



EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion

Montenegro

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**ESPN Thematic Report on
National strategies to fight
homelessness and housing
exclusion**

Montenegro

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Summary

The category of homeless people was introduced for the first time into Montenegro's legislation in 2013, when it was mentioned in the Law on Social and Child Protection. The law was amended in 2017, when the definition of a homeless person was changed. According to the current definition, a homeless person is a person without a residential address.

There is no state register on the number and socio-demographic characteristics of the homeless population. According to official data, 36 persons who were looking for assistance in social work centres were considered homeless in 2015. According to some unofficial sources presented in the media, there are between 80 and 300 homeless people in the country, mostly in the capital Podgorica. The number increases during the summer months, due to the influx of seasonal working migrants. The majority of shelter users are middle-aged men.

There is no strategy and there are no policies that specifically and directly refer to homelessness and homeless people. There is the National Housing Strategy for 2011-2020 on which three-year national and local housing programmes are developed; but that does not recognise homeless people as a priority population group. Of the five national housing sub-programmes planned for the period 2017 to 2020, only one focuses on socially and economically vulnerable categories.

The main types of support services provided include temporary accommodation and low-intensity support services. In the whole country, there is currently only one shelter for homeless people, and none in the capital. There are public kitchens in several cities, and so homeless people – just like other socially disadvantaged groups – have the opportunity to receive one free meal a day.

Field research on homelessness is urgently needed and should lead to specific evidence-based policies that address homelessness and housing exclusion. Depending on the findings of the research, those policies may form part of the existing strategic documents, or of a specific strategy that addresses only homelessness. Meanwhile, it is important that shelters for homeless people should be provided.

1. The nature and extent of homelessness and housing exclusion

The category of 'homeless person' was introduced into Montenegrin legislation in 2013, in the Law on Social and Child Protection (Government of Montenegro, 2013a). The law defined a homeless person as someone without property, with no place or means of living, who is temporarily located in a reception centre or who stays in public or other places not intended for habitation. In 2017, the law was amended and the definition of a homeless person was changed. According to the new, current definition, a homeless person is not a person without property, but one without a residential address, who dwells in public or other places not intended for habitation, and who lacks the funds to meet his/her housing needs (Government of Montenegro, 2017).

In the context of the ETHOS Light categories, the current definition of a homeless person includes the following: people living rough; people in emergency accommodation; people living in accommodation for the homeless; people living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing (see Table A1 in Annex). The previous definition also included people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing), but they are not included in the current definition. It is also important to note that before the adoption of the Law on Social and Child Protection in 2013, the expression 'homeless person' was not even included in national legislation, and homeless people were not identified by the state as a vulnerable category (Institut Alternativa, 2013).

The Montenegro Statistical Office does not recognise 'homeless person' as a category and has no data on the category (see Table A2 in Annex). It is not known how many homeless people in Montenegro there really are, due to the lack of an official register. The

establishment of the register of homeless people was planned in the 2013-2017 Strategy for Social and Child Protection System, but it was not implemented (Vladan Jovanović, 2017). Despite that, the new 2018-2022 Strategy does not foresee such activity.

According to the ministry's statement to the media, in 2015 there were 36 homeless people recorded by social work centres. The centres recorded these people when they came to the centre to ask for social assistance. In most cases, these were people who had been made unemployed, had been released from prison, were severely ill, had experienced family violence or had been rejected by their family. According to the social work centre in Podgorica, the majority of the people who used to resort to its homeless shelter were middle-aged men.¹

According to unofficial data acquired by the media, there are between 80 and 300 homeless people, mostly in the capital of the country, Podgorica. The number of homeless people increases during the summer months due to the influx of people from surrounding countries looking for seasonal jobs.²

2. Relevant strategies and policies to tackle homelessness and housing exclusion

In Montenegro, there is neither a strategy nor a specific law on homeless people and homelessness. However, there is a social housing policy, and social services are provided under the social and child protection policy framework.

In order to establish a legal framework in the field of social housing, in 2011 the Government of Montenegro adopted the National Housing Strategy 2011-2020 (Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism, 2011), and in 2013 the Social Housing Law (Government of Montenegro, 2013b). This law established the concept of social housing as a specific standard offered to individuals or households who are not able to provide for their own accommodation, due to social, economic or other reasons. Priority in exercising the right to social housing is granted to: single parents, people with disabilities, people over 67 years of age, young people who were children without parental care, families with children, members of the Roma and Egyptians (RE) population, displaced people (people from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and other former Yugoslav republics who migrated to Montenegro between 1991 and 1997 due to war), internally displaced people (migrants from Kosovo during 1998 and 1999) and victims of domestic violence. Homeless people are not addressed as a specific category, either in the law or in the National Housing Strategy.

According to the law, the government defines a national three-year social housing programme that is used as a basis for the development of local housing programmes by local governments. The Law on Social Housing defined the general criteria for exercising the right to social housing, which are: existing housing situation; amount of income and financial standing; length of uninterrupted permanent or temporary residence in the place where housing need is being addressed; number of family household members; disability; health and years of age. However, detailed criteria are further defined by the national government or local governments for each programme developed.

The Government of Montenegro adopted the 2014-2016 Social Housing Programme in June 2014 (Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism, 2014) and the new programme was adopted for the period 2017-2020 (Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism, 2017). In neither document was homelessness mentioned, and homeless people were not recognised as a category.

¹ <https://www.monitor.co.me/prihvatile-za-beskunike-na-koniku-privremeno-rjeenje/>

² <https://www.monitor.co.me/prihvatile-za-beskunike-na-koniku-privremeno-rjeenje/>

Priority in the 2017-2020 Programme is given to people with disabilities, persons over 67 years (pensioners), young couples and the RE population. The programme envisages five sub-programmes: a regional housing programme (development of around 1,000 housing units, mainly for internally displaced and displaced people); a solidarity housing programme (purchase of accommodation at a discount for public employees through the Montenegrin Fund for Solidarity Housing Development); a housing programme for employees in the educational sector (building of accommodation); a housing programme for employees in the healthcare sector (building of accommodation); and the '1000+ project' for 500 households including young couples. By the end of 2020, more than 5,000 apartments will be built in Montenegro under the 2017-2020 Social Housing Programme.

Similar sub-programmes were defined under the 2014-2016 Programme. A regional housing programme focused on displaced and internally displaced people, especially those living in Camp Konik (a settlement of temporary structures in a suburb of Podgorica), and on other people in social need who live in individual dwellings. Under this programme, five projects were implemented: 62 housing units were built in the central-region municipality of Nikšić;³ 120 housing units were built at Camp Konik;⁴ a centre for the elderly was established and constructed in the northern municipality of Pljevlja;⁵ 94 housing units for refugees were built in the northern municipality of Berane;⁶ and an additional 51 units were built in Camp Konik 2. In addition, three projects are in the implementation phase: construction of 38 apartments for displaced people in southern Herceg Novi; reconstruction of military dwellings to serve as a centre for the elderly in Nikšić; and construction of 50 houses throughout Montenegro for people who own land and building permits.

A solidarity housing programme is implemented by the Montenegrin Fund for Solidarity Housing Development. The fund was established in 1996 on the initiative of the Montenegro Confederation of Trade Unions, which was also a founder. The Government of Montenegro and the Montenegro Union of Employers joined the fund in 2018. This three-member company has the opportunity of financing the construction of buildings that are priced lower (on average 50% lower) than similar real estate on the market. Employees with those institutions and companies that contribute to the fund may apply to buy these dwellings. Up until 2017, the Fund for Solidarity Housing Development had built a total of 1,814 dwellings in Montenegro, with a total gross building area of about 106,000 square metres. Of these dwellings, 39% were built in the southern region, 36% in the central region and 25% in the northern region.

Through the housing programme for socially vulnerable categories of citizens in the northern municipalities, 31 housing units built as part of a solidarity housing programme were bought by the government from the fund and handed over to municipalities to be given to selected households in social need. The recipients of these units are selected on the basis of a public call issued by local governments.

The '1000+ project' is a programme that aims to provide housing support for the young population. Through this programme, the government subsidises part of the interest rate on the purchase of a residential house/apartment. Young couples (below the age of 35), those employed in the public sector and also other categories are eligible, while priority is given to single-parent families, families with a member with disability, and victims of

³ The total budget amounted to €2,780,000 of which €1,980,000 were grant funds from the Council of Europe Development Bank, while the state and/or local unit contribution was €600,000. Works on the facility started in May 2015 and the project was completed within the planned time-frame.

⁴ The total budget amounted to €6,906,750, of which grant funds of the Council of Europe Development Bank constituted €6,226,622. The work on 10 buildings, each with 10 housing units, was completed ahead of the agreed schedule.

⁵ Total value of €2,331,716, the grant of which amounted to €1,918,572.

⁶ Total budget was €3,990,649, of which donor funds from the Council of Europe Development Bank amounted to €3,575,779. Construction began in February 2017 and a public call for the allocation of apartments was announced during the summer of 2018.

violence, among others. The project consisted of three phases, the first implemented in 2010 and 2011, the second in 2016 and 2017, and the third in 2018. Across all three phases, a total of some 470 vouchers for purchase have been provided. The project is implemented in cooperation with, and through a credit arrangement with, the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB).

Besides these initiatives, a number of projects are implemented by state institutions (such as the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Internal Affairs), in order to solve the housing problems of their own employees. In addition, the accommodation of pensioners who pay rent for their apartments is addressed through projects that are initiated by pensioners' associations, which exist in each municipality; these are implemented in cooperation with local governments and the national government. Through such initiatives, apartments have been built and then sold to pensioners at prices that are far lower than the market price.

Of the above-mentioned programmes implemented from 2014 to 2016, only the regional housing programme and the programme for socially vulnerable persons targeted those in real social need and without the financial means to buy accommodation. Out of five programmes planned until 2020, only one targets socially vulnerable and displaced persons. The majority of programmes are for persons who are (or were) employed and who are given the possibility to purchase or rent accommodation under favourable conditions.

A monitoring plan and monitoring tools for national or local-level social housing programmes have not been developed. The government only reports on the implementation of a programme after its finalisation, by presenting the activities that have taken place, but without providing an overview of the results and without measuring progress using indicators. Monitoring and reporting on programme implementation is a challenge due to a lack of systematically collected and categorised data. For instance, according to the Directorate for Spatial Planning, the lack of data on the number of social houses in Montenegro and the number of units under lease, and issues to do with the ownership rights on social housing units are the biggest problems in the area of social housing.⁷

3. Analysis of the current patterns of service provision and challenges in implementing Montenegro's responses to homelessness and housing exclusion

The main types of support services currently provided to the homeless are temporary accommodation and low-intensity support services.

Currently, there is only one shelter for homeless people in the country, located (since 2010) in the city of Pljevlja, in the northern region of the country. Apart from accommodation and food, the shelter offers psychosocial support.⁸

However, it should be mentioned that, in April 2017, a shelter for homeless people was opened in the capital of Montenegro, Podgorica, as part of a two-year pilot project. The idea was to summarise the results at the end of the project, in order to assess how to take care of those who need this type of assistance. Apart from accommodation, users had access to food, healthcare and psychosocial support. The shelter was able to accommodate 12 people. A person could stay at the shelter for a period of up to nine months. One of the conditions for providing accommodation was that the person had to be a resident of Podgorica. When it comes to people who are foreign citizens or those registered in other

⁷ <http://www.zid.org.me/143-adp-zid/521-pitanje-socijalnog-stanovanja-u-crnoj-gori>

⁸ <http://www.csrcg.me/index.php/pljevlja/usluge-u-zajednici>

municipalities of Montenegro, they could stay in the shelter for a maximum of one week. From the opening until the start of 2019, in total eight people stayed at the shelter. According to the Secretariat for Social Welfare, none of those who lived in the shelter actually left it after the prescribed nine months.⁹ Officially, the main goal of the shelter was to protect users and to prepare them to enter and reintegrate into society.¹⁰ However, it is not known if any of them actually were ultimately reintegrated into society.

Almost €60,000 was spent annually on this shelter; the conclusion of the participants in the project was that the shelter was financially unsustainable, and it was therefore closed in March 2019.¹¹ Since then, the capital of the country has been without a shelter for homeless people.

Public kitchens exist in Montenegro, run by different authorities/institutions. The public kitchen in Podgorica run by the municipality was opened on 13 July 2011. A meal is available every day for a few hours, and homeless people take advantage of it. The kitchen prepares 500 meals a day.¹² In addition to this public kitchen, since 2010 Podgorica has had a public kitchen covering the Diocese of Montenegro and the Littoral (*Mitropolija crnogorsko-primorska*). This is organised by the Cathedral of Christ's Resurrection in Podgorica and serves around 230 meals per day. Currently, some 200 families are regular users of this public kitchen.¹³ Besides Podgorica, there is also a public kitchen in the following cities: Cetinje (central region), Bar (coastal region), Bijelo Polje, Berane and Rožaje (northern region).

The main service providers include different institutions. Public institutions and local authorities are the main service providers of the shelters for homeless people. These local authorities are: Social Work Centre in Podgorica (for the former homeless shelter in the city of Podgorica), Social Work Centre in Pljevlja and Žabljak municipalities (for the homeless shelter in the city of Pljevlja). The public institutions are: the Secretariat for Labour, Youth and Social Welfare Branch, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Podgorica Health Centre, the Police Administration of Montenegro, the Asset Administration and the Emergency Medical Service (all for the homeless shelter in Podgorica). Some companies provided important funding for the above-mentioned shelters for homeless people, including the Coal Mine Pljevlja and ZOIL Lovćen Insurance Company (which provided donations to adapt and furnish the homeless shelter in the city of Pljevlja), and also Voli Trade, Gorenje, Namos Dajković, MPM (cosmetics), Crnogorski Telekom, Ultra SB and Elevator (for the former homeless shelter in the city of Podgorica). International organisations, such as Red Cross Montenegro, the UNDP and UNHCR, were also participants in the pilot project of the former homeless shelter in Podgorica, with the Red Cross as the coordinator of the shelter.¹⁴ Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Montenegro have not been involved much in the formation of the shelters for homeless people, apart from the Human Rights Action in Podgorica, which helped partners to create a quality House Rules in the former homeless shelter in Podgorica; before that, in 2013, together with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, it ran a shelter for homeless persons in Podgorica for three months. It should be added that some NGOs were actually involved in the formation of the public kitchens (e.g. NGO 'Zene Bara' in the city of Bar).¹⁵

⁹ <https://www.dan.co.me/?nivo=3&rubrika=Podgoricom&clanak=686241&datum=2019-03-03>

¹⁰ <http://www.rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/227974/krov-nad-glavom-naslo-osam-beskucnika.html>;
<https://www.monitor.co.me/prihvatilite-za-beskunike-na-koniku-privremeno-rjeenje/>

¹¹ <https://m.cdm.me/drustvo/zatvoreno-prihvatiliste-za-beskucnike-na-koniku/>

¹² <http://www.csrcg.me/index.php/podgorica/usluge-u-zajednici/329-narodna-kuhinja-u-glavnom-gradu-podgorica>

¹³ <http://www.hramvaskrsenja.me/organizacije-pri-hramu/narodna-kuhinja>

¹⁴ <http://podgorica.me/2017/04/27/nakon-prvomajskih-praznika-prihvatiliste-za-beskucnike-prima-prve-korisnike/>

¹⁵ <http://www.jedro.bar/info/4608-u-narodnoj-kuhinji-100-obroka-dnevno>

Religious charities – like churches and monasteries – are important providers of public kitchens in Montenegro, and according to the available data there are more public kitchens run by churches than by the state. There are four public kitchens run by the Serbian Orthodox Church/Diocese of Montenegro and the Littoral (one of which is the one mentioned above in Podgorica, at the Cathedral of Christ's Resurrection, which offers around 230 meals per day). The others are the public kitchen 'Mati Jelisaveta' in the city of Cetinje, which offers 150 meals per day, and the public kitchen 'Divna Veković' at the monastery Đurđevi Stupovi in the northern city of Berane, which offers 100 meals per day.¹⁶ The most recent public kitchen is 'Milena Vojvodić' near the northern city of Bijelo Polje, which opened at the beginning of 2019.¹⁷ In addition to these religious charities, the humanitarian organisation of the Christian Movement – The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has donated money to adapt and furnish of the homeless shelter in the city of Pljevlja, mentioned above.¹⁸

Although homeless people are not very visible in the public spaces of the cities of Montenegro, and although the official number of registered homeless people is quite low (36 in 2015, as mentioned above), there are two things to bear in mind: the small population of Montenegro (compared to the rest of the Balkan region and Europe) and the traditionally strong kinship relations and family bonds in Montenegro. But since there are no research studies or precise data available, and no strategy or plan for homelessness, it is not possible to properly discuss the existing services' level of effectiveness in the prevention of homelessness and housing exclusion in Montenegro.

There are no services providing comprehensive and flexible support according to people's support needs. The existing services are quite poor and very limited, consisting of only one shelter in the country and public kitchens (in some cities); there are no high-intensity specialised support or housing-led services.

The most important innovation in the provision of homelessness services over the past five years in Montenegro was the opening of the shelter for homeless persons in 2017 in the capital of the country, Podgorica. Apart from this, the new public kitchens in the last five years, run by the local authorities and the church, could be considered the most important changes which can positively affect homeless people's lives. At the same time, the closure of the shelter in 2019, of course, damaged the position and quality of life of the homeless people in the capital.

The main weaknesses regarding the homelessness and housing exclusion situation in Montenegro are:

- the lack of research and data on homelessness in Montenegro;
- the absence of strategies targeting homeless people;
- the lack of housing programmes focused on homeless;
- the very limited set of services provided to the homeless; and
- the absence of a shelter for homeless people in the capital.

¹⁶ <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/regioni/201812241118276361-crna-gora-narodne-kuhinje-siromastvo/>

¹⁷ <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/drustvo/otvorena-narodna-kuhinja-u-bijelom-polju-nosice-ime-dobrotvorke-milene-vojvodic>

¹⁸ <http://www.csrcq.me/index.php/pljevlja/usluge-u-zajednici>

The main priorities for improvement in Montenegro in terms of homelessness and housing exclusion are:

- to conduct comprehensive field research on homeless people in Montenegro, including both quantitative and qualitative perspectives;
- to create a strategy that focuses directly on the issue of homelessness or to include relevant policy responses in existing strategy documents, based on research findings;
- to create an official register of homeless people in Montenegro, with precise numbers and other important data on homeless people, both at the national and the local level;
- to urgently open a shelter for homeless people in the capital of the country;
- to open a free public bath¹⁹ that could be used by homeless people who do not live in the shelter.²⁰

¹⁹ There is a public bath located on the underground level of the bus station in Podgorica, but its use is charged at €1.50 (http://www.busterminal.me/assets/pdf/fact_sheets/en.pdf).

²⁰ Although, as already stated, there is no longer a homeless shelter in Podgorica.

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List of websites

- Association for Democratic Prosperity – Zid, url: <http://www.zid.org.me/143-adp-zid/521-pitanje-socijalnog-stanovanja-u-crnoj-gori>
- Bus Terminal Podgorica, url: http://www.busterminal.me/assets/pdf/fact_sheets/en.pdf
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Vijesti Daily Newspaper, url: <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/drustvo/otvorena-narodna-kuhinja-u-bijelom-polju-nosice-ime-dobrotvorke-milene-vojvodic>

Youth of Berane, url: <https://mladiberana.me/stanovi-za-raseljena-lica-rudes/>

Annex:**Table A1: ETHOS Light categories defined as homeless in Montenegro**

Operational category		Living situation		Definition	Defined as homeless in Montenegro
1	People living rough	1	Public space/ external space	Living in the streets or public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters	YES
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation	YES
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homeless hostels	Where the period of stay is time limited and no long-term housing is provided	YES
		4	Temporary accommodation		YES
		5	Transitional supported accommodation		YES
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation		YES
4	People living in institutions	7	Healthcare institutions	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing	NO
		8	Penal institutions	No housing available prior to release	NO
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9	Mobile homes	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence	YES
		10	Non-conventional building		YES
		11	Temporary structures		YES
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	12	Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence	NO

Table A2: Latest available data on the number of homeless in Montenegro

Operational category		Living situation		Most recent number	Period covered	Source
1	People living rough	1	Public space/ external space	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	n/a	n/a	n/a
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homeless hostels	n/a	n/a	n/a
		4	Temporary accommodation	n/a	n/a	n/a
		5	Transitional supported accommodation	n/a	n/a	n/a
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation	n/a	n/a	n/a
4	People living in institutions	7	Healthcare institutions	n/a	n/a	n/a
		8	Penal institutions	n/a	n/a	n/a
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9	Mobile homes	n/a	n/a	n/a
		10	Non-conventional building	n/a	n/a	n/a
		11	Temporary structures	n/a	n/a	n/a
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	12	Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence	n/a	n/a	n/a

