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EUROPEAN OBSERVATORY ON HOMELESSNESS

**NATIONAL REVIEW
OF STATISTICS
ON ACCESS TO HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS**

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1 INTRODUCTION

In Greece, public attention to the emergence as well as the changing demographic and geographic patterns of homelessness has developed with a notable delay. As a result, the general public and, to a certain extent, policy makers still tend to believe that homelessness, as a social phenomenon, is atypical of the Greek society and may even be thought as having been ‘imported’ by immigrants. It is of no wonder that until recently very little research and data collection has been aimed at the particular issue while, on the whole, policies and service provision remain insufficient and fragmentary.

The lack of systematic official data collection and statistics on homelessness is mainly due to the fact that although homelessness has already been acknowledged as a phenomenon, policy makers tend to misinterpret its historical legacy and key international developments and to gear their efforts to tackle only the visible aspects of homelessness.

The aim of this review is to assess developments in statistics on homelessness and access to housing in Greece during the last twelve months, i.e. between August 2004 and 2005. It is understood that as official statistics are still in the process of becoming organised, the assessment of the dimensions of homelessness in the country will chiefly have to rely on estimates based on the diversified pattern of accommodation experienced by the homeless population in the country.

2 SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND METHODOLOGY

2.1. Sources of available data

The fragmented official approach to homelessness and especially its analytical dimension does not help to elucidate the issue and causes severe constraints on research. Characteristically enough, it is noted that the responsibility on housing issues and relevant matters is spread among several governmental institutions. Housing issues are tackled by the Ministry of Environment and Public Works while social issues are the object of the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity. Data collection is further fragmented as the rental housing market is supervised by the Ministry of Commerce, while incoming migration flows are recorded by the Ministry of Public Order.

The National Chart of Welfare, prepared by the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity, is intended to provide a record of services for vulnerable groups across the country but still does not include data of users of services. On the other hand, national population and housing surveys, which have been conducted across the country by the National Statistical Service (ESYE), are still the major source of data on housing conditions in general. Nevertheless such data, including similar data on living conditions on specific areas, do not relate directly to homelessness and for this reason are seldom pertinent to the social scientist's interests.

Still, one must note the positive attempt to develop and systematise an inventory on the characteristics of the users of services provided by the National Centre of Urgent Social Aid (EKAKB). This inventory, which relates to users of services in the country's two major urban centres Athens and Thessaloniki, is still in its initial stage of development but is expected to be particularly useful for the researcher.

2.2. The operational definition of homelessness

As homelessness is a multidimensional phenomenon, it is essential to approach it in a dynamic manner. Thus, the definition of a homeless person may not be confined to the pure lack of a roof, because then the dimensions of social exclusion and legal rights would be obscured. For this reason, FEANTSA researchers have put together the parameters affecting homelessness and have come to a composite definition of the typology of the homeless population. As it encompasses, diversified variables, this definition is essentially operational in character.

According to the operational definition of homelessness, a person's living condition is assessed in relation to three variables, i.e. their situation as regards the physical domain (roof, place or dwelling), the social domain (ability to have privacy, to socialize) and the legal domain (possession of specific space or dwelling). Based on this juxtaposition, people are classified as falling into the category of 'roofless', 'houseless', or experiencing 'insecure but adequate housing' or 'inadequate but secure tenure'.

The application of the operational definition of homelessness on specific target groups reveals the conceptual category into which each particular group may fall. Thus, classification helps methodologically to organise target groups into separate entities. It is interesting to note that, after testing the operational definition on particular groups, one often comes to the conclusion that what has initially been conceived as one target group, must be divided into two different entities simply because a particular characteristic proves to be critically differing. An example, to this direction is the differing behaviour of repatriates and members of the Roma community in Greece as regards their view of secure tenure and adequate housing.

It must be noted that there has not been any attempt to define 'homelessness' in the Greek context by statutory authorities. This inadequacy is certainly reflecting the state of affairs in relation to the issue of homelessness in the country. As no one threatened by the loss of home or even experiencing homelessness may ask for a dwelling and expect to receive one, there appears to be no urgent need to define potential users of such services by a specific definition.

3 THE HOMELESS POPULATION AND THE REVISED OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

In the present report, recent statistics data and/or estimates are incorporated within the conceptual categories of homeless people as these have been outlined by FEANTSA's revised operational definition. It must however be noted that, depending on the type of accommodation and other characteristics of each specific category of homeless people, approaches to data may differ substantially.

Thus, taking into consideration the few studies elaborated on specific categories, the first-hand primary survey conducted for the European Observatory as well as the fact that this detailed classification is attempted for the first time ever in Greece, the typology of the homeless population in the country according to the Revised Operational Definition of Homelessness is patterned as follows:

CONCEPTUAL CATEGORY A: Roofless people

Operational categories 1 & 2: Living in a public space or staying in a night shelter

Subcategories 1.1 1.2 2.1 2.3 Rough sleepers, people contacted by out reach services, low-threshold / direct access or arranged shelters

The conceptual category of rough sleepers is a domain that, despite its emotional load, has only very recently started to attract the official's attention in Greece. As a significant number of rough sleepers is contacted by out-reach services, the inventory of the characteristics of the users of services of National Centre of Urgent Social Aid (EKAKB), which has been established this year, is expected to provide an interesting overview of this target group.

Nevertheless, estimates of social workers working with the homeless refer to a figure of 350 rough sleepers in the centre of Athens. A similar, or possibly a little higher percentage of rough sleepers is considered as frequenting public places in other parts of the capital's periphery, while another 300 is expected to share similar experiences

in the rest of the country and especially Thessaloniki. As no night shelters operate in Greece yet, the figure relates to people who stay roofless making the most of public places in the country's main urban centres.

Taking into account recent assessments of social workers, it is estimated that the annual number of homeless individuals country-wide for the year 2005 approximates 1,000 Greeks and 5,000 refugees and undocumented immigrants.

Subcategory 2.3. *Low budget hotels*

There is no official estimate on the number of people who are using low budget hotels for accommodation. It is expected that the period of stay generally tends to be short and is largely dependent on the availability of earnings from occasional employment. Such people are not more than 1000 and they must be approached as a diversion of the previous categories rather than practising some form of secure tenancy. In any case, organising a more detailed data base on this category remains a task for the future.

Renting a room in a house or flat has not been common practice in Greece. A possible explanation lies on the manner in which home ownership is approached by landlords. Still it appears that recent changes in people's attitudes have shifted their qualitative goals to quantitative ones and people who have now left their small houses in the city centre wish to make as much as possible from it. The recent rise in the inflow of immigrants anxious to stay close to the market has provided the opportunity for maximum exploitation of nearly derelict houses in deprived areas. It has been reported that almost obsolete property in the deprived part of central Athens is rented to illegal immigrants at very low prices or even per head.

CONCEPTUAL CATEGORY B: Houseless people

The second conceptual category of homeless people relates to people who have not managed to gain access to proper housing but are somehow using statutory or voluntary care and/or re-integration services. The variety of pathways to homelessness and the differentiated existing services for different target groups are reflected on the operational categories and sub-categories of homeless people that follow.

Operational category 3: Homeless hostel / temporary accommodation

Subcategories 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 Short-stay homeless shelter / temporary housing

Operational category 3 includes several sub-categories of users of services for the homeless. Firstly, those who utilise the shelters of urgent accommodation organised by the state and municipalities, mainly the municipality of Athens, where the phenomenon of homelessness is readily perceived.

These services comprise the two accommodation centres run by the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and the two converted hotels in central Athens run by the Municipality. The total occupancy of these shelters is 300 users in August 2005. In relation to the operational definition of homelessness, users of these services may be termed as being 'houseless' as despite the place they have to live, they have no private space for social relations and no legal title to the exclusive possession of a specific space.

Subcategory 3.4 Temporary housing (longer stay)

Furthermore, there are several types of shelters and guesthouses across the country, which provide temporary shelter for people in need, run by the voluntary sector. A significant proportion of shelters and hostels which belong to this category are found in the Greater Athens area and vary according to the sponsoring body, the period of stay, the age and nationality of the users and so on. The link between them however is that the great majority of occupants may be classified as 'houseless', as people of the previous category, and are not required to pay for their stay.

It must be noted that this subcategory includes shelters for the elderly, a sizeable number of which houses aged people without a home. Estimates based on first-hand inquiries indicate that the number of users of subcategory 3.4 is approximately 2,500 people.

Operational category 4: Women's shelter/refuge

There are currently three shelters for battered women in Greece, two of them are located in Athens, one run by the Municipality and another one by EKAKB, and one in Thessaloniki. Their occupancy is around 40 women who are allowed to stay for a period of up to two weeks. Apart from these hostels, two more shelters, similar in size, run by bodies of the voluntary sector which cater for the needs of victims of trafficking.

There are no supported accommodation services for women in Greece.

Operational category 5: Immigrant accommodation

Subcategory 5.1 Reception centres /not only for asylum

The proportion of immigrants amongst the total homeless population is high. According to the survey of Panteion University and to independent researchers (Arapoglou and Ligdopoulou 2002, Arapoglou 2004) a total number of 8,000 non-Greek citizens annually rotate between refugee camps, street living and extremely marginal accommodation. Nonetheless the number of the non-sheltered applicants by far outweighs the number of those properly accommodated.

Concerning statutory responses, the lack of substantial facilities in terms of housing and social support as well as an extended bureaucracy aiming at discouraging migrant and refugee inward movement has been crucial. Immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are offered by NGOs medical/health services and family reunion, voluntary repatriation, social support and occasionally food, while refugees and asylum seekers are also offered limited places of accommodation, legal support, counselling and psychological support.

The Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity recognizes and partly finances NGO initiatives, which developed on ad-hoc basis for providing shelter and other supporting services to refugees. Consequently, most of the schemes in operation make use of European Union funds and constitute an unstable network for the reception of refugees. Nonetheless, large reception centres across the country are overcrowded and lack the necessary facilities and personnel to service the residents. In several cases informal practices allow the mix of ‘undocumented immigrant workers’ and ‘refugees’. NGOs face a dilemma whether they should accept limited state financing to develop overcrowded low standard schemes.

Political refugees who have been granted asylum stay in the organised transitory accommodation camps organised by the State with the contribution of the Red Cross and other voluntary organisations. These people wait either to be included in the country’s labour market or to move to Europe or the U.S. Both people who belong to this category, who are estimated to be over 500, as well as those described above, fall into the ‘houseless’ conceptual category.

Nine out of 14 reception centres are now in operation servicing nearly 1000 immigrants in mid 2005. These are located in Aspropyrgos, Lavrio, Athens centre (Nafsika and Ios), western Athens (Nefeli), Thessaloniki, Spercheiada, Kokkinos Pilos as well as Anogeia, Crete, for unattended immigrant children. One should also note the camps in Lesbos, Samos, Venna and Amygdaleza, where nearly 300 people are kept under very unfavourable living conditions

Subcategory 5.2 Housing services for repatriates

In as much as services for repatriates are concerned, the housing and social inclusion programme for Greeks from Pontos has been organised by the Ministry of the Exterior through EIYAAPOE. As approximately 200 people still wait to be finally properly accommodated, this programme is currently at its last phase. It must be noted that the program has faced severe criticism as its complexities restricted its application to a mere tenth of the target group of repatriates from Pontos who number nearly 160,000 people.

Subcategory 5.3 Shelters that specialize in immigrants

A fairly developed range of smaller scale schemes often target the needs of more than 200 members of particular groups (e.g. women refugees, juveniles, etc.) with or without state financial assistance. Although reception centres are spread all around the country, the great majority of smaller services are offered in the greater Athens area.

Operational category 6: Institutional release

Subcategory 6.1 Penal institutions

Although the temporary accommodation of ex-prisoners and ex-offenders has been reported, there is no record of relevant institutions and shelters. Voluntary sector bodies, such as Arsis, occasionally accommodate a small number of ex-offenders.

Subcategory 6.2 Care and hospital institutions

The de-institutionalisation programme 'Psychargos', which now finds itself in its middle development phase, has reached the stage of providing temporary accommodation in the form of shelters and boarding houses across the country for nearly 2500 users, not all of whom may be classified as being homeless.

It is furthermore estimated that a number of especially young persons accommodated in hospitals' special annexes, do fall into this category.

Operational category 7: Supported accommodation

There is no organised form of supported accommodation in Greece other than what has already fallen in other operational subcategories, as for example temporary accommodation offered to repatriates.

In relation to the de-institutionalisation programme 'Psychargos', the 136 protected flats that had already been organised by mid 2005, housing about 400 users, have not been included in 6.2.

CONCEPTUAL CATEGORY C: Insecure housing

Operational category 8: No tenancy

Subcategory 8.1 Living temporarily with family or friends (not through choice)

There is no official record, neither an unofficial estimate of people living temporarily with family and friends.

Subcategory 8.2 Living in dwellings without a standard legal (sub) tenancy - excludes squatting

There is no official record of people living without a standard legal tenancy.

On the other hand, it would have been interesting to estimate the number of residences that are partially or even fully illegal in as much as planning law is concerned. Such dwellings include buildings illegally constructed in the woods, too near the sea, in streams etc. and for this reason entail the danger of becoming disaster stricken.

Operational category 9: Eviction orders

Subcategory 9.1 Legal orders enforced (rented housing)

There is evidence to suggest that the number of legal orders enforced to rented housing has grown during the last couple of years. The exact figures still await verification.

It must still be noted that the exceptionally low number of implemented evictions does not generally result in homelessness. In most cases people evicted are capable of renting cheaper property while it must also be noted that eviction is often employed as an element of pressure in the argument between tenants and landowners.

Subcategory 9.2 Repossession orders (owned housing)

In Greece, failure to repay housing loans seldom ends in the repossession of property. A reason for this phenomenon is that, apart from subsidised loans from OEK, very few people used the commercial banking system in the past as interest rates have been as high as 22%. As interest rates dropped 8 years ago, housing loans grew exponentially but, even though evidence suggests that the incidence of repayment failure is considerable, it appears too early for repossession procedures to be enforced.

On the other hand, OEK's subsidised loans have a history of several decades with an exceptionally low repossession record because of the socially minded approach of both OEK and the Ministry of Labour which supervises it. In recent years, OEK's loans are handled not only by the Organisation's officials but mainly by the commercial bank that the client has chosen. It has been reported that in cases of fairly large loans which are not easily repaid, borrowers finally end up conforming to their obligations.

Operational category 10: Violence

There is no official record of people living under threat of violence from partner or family. Still, an estimate of people who have already experienced domestic violence is given by the number of people who take advantage of relevant accommodation services. In as much as battered women are concerned, this figure has been given in section 4.1. In relation to juveniles who share similar experiences and have already been forced to leave their homes, one should note of the new accommodation centres for young people.

CONCEPTUAL CATEGORY D: Inadequate housing

Operational category 11: Temporary structure

Subcategory 11.1 Mobile home or caravan

According to official statistics, the percentage of 'not normal housing', i.e. mobile homes, tents, caravans etc, is 0.20 of the total amount of dwellings in the country (ESYE, 2001 housing statistics)

Subcategory 11.2 Illegal occupation of site

On the other hand, despite the recently aroused public interest on the issue, the Roma communities in Greece still endure serious deficiencies of bad quality housing as well as social exclusion. The rehabilitation programs that have been put forward a few years ago have not managed to bear a distinct positive impact on their living standards as yet.

Subcategory 11.3 Illegal occupation of building

An estimated number of 1,000 people occupy a deserted yard, hut or even house, which they do not own. It should be noted however that since there is no research on the matter, this estimate is the outcome of a combined appraisal of the housing situation expressed by the social workers.

Operational category 12: Unfit housing

Subcategory 12.1 Dwellings unfit for habitation under national legislation

According to National housing statistics, in 2001 43.77% of the total number of regular dwellings in the country had no central heating, while 1.17% no kitchen and 3.86% no bathroom or shower inside the dwelling.

Operational category 13: Extreme overcrowding

Subcategory 13.1 Highest national norm for overcrowding

There is evidence to suggest that overcrowding is a phenomenon that is not uncommon in Greece. Data suggest that the phenomenon grew in the 90's when the influx of incoming migration reached its peak. According to 2001 National housing statistics, almost 5,600 households with 6 or more members have been forced to cohabit to the level of more than 3 persons per room.

It must be noted that the lowest national norm for area per person in a regular dwelling is 28 sq.m.

Revised Operational Definition

Roofless

SUB CATE GORY	DESCRIPTION	COUNTRY DESCRIPTION	SOURCE	ACCESS	AREA COVERED	MEASURE	DATA (LATEST)	DATE
1.1 1.2	Sleeping Rough Contacted by outreach services	There is no national definition of a rough sleeper.	Estimates of statutory social workers	Direct from supervising agencies	Country- wide	Stock	6000	2005
2.1 2.2 2.3	Low-threshold / direct access shelter ¹ Arranged (e.g. low budget hotel) Short-stay hostel	No definition	Estimate			Flow	1000	

Houseless

SUB CATEG ORY	DESCRIPTION	COUNTRY DESCRIPTION	SOURCE	ACCESS	AREA COVERED	MEASURE	DATA (LATEST)	DATE
3.1	Short-stay homeless hostel	(see text)	First hand data collected for EOH	In most cases direct visit	Greece	Flow	300	2005
3.2	Temporary housing (no defined time)		First hand data collected for EOH	In most cases direct visit	Greece	Flow	2500	2005
3.3	Temporary housing (transitional defined)							
3.4	Temporary housing (longer stay)							
4.1	Shelter accommodation	Not defined as homeless Emergency situation Does not exist	Social workers	Direct from supervising agencies	Greece	Flow	70	2005
4.2	Supported accommodation							
5.1	Reception centres (asylum)	Not always asylum Program ending Temporary Accommodation	NGO Estimate Estimate	Published data and web sites	Greece	Stock Stock Flow	1800 200 200	2005
5.2	Repatriate accommodation							
5.3	Migrant workers hostels							
6.1	Penal institutions (period defined nationally)	No national definition Opening of mental care institutes	Psychargos	Direct	Greece	Stock	2500	
6.2	Institutions (care and hospital)							
7.1	Supported accommodation (group)	Only through Psychargos	Psychargos	Direct	Greece	Stock	400	
7.2	Supported accommodation (individual)							
7.3	Foyers							
7.4	Teenage parent accommodation							

Insecure Housing

SUB CATE GORY	DESCRIPTION	COUNTRY DESCRIPTION	SOURCE	ACCESS	AREA COVERED	MEASURE	DATA (LATEST)	DATE
8.1	Living temporarily with family or friends (not through choice) (Housing /Social Service records)	No record					No data	
8.2	Living in dwelling without a standard legal (sub)tenancy (excludes squatting)	No record					No data	
9.1								
9.2	Legal orders enforced (rented housing)	No record					No data	
10.1	Re-possession orders (owned housing)	No record					No data	
	Living under threat of violence from partner or family (police recorded incidents)	No record					No data	

Inadequate Housing

SUB CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	COUNTRY DESCRIPTION	SOURCE	ACCESS	AREA COVERED	MEASURE	DATA (LATEST)	DATE
11.1	Mobile home / caravan (which is not holiday accommodation)		ESYE	Official statistics	Greece	Flow	1000	
11.2	Illegal occupation of a site (e.g. Roma / Traveller / Gypsy)		Estimate		Greece	Flow		
11.3	Illegal occupation of a building (squatting)							
12.1	Dwellings unfit for habitation under national legislation (occupied)		ESYE					
13.1	Highest national norm of overcrowding		ESYE					
		No legal national norm. Desired floorspace threshold: 28sq.m. per person						

Comments:

- A Reasons for lack of data (if applicable)*
- B If data is estimated / weighted or provided as a rate then indicate method employed*
- C Are there access restrictions?*
- D Gaps – other forms of provision not easily included in these categories ?*
- E Spell out abbreviations*
- F Web links / Useful literature or other sources*

Own comments:

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