right to get social housing. The order of request registration is defined by the municipalities.*

*Lists of persons (families) who have the right to social housing are formed according to the request registration date.*

*These separate lists are formed:*

*1) young families;*

*2) families with three or more children;*

*3) orphans and persons left without parental care. Persons (their families) who at the end of their wardship or imprisonment period or less than 35 years of age are included in this list.*

*4) handicapped persons (their families). Persons who are handicapped and pensioners that have special needs or who have chronic diseases, listed in the official State chronic disease list, are included in this list.*

*5) General. Persons who are not included in lists 1, 2, 3 and 4 are included in this list.*

*6) Tenants of social housing who have a right to housing condition improvement.*

*Municipalities determine list priorities. Municipalities can also decide to urgently provide social housing to persons who lost their homes due to fire, flood, strong winds or other circumstances that are not dependent on persons will.*



- Do you agree that social housing should be allocated primarily on the basis of the urgency of housing exclusion – even if that would jeopardize social mix in the social housing stock? Please, explain.

*Yes we do agree. It is important to notice that we think that it is difficult to classify people into social sets due to the unclarity of classification criteria.*

- Are there any conditions in relation to the place of residence to access social housing? Is this relevant to homelessness. Please, explain?

*Yes the person willing to get social housing must territorially belong to a certain municipality. Homeless people often don't have any documents or if they do they belong to the municipalities of other cities or towns, so they are not fit for public housing.*

- Are you aware of any structural cooperation between the homelessness sector and social housing providers? If yes, can you explain how the cooperation is organized (voluntary or statutory basis) and give examples of good practices.

*No we are not.*

- Do you agree that mixing housing tenures and social & ethnic groups is a precondition for building sustainable communities? Please, explain.

*It is difficult to say because this is not common practice.*

- How can one solve the tension between building socially mixed communities and providing housing for the most excluded?

*Strengthen the community. Establish community centers.*



- Are you aware of sustainable poor housing communities?

*No.*

- What are the main obstacles in your country to construct more social housing?  
How can they be overcome?

*Limited financial resources.*

## **8. Prevention of homelessness**

- What are the main interventions in the housing area aimed at preventing homelessness? Please, explain. (summarize if necessary)

*There are no direct intervention in the housing area aimed at preventing homelessness in Lithuania.*

- Is eviction an important issue in relation to homelessness? Why/why not – please, explain.

*Yes, it is issue in relation to homelessness in Lithuania however it is difficult to measure it's important because there is not enough statistics that would show how much eviction is related to homelessness.*

*People after eviction according to the present law of State support for getting or renting housing have no right to get social housing.*

- % of people evicted who become homeless?

*There is no statistical data about it. The information we found shows that in 2005 during the period of 8 months there were 133 eviction cases. Not all people after*



*eviction becoming homeless, but for those who experience homelessness after eviction there is no alternatives that State would suggest.*

- What are the main reasons for people being evicted?

*The main reasons for people being evicted are:*

- *debts;*
- *danger that person puts someone living with him to.*

- What public intervention exists to prevent eviction?

*The only public action that could be considered as intervention preventing eviction is notices from certain institutions informing about debts and actions that will be taken in case the indebted person won't be out of debts.*

- Do you have evidence that this intervention reduced the number of people who are homeless?

*No, there is no statistical data about this.*

- Please, explain the importance of housing allowances as a tool for prevention of homelessness? Is it cost-effective? Does it reach homeless people?

*Efforts to help person to sustain his own housing should be one of the main aims of homelessness prevention. Because the assistance process after person is already homeless is much more difficult, longer and costs more.*

- Is housing advice an effective way to prevent/address homelessness?

*It is important in assistance process because often homeless people have not enough information to find, sustain housing.*

- What kind of housing advice do people need?

*Homeless people should get information about the ways for finding, sustaining housing. Also sometimes homeless people due to certain reasons have a right to get certain concessions or benefits and only because they don't know it, they don't use it.*

- How should it be provided?

*When talking about people who still have their own housing, social workers should provide this information. When social worker get information from certain institutions that there is a person who pays no taxes, has debts or some other problems, social worker should visit this person to talk about it and to help him to solve these problems. When there is homeless person already, the provision of this service depends on institution witch works with homeless people. But in both ways social worker should give advice about housing because social worker is closest to the client in assistance process.*

## **9. Additional information about social housing in Lithuania**

*A significant part of public housing funds was formed before the independence of Lithuania was restored. About 75 % of this fund is located in cities. Usually they are many-flat houses built in the last 4 decades of the last century. These houses are worn-out a lot of financial resources are needed to ensure the maintenance of these buildings. The social housing situation in the country side is even worse. Part of social housing tenants in the country side don't have water, sewerage, central heating etc.)*

*In the last 4 years there were 17 860 housings build and provided into the Lithuanian housing market. That is almost 8 times more than the increase of social housing in the same period of time. The increase of housing value in the housing market also had a negative influence on the social housing market.*



*Since 2004 115 million litas were invested in the expansion of social housing market. This investment provided 2254 social housings.*

*Municipalities provide social housings to 900-1000 persons (families) per year.*

*Since 2004 the number of persons (families) that have the right to social housing has increased 2,4 times. The need for social housing has increased due to insufficient incomes to buy a housing (mainly because of inflation).*

*In 2008 01 01 in the municipalities there were 20405 registered persons (families) who have the right to social housing. In order to meet this need of social housing the investment of 2,5 billion litas is needed.*

*It is expected that by the end of 2010 using budgets of State and municipalities and other recourses social housing fund will increase from 2,4 till 3 percent of total residential fund of Lithuania and it will be rented to people (families) that have a right to social housing.*