

Case Studies

Below is a selection of case studies which tell stories of CRS and how they have been helped, initiatives happening, current situation in particular countries and government responses.

Number of Homeless Rising

Society, 09 Oct 2015 / By STA

Homelessness is on the increase in Slovenia, but a growing problem is that it has spread to entire families. To alert to this problem several events are planned around the country on Saturday, World Homeless Day.

The latest data put the number of homeless people in Slovenia at around 4,000, but the actual number is believed to be higher, since many conceal their situation, experts told a news conference hosted by the Human Rights Ombudsman earlier this week. But homelessness is no longer limited to middle-aged men, spreading to include women and children, families who have been evicted and are without basic insurance, Ombudsman Vlasta Nussdorfer said. Such families "cannot hope to get a housing unit", she warned, adding that the homeless do not have the social support needed to find a way out of the situation. Around 800 additional accommodation units would be necessary in the country, a specific problem being shelters that could accommodate families. Suzi Kvas of the Socio institute said that meant families were often broken up and that children ended up in foster homes. Kvas feels shelters need to be set up that meet the needs of specific groups; families, those with addiction issues and those who are released from prison for instance. Also highlighted was the problem of loss of rights, such as welfare and healthcare, as a result of not having a registered residence. Boštjan Cvetič, who heads the umbrella organisation for the issues of the homeless which was formed by several associations last year, presented a draft strategy for the field, the first such document in Slovenia to date. Expressing his hope the network's strategy will help Slovenia become more like Scandinavian countries when it comes to addressing homelessness, Cvetič explained the document dealt with areas like social care, housing and employment. While arguing for an ombudsman for the homeless, he stressed the need to do more on the prevention side, as "increasing the number of beds in homeless shelters is not the only solution". Also needed is post-hospital care unit for the homeless. In order to challenge stereotypes related to homelessness and raise awareness about the worrying trends, an open doors day will be held at shelters around Slovenia on Saturday. Already today, visitors to the shelter of the Maribor branch of Caritas will be able to see an outdoor shelter unit as well as the garden tilled and tended by the homeless and a display of their paintings. These will be on sale tomorrow at a homeless market in Maribor, at which homeless people will be exchanging their products for hats, scarves and other useful things. Humanitarček, the charity that has been taking care of the homeless, elderly and other marginalised groups in Maribor for several years, will stage an event in the city's main square dubbed "Let's put ourselves in some one else's shoes" that will also see people form a live chain across the old bridge.'

[Source: <http://www.sloveniatimes.com/number-of-homeless-rising-women-and-children-also-among-them>]

'Javni Zavod Socio work with homeless people, migrants, refugees, people suffering from substance abuse or who are in rehabilitation centres, and youth without incomes, jobs, or roofs over their head. In 2012, JZ Socio established a street football league and began developing public awareness campaigns about inclusion for marginalised groups through sports activities.

JZ Socio was established by the Municipality of Celje in 2002 with the aim of helping vulnerable individuals and families, and to provide other social services. In Celje, their participants are offered weekly football training sessions accompanied by consultancy sessions and advice. The aim of the consultancy sessions is to help vulnerable people set achievable goals, and to develop a plan for attaining them. JZ Socio help participants prepare an individual plan with short-term and long-term goals, and encourage them to take the first step.'

[Source: <https://www.homelessworldcup.org/partner/slovenia/>]

'Even worse is the fact that 27 percent of the country's children – more than 2.3 million girls and boys – live in or on the verge of poverty, according to the United Nations children's fund, UNICEF. A study published Sept. 19 by the Association of Directors and Managers of Social Services reported that public spending on the neediest this year was 18.98 billion dollars – 2.78 billion less than in 2012. "You find yourself in the street because you don't have anyone to turn to," said Miguel Arregui, 40. "And once you're there it's really hard to take flight again."

The tall, black-haired Arregui, who is separated and has an 11-year-old son, told IPS that he spent 15 "endless" days sleeping rough, and that two bags holding his clothes and cell phone were stolen. For the past few weeks, he has been living in a shelter, where he is overcoming his addiction to drugs. Cerrezo and Arregui are two of the thousands of homeless people in Spain – who total 23,000 according to the last INE census, from 2012, although the social organisations that help them put the number at 40,000. But the 2014 study on exclusion and social development in Spain by the Foessa Foundation reports that there are five million people in this country affected by "severe exclusion" – 82.6 percent more than in 2007, the year before the lingering economic crisis broke out. The report states that although homeless people are part of the landscape, most people have no idea what their lives are like. They sleep rough or in shelters, after ending up on the street as a result of numerous social, structural and personal factors. In Málaga dozens of poor families, many of whom were evicted for failing to pay the rent or mortgage, are living together in squats known as "corralas", in empty buildings owned by banks or construction companies that went bankrupt. In the first half of 2014 there were 37,241 evictions in Spain, according to judicial sector statistics. Since 2007 there have been 569,144 foreclosures, the Platform for Mortgage Victims (PAH) reports. At the same time, there are 3.5 million empty dwellings – 14 percent of the total, according to the INE. A number of people wake up on the stone benches near the stand where breakfast is served at 9:00 AM. "The day I went to the shelter, they told me it was full and they gave me a blanket," says José, 47, who spent 15 years in prison and admits that he has to steal to pay for a night in a pension. "The system could use a turn of the screw, to provide permanent and unconditional housing, in first place," the director of the RAIS Foundation, José Manuel Caballol, told IPS. His organisation is promoting the Housing First model in Spain. This approach focuses on moving homeless people immediately from the streets or shelters into their own apartments, based on the concept that their first and primary need is stable housing. The approach targets people who have spent at least three years living on the streets, or those suffering from mental illness, drug use, alcoholism or disabilities. Caballol said people with severe problems have a hard time gaining access to homeless shelters, supportive housing or pensions, and that even if they do they fail to move forward with their rehabilitation or end up being expelled from the system once again. "The results are spectacular," he said. "The people are so happy, they take care of their house and of themselves because they don't want to lose what they have." The activist is convinced that this approach, which emerged in the United States in the 1990s, "offers a definitive solution to the problem of homelessness and spells out significant savings in costs for the state, in hospital care for example." Since July, a total of 28 homeless people have been living in eight housing units in Málaga, 10 in Barcelona and 10 in Madrid, some given to RAIS and others rented by the NGO by means of agreements with city governments and foundations, and with economic support from the government. "Changes are seen very quickly in the people involved," said Caballol, who stressed the role played by social workers, psychologists and experts in social integration, who listen, support and assist the beneficiaries, depending on what they themselves decide, rather than the other way around. "On the street I feel vulnerable, so inferior. You lose your dignity and it's hard to get it back. I want out of this," says Miguel Arregui just before going into a shelter in downtown Málaga for the night. Another local NGO, Ayuda en Acción (Help in Action), warns that one out of every five people are at risk of social exclusion in Spain. Cerrezo says the social network for the homeless falls short of meeting the current needs, and calls for other models like "casas de acogida" – halfway homes or residential-based homes for the most vulnerable, "with orientation by professionals." The number of people assisted in Spain by the Catholic charity Caritas rose 30 percent from 2012 to 2013, according to a report it released Sept. 29.'

[Source: <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/27333-the-invisible-reality-of-spain-s-homeless>]

Three million people in Spain are homeless or living in unacceptable conditions, says Cáritas
By: thinkSPAIN , Thursday, November 22, 2012

'NEARLY three million people in Spain either sleep on the streets every night because they have no home of their own, or live in homeless shelters, shanty towns or in squalor, according to research by the charity Cáritas. An estimated 30,000 to 35,000 people live on the street, but

when these figures are added to those who do not have a proper, dignified home but instead live in shanty towns, insalubrious or overcrowded bedsits, shelters or hostels, the total comes to nearer three million. In Madrid alone, 600 people live on the pavement, and when combined with those who live in shelters, youth hostels or flitting between cheap guest houses, the total comes to over 3,000. About another 4,000 people in the north-western region of Galicia are homeless, and a further 500 in the province of Santa Cruz de Tenerife. Cáritas has been unable to find details of the number of children who are living on the streets, but they say they are hearing of more and more cases of entire families with no home. The number of women who have nowhere to live is also rising, with 15 per cent of those attending 'emergency' homeless shelters – where people are offered a free bed for the night for six or seven days – being women in 2011, increasing to 22 per cent this year. Cáritas says a person without a home 'has no access to their basic rights' and 'no dignity', meaning they and their lives are 'totally destroyed and at stalemate'.

[Source: <http://www.thinkspain.com/news-spain/22021/around-three-million-people-in-spain-are-homeless-says-critas>]

'WOMEN, IMMIGRANTS & CHILDREN

One-third of individuals affected by the mortgage crisis are immigrants, at a significantly higher rate than the rest of the population. The Ecuadoran community, in particular, has been snared by "crossed mortgages," in which two buyers guarantee one another's loans and [chain mortgages](#). The banks then link together a string of people, often strangers, and they guarantee one another's mortgages. And, when one person defaults on their mortgages, it creates a chain reaction of defaulted mortgages, due to their liability as guarantors.

Single-parent homes headed by women face clear challenges because of income instability, earning lower wages on average, and child care responsibilities. Also, women head of households often remain tethered to their mortgage, due to a hostile former partner. They face economic abuse, a form of domestic violence not recognized by Spanish law, where men refuse to collaborate in negotiations with the bank — creating powerlessness and dependency.

The lateral effect on the nation's children is evident, as they suffer homelessness due to their parent's over-indebtedness. The social and economic ramifications of the debt affects education, healthcare and food. It makes it impossible to sign a lease, buy anything on credit, or acquire a phone contract, so women and immigrants often work on the black market or pursue entrepreneurial ideas.'

[Source: <http://www.latinpost.com/articles/14743/20140613/women-immigrants-children-affected-economic-crisis-homelessness-spain.htm>]

'The Invisible Reality of Spain's Homeless

By Inés Benítez

Socially marginalised people waiting for lunch at a stand run by the Ángeles Malagueños de la Noche association, whose volunteers serve three meals a day in the centre of Málaga, Spain. Cedit: Inés Benítez/IPS

MÁLAGA, Spain , Oct 28 2014 (IPS) - "It's easy to end up on the street. It's not because you led a bad life; you lose your job and you can't afford to pay rent," says David Cerezo while he waits for lunch to be served by a humanitarian organisation in this city in southern Spain. Cerezo, 39, lives in a filthy wreck of a house in downtown Málaga with two other people. He used to work as a baker and confectioner but his drug abuse ruined his life, and separated him from his wife and his 36 and 39-year-old brothers. Now he is determined to undergo rehabilitation, he tells IPS in front of the lunch counter of the [Ángeles Malagueños de la Noche](#) (Málaga Angels of the Night) association. "Most of those who ask for food here have ended up on the street because of drugs or alcohol, but there are also parents coming for food for their kids, and very young people," he says, pointing towards the dozens of people lined up under the midday sun for a plate of rice, which is steaming in a huge pot. Spain's long, severe recession and high unemployment rate, which currently stands at 24.4 percent according to the national statistics institute, INE, have impoverished the population while government budgets for social services for the poor have been cut. "On the street I feel vulnerable, so inferior. You lose your dignity and it's hard to get it back. I want out of this." – Miguel Arregui. According to statistics from earlier this year, between 20.4 and 27.3 percent of the population of 47.2 million – depending on whether the measurement uses Spanish or European Union parameters – lives below the poverty line. Nor does having a job guarantee a life free of poverty. The crisis drove up the proportion of working poor from 10.8 percent of the population in 2007 to 12.3 percent in 2010, according to the [Dossier de Pobreza EAPN España 2014](#), a report on poverty in Spain by the [European Anti Poverty Network](#). Even worse is the fact that 27 percent of the country's children – more than 2.3 million girls and boys – [live in or on the verge of poverty, according to the United Nations children's fund](#), UNICEF. "You find yourself in the street because you don't have anyone to turn to," said Miguel Arregui, 40. "And once you're there it's really hard to take flight again." The tall, black-haired Arregui, who is separated and has an 11-year-old son, told IPS that he spent 15 "endless" days sleeping rough, and that two bags holding his clothes and cell phone were stolen. For the past few weeks, he has been living in a shelter, where he is overcoming his addiction to drugs. Cerezo and Arregui are two of the thousands of homeless people in Spain – who total 23,000 according to the last INE census, from 2012, although the social organisations that help them put the number at 40,000. But the 2014 study

on exclusion and social development in Spain by the [Foessa Foundation](#) reports that there are five million people in this country affected by “severe exclusion” – 82.6 percent more than in 2007, the year before the lingering economic crisis broke out. The report states that although homeless people are part of the landscape, most people have no idea what their lives are like. They sleep rough or in shelters, after ending up on the street as a result of numerous social, structural and personal factors. In Málaga dozens of poor families, many of whom were evicted for failing to pay the rent or mortgage, are living together in squats known as “[corralas](#)”, in empty buildings owned by banks or construction companies that went bankrupt. In the first half of 2014 there were 37,241 evictions in Spain, according to [judicial sector statistics](#). Since 2007 there have been 569,144 [foreclosures](#), the [Platform for Mortgage Victims](#) (PAH) reports. At the same time, there are 3.5 million empty dwellings – 14 percent of the total, according to the INE. A number of people wake up on the stone benches near the stand where breakfast is served at 9:00 AM. “The day I went to the shelter, they told me it was full and they gave me a blanket,” says José, 47, who spent 15 years in prison and admits that he has to steal to pay for a night in a pension. “The system could use a turn of the screw, to provide permanent and unconditional housing, in first place,” the director of the [RAIS Foundation](#), José Manuel Caballol, told IPS. His organisation is promoting the [Housing First](#) model in Spain. This approach focuses on moving homeless people immediately from the streets or shelters into their own apartments, based on the concept that their first and primary need is stable housing. The approach targets people who have spent at least three years living on the streets, or those suffering from mental illness, drug use, alcoholism or disabilities. Caballol said people with severe problems have a hard time gaining access to homeless shelters, supportive housing or pensions, and that even if they do they fail to move forward with their rehabilitation or end up being expelled from the system once again. “The results are spectacular,” he said. “The people are so happy, they take care of their house and of themselves because they don’t want to lose what they have.” The activist is convinced that this approach, which emerged in the United States in the 1990s, “offers a definitive solution to the problem of homelessness and spells out significant savings in costs for the state, in hospital care for example.” Since July, a total of 28 homeless people have been living in eight housing units in Málaga, 10 in Barcelona and 10 in Madrid, some given to RAIS and others rented by the NGO by means of agreements with city governments and foundations, and with economic support from the government. “Changes are seen very quickly in the people involved,” said Caballol, who stressed the role played by social workers, psychologists and experts in social integration, who listen, support and assist the beneficiaries, depending on what they themselves decide, rather than the other way around. “On the street I feel vulnerable, so inferior. You lose your dignity and it’s hard to get it back. I want out of this,” says Miguel Arregui just before going into a shelter in downtown Málaga for the night. Another local NGO, [Ayuda en Acción](#) (Help in Action), warns that one out of every five people are [at risk of social exclusion](#) in Spain. Cerezo says the social network for the homeless falls short of meeting the current needs, and calls for other models like “casas de acogida” – halfway homes or residential-based homes for the most vulnerable, “with orientation by professionals.” The number of people assisted in Spain by the Catholic charity Caritas rose 30 percent from 2012 to 2013, according to a [report](#) it released Sept. 29.’

[Source: <http://www.ipsnews.net/2014/10/the-invisible-reality-of-spains-homeless/>]

‘Number of homeless in the Netherlands has risen

Dec 24, 2013

Homelessness has increased for three consecutive years. Early 2012, more than 27 thousand people were homeless according to figures released by Statistics Netherlands. Half of them have a foreign background and 40 percent have a non-western background. Nearly half of all homeless are found in Amsterdam, Utrecht, The Hague and Rotterdam.

Homeless people have no fixed abode and sleep in homeless shelters, rough on the streets or in public buildings, but also on an irregular basis with relatives or friends. The number of homeless has risen in recent years. Last year, there were more than 27 thousand, versus more than 23 thousand in 2010. Four in every five homeless are men, one in five are women. Homeless women are relatively young: 30 percent are aged between 18 and 30. More than 20 percent of homeless men are in this age category.

Many homeless have a non-western background. There are more men than women among homeless with a non-western background. Six in every ten homeless with a foreign background are found in the major cities versus nearly one in three native Dutch homeless. On average, homeless people with a foreign background are younger than their native Dutch counterparts: 27 percent are younger than 30, nearly 20 percent are aged between 50 and 65.

In the Dutch population as a whole, the average age of people with a foreign background is also lower than the average age in the native Dutch population. With a share of 20 percent, there are fewer young people among native Dutch homeless and more older people (25 percent).’

[Source: <http://www.dutchdailynews.com/number-of-homeless-in-the-netherlands-has-risen/>]

'Beneath the streets of Romania's capital, a living hell

Deep under the streets of Bucharest – in Europe, in the 21st century – there is a network of tunnels and sewers that is home to hundreds of men, women and children stricken by drug abuse HIV and TB. Thousands are destitute and live in a network of tunnels and sewers beneath the city streets. You can travel to the heart of the EU from Bucharest's Gara du Nord, *write Paraic O'Brien and Jim Wickens*, but our journey will take us just a few metres. On the surface, the newest member of the European club has worked hard to redefine itself. But there's another Romania, underground. When Ceausescu fell there were tens of thousands of children in orphanages and in state "care" in Romania. But in 1990 a series of reports revealed what a nightmarish misnomer that was. Scenes of neglect and cruelty reminiscent of the concentration camps. So what happened to those children?

We've been told that some moved into the tunnels underneath Bucharest. Drug addiction is rife, some have had children of their own. The entrance to this underworld is a hole in the pavement on a traffic island in front of the station. By late afternoon they start to wake up, clambering up out of the ground like the undead. Among them is a little boy, Nicu, who looks about 12. We find out later that "little" Nicu is in fact 17 but his development has been stunted by the drug abuse. He agrees to send word down that we would like to meet the boss. Then there's the smell: a metallic paint called Aurolac, snorted by the addicts from small black bags. Next up the music.

The whole place is wired with electricity, there's a stereo system pumping out dance music. If they had a club night in hell it would feel like this. We're in the first chamber: they call it The Office. You try not to gawp. Out of the corner of your eye, a woman with a syringe between her legs; a little boy stares at you with the Aurolac bag at his mouth, pumping slowly, like a black heart. Everyone here is HIV positive, a quarter have TB. They're all on their way to "the counter". The man behind the counter is called "Bruce Lee" (pictured above) after his street fighting days. He points to a tattoo on his inner thigh, it reads: "Bruce Lee, King of the Sewers".

[Source: <https://www.channel4.com/news/romania-tunnels-bucharest-orphans-photo>]

'Street children in Romania

Romania has an estimated 6,000 plus homeless children living on the streets, most having run away from institutions or family abuse. As Romania's notorious institutions are being closed down, the numbers are on the increase. We fund a safe house for homeless children in a city in NE Romania. In the winter months, many children retreat to the sewers where at least it is warm. We provide refuge, medical care, food, comfort and education. Links are made to reunite the children with their families or alternatively to find good foster homes. A successful outcome for each child depends on long term support and counselling to families and foster carers. Our teams work daily on the streets together with the local Department of Child Protection in an outreach programme. It identifies homeless children very early in their life on the street before they succumb to the inevitable risks of substance abuse and criminality. We offer food, friendship and support to each street child before they are admitted to our refuge. We also provide "drop-in" day care facilities for children who do not wish to be admitted so that they still have access to medical care, showers, food and support services.'

[Source: http://www.reliefundforromania.co.uk/street_children.html]

'Street Kids [Romania]

Marissa Yaremich, Register, May 7, 2007

In the sewer's dim recesses, filthy children huddle with adults — all considered "street kids" — and breathe in the dizzying narcotic fumes of a solvent-based glue through plastic bags clutched to their mouths. For Gabi, 31, who resorted to sewer life when he ran away from a state orphanage at age 14, the fumes kill his hunger pangs, or in the plain English he's learned in an Internet cafe, are used "instead of meals."

Gabi and some of his 14 other sewer mates — either orphans or abused runaways — acknowledge in their native Romanian tongue conveyed through a translator that life should have more to offer than stealing or begging. They then regroup on a rank mattress to inhale more glue.

Laurenteu, 33, who spent the last 15 years in the sewers following his release from a state orphanage, does not have much faith in the government.

Nearby in the Grozavesti-Metrou neighborhood, Elena, 18, covers dozens of intravenous drug scars with a jacket and then crawls out of a sewer to breastfeed her daughter, one-year-old Bianca. Unlike Laurenteu, the runaway said she wants to believe in the government's promises and Booth's commitment to help street kids because she wants to finish night classes.'

[Source: <http://www.gvnet.com/streetchildren/Romania.htm>]

'ECPAT Global Monitoring Report on the status of action against commercial exploitation of children - ROMANIA [PDF]

ECPAT International, 2006

A number of street children in Romania are involved in prostitution or have been forced to engage in the production of pornographic material, while other vulnerable children are also recruited by paedophiles or trafficking networks at a very early age. Most street children come from Roma families. Street children are among the most vulnerable groups of children, and both girls and boys are sexually exploited at a very early age. Rape is very frequent in the streets, and girls and very young boys are the main victims. There are at least 2,000 street children in Bucharest and 5,000 in the whole country.'

[Source: <http://www.gvnet.com/streetchildren/Romania.htm>]

'Bucharest's homeless kids find shelter underground

Many of Bucharest's homeless children turn to the city's underground canals for shelter, climbing down manholes and broken concrete. Life down there is harsh as most of them are addicted to drugs.'

[Source: <http://www.dw.com/en/bucharests-homeless-kids-find-shelter-underground/g-17306315>]

'In July 2011, Laurentiu Ierusalim left his Romanian orphanage, the only home he had ever known. He had less than \$150 in his pocket and nothing more than the clothes he was wearing. He had no job, no housing, and no clue how to survive. "I didn't know what to do," Ierusalim says, "so I slept in a playground across the street."

It was the beginning of two years of homelessness, of knocking on doors to ask for food and shelter. An Orthodox priest helped him find families to take him in for several weeks at a time. Last summer, after finally surmounting the formidable bureaucratic and financial obstacles required to secure a government ID, he landed his first job as a grocery store clerk.

With slight variations, Ierusalim's story is told over and over again in the experiences of the tens of thousands of children shunted away in Romanian orphanages during the reign of communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. The execution of Ceausescu and his wife on Christmas Day 1989 led to the discovery of the country's most disturbing secret—enough abandoned children to make up a city had been living in squalor for years, packed into unsanitary orphanages without appropriate resources, care, or stimulation.'

[Source: <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/orphaned-history-child-welfare-crisis-romania>]

'Romania's Children

There are just under four million children under the age of 18 in Romania. According to the United Nations about 32,000 children under the age of 14 are involved in child labour.

The children of Romania have been affected by the recent economic, social and political changes. As parents have struggled to find employment, there has been an increase in poverty. Children living in these families sometimes face precarious situations such as labour exploitation, violence, and domestic violence. Many are ultimately taken into care.

The general cuts in public spending have affected children due to less investment in education and in health provision. The country continues to score low in the international Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). The under-five mortality rate stands at nearly three times the EU average. The funding of services, and their quality, varies according to location. Staff turnover is also a problem in these sectors, partly because of low wages.

Despite planned measures to provide support to families, the percentage of children taken into care has remained the same over the past ten

years. Small children – under the age of three – constitute the group who are most taken into care. Children with disabilities are routinely placed in institutions or with foster care; the reintegration into their family is difficult.

The health system is facing challenges: not only is it experiencing budget cuts but also corruption and shortage of drugs and staff - the latter form a significant percentage of those emigrating abroad in search of better working conditions. Parents who move abroad often leave their children behind, in most cases in the care of relatives. In 2008 over 96,000 cases were reported.

One per cent of the population has HIV/AIDS. Most of these cases are children who were brought up in the Romanian orphanages in the 1980s. Orphanage staff would inject blood as a food substitute. The syringes were not changed and with some contaminated blood, the disease spread quickly. At present the epidemic is believed to be spreading quickly through drug use and sexual transmissions - the most vulnerable groups are sex workers, street children and homeless adults and those addicted to heroin. [1]

The forgotten children

Under Ceausescu's deranged despotism, abortion and birth control were outlawed. He demanded that all women bear at least five children in an effort to create a caste of "worker bees" that would labor in the hive of communism. Invasive investigations of women were conducted at workplaces and elsewhere to track their individual progress in making babies. The government pledged to raise the children whose parents were too poor or incapable of caring for them. Some women never wanted the children they had been ordered to conceive in the first place and were happy to offload them.

But many thought their babies would have a better life if given up—or that they had the option of collecting them later if they found the means to properly care for them. [2]

At the age of three years the children were medically examined. Disabled and orphaned children were in huge numbers brought into homes like Cighid or psychiatric hospitals, where they lived under inhumane conditions. Many children died within a few weeks because of hunger, frostbite or diseases.

Most of the lucky ones found homes abroad, when thousands of Americans and Europeans flocked to Romania in the 1990s to adopt, after catching glimpses of the tragic situation through television and newspaper reports.

Those who found homes with families, in Romania or abroad, have fared better, as numerous studies have shown, than those who remained warehoused in the system. But few abandoned children escaped untouched by their initial neglect. American and Romanian researchers have been collaborating on a long-term study, based in Bucharest, investigating the effects of living in an institution in comparison to a family setting. Living in an institution, the Bucharest Early Intervention Project (BEIP) has found, has significant negative effects on brain development, behavior, and psychological functions.

Charles Nelson, a professor of pediatrics and neuroscience at Harvard Medical School and lead researcher at BEIP, along with coauthors Nathan Fox and Charles Zeanah, have just published a book on their research, *Romania's Abandoned Children*. Their ongoing study has shown that there are critical "sensitive periods" of development. For example, the IQs of children placed in foster care prior to turning two were significantly higher than IQs of those placed after age two. And language development reaches a key point at fifteen months.

The legacy of this nightmare is very much present in Romania today—and is one of the reasons, nearly twenty-five years after the death of Ceausescu and the bizarre and brutal system he created, that so many Romanian children continue to be abandoned while adult survivors struggle to make a life. A lingering social welfare mentality, coupled with lack of progressive approaches to education, a struggling economy, and halfhearted commitment to rule of law, pressurize the situation. [2]

Fewer abandoned Romanian children are living in institution-like settings today than during the Ceausescu years. Since the early 1990s, several NGOs have worked with the government to close down many of the larger, notorious orphanages. Later in that decade, the Romanian government began a foster care program, employing "maternal assistants" to take care of orphans, hopeful that this would move more kids into family settings. The most recent government data indicate that more than twenty thousand Romanian children live in foster care. The system is based on the French model: foster parents are government employees, earning the equivalent of about \$200 a month, and are prohibited from other employment, even if the children are of school age.

Child welfare workers in Romania debate about whether foster parents choose this path for love or for money. While \$200 a month doesn't sound like much, it is equivalent to the salaries of some other professions in Romania, including some teachers and nurses. In many smaller cities and more rural areas, jobs are scarce and foster parenting is one of few options. "It's not for the love," says Catalin Ganea, a project manager for one of the biggest funders of child welfare programs in Romania, SERA Romania. "It is a contract that can be broken at any time. It's not good to have kids in foster care or foster homes for a long time. It's a broken connection. Sometimes the foster family has an interest because it's the only job to have here. It's a job—a contract between them and social services."

In November, Ganea concluded a trial program formulated in conjunction with a county in western Romania to reintegrate one hundred and sixty abandoned children back into their biological families. The plan provided goods, like a washing machine or materials to build a house, to

families on a case-by-case basis in return for accepting their child back home. Most of the families are extremely poor, often living in cement-block homes with no electricity, running water, or indoor plumbing. Though some of the children had been living in orphanages, many had been living in foster homes—sometimes in the same home since they were babies.

The head of one children's charity in Romania, who asked to not be identified for fear that her statements might negatively impact her relations with the government, says she is unsure of the merits of the effort. "I don't believe that a kid should be taken out from a good foster home after ten to fifteen years, to be placed back with his parents just because the government offered the parents an incentive to say they wanted the kid back. I believe that family is very, very important. But I also believe that family is where your heart is, where you feel peace, and where you are protected."

She recalls a visit to the home of two elementary-aged brothers who had been reintegrated into their biological family by social services, unrelated to the SERA project. Neighbors approached her, she says, and told her the children were not safe—that the parents were drunk most of the time. The boys had previously spent their entire lives in one foster home, with guardians who were devastated when told that the kids were being removed.

But a child's ties to his biological family, for better or worse, have become a central focus of child policy in Romania. A child's biological parents must be deceased or indicate that they have no interest in having a relationship with the child before adoption can be considered. But what a "relationship" is, exactly, is unclear. Sometimes a mere phone call or e-mail a couple of times a year is considered sufficient. Many children now linger in the orphanage system because a parent "expresses interest" by stopping by or calling once a year. Many times, the parent can ensure the child won't be adopted this way - leaving open the possibility that when the child gets older, he or she could finally be taken home and put to work to earn money for the family.

Even when the parent does not express any interest in maintaining a relationship with the child, the social system's structure makes it difficult to get a child into an adoptive home within the critical periods of development that Charles Nelson and his colleagues have defined. At least a year with no familial contact must pass before a social worker can pursue adoption. Once it has officially been established that there is no interest from the biological parents, the social worker assigned to the child's case must make contact with all adult relatives of the child, to the fourth degree - including, for example, the grandparents' siblings - to explore the possibility that someone else in the family might take in the child. Only after this process is completed can the social worker finally file a motion to make the child adoptable.

But even from that point, other obstacles remain. A child cannot be adopted directly from an orphanage or group home; he must be adopted out of a foster home. The state slashed funding for foster parents as part of austerity measures a few years ago, meaning now fewer children can be moved through the system this way. And with the high case demand facing social workers, the process to finalize adoption is often slow.

Romania had issued a moratorium on international adoption in 2001, finally outlawing it in 2005 under pressure from EU representatives as the country made its bid for entry into the union. Romanian officials at the time said they could not effectively monitor and control the process, as rumors swirled of babies being sold at auction. But adoption inside Romania hasn't been a success. Annually, between seven hundred and nine hundred children are adopted of the twelve hundred to fourteen hundred considered "adoptable," a tiny fraction of the orphans within the system.

Most Romanians who apply to adopt children are couples that have been unable to have children on their own. Most of these couples are only interested in adopting babies; seventy-two percent want a child who is less than three years of age, and eighty-six percent want a child under five, according to a study by the Romanian Office of Adoptions and UNICEF. Few are open to adopting children with disabilities or those of Roma descent, which rules out a large percentage of children.

The idea of putting the needs and rights of these children first—reconnecting them with their biological families or finding them other loving homes—would require changing the social mentality of Romanians. During the Ceausescu years, parents didn't necessarily know what they were getting into when they dropped their children off at the doorstep of a state-run institution. The poor in Romania today continue to lack education about birth control, and costs remain prohibitive for many. There also is a lingering belief that full-time childcare—for a year, five years, or more—is a service provided by the state.

Mothers have the option of leaving their newborns at the hospital when they go home. They do not have to give up the rights to the child at this point—or ever. And, as the law states, if the parents or relatives don't renounce their relationship with the child, the child cannot be adopted. Some are eventually moved into foster care, while others remain at the hospital until they are two, when they can be sent to orphanages.

There are no national programs aimed at preventing unwanted births or child abandonment; no system for giving up your child for adoption directly or privately, as exists in the United States and Western Europe. But neither is there coordinated government support for the children who "age out" of the child protection system, leaving many on the street without the skills to find work, search for a place to live, or cook a meal. At age eighteen, or twenty-six in the rare instance when the orphan is enrolled in higher education, the young adults, like Laurentiu Ierusalim, are turned out with only a few dollars in their pockets. Each year, an estimated two thousand young adults exit orphanages in Romania. Many end up homeless, with no money or shelter, and turn to drugs and crime.

Romania seems unable to move past the shame associated with the early days of its abandoned children. While dozens of children's charities continue to funnel money, goods, and care into the country, many international groups that came in the 1990s—some establishing model programs intended for government takeover—have gone, and few of their programs have continued. While Romania now for the most part looks at the brutal Ceausescu regime in its rearview mirror, it sees one of the few accomplishments of that dictatorship, large numbers of disquieted orphans who are now young adults, walking its streets every day. [2]

Orphans and child abandonment

In 2001, Romania placed a moratorium on international adoptions, and officially banned the practice four years later, citing widespread corruption in adoption practices across borders. Romania has no formal national assistance program for orphans after they leave state institutions. Most must leave at age 18, when they become legal adults. Few of the country's 75,000 orphans know how to manage money, find an apartment, prepare food or search for a job. Many end up homeless and turn to crime, like prostitution, when they age out.

The number of children abandoned in maternity wards dropped from 5130 in 2003 to 1315 in 2010. 28% of children abandoned are Roma. NGOs claimed that the official statistics underestimated the problem, and that many children living in state institutions were never officially recognized as abandoned. Poverty, child marriage and mobility are the primary causes of child abandonment. But most potential adoptive parents refuse to adopt Roma children.

According to the Ministry of Labor, Family, and Social Protection, there were 63,847 children in state care. Of them 39,212 were in professional foster care, 1,878 in alternative care (with guardian), and 22,757 in public or private residential care. [18]

"Have a problem? Abandon it!"

The old mentality from Communist times that a baby from a poor family had a better chance if he or she were given over to social services, is still present today and mothers, or parents, who cannot cope with their children for whatever reasons, simply surrender them in the "care" of institutions.

Unwanted newborn babies are sometimes simply left at hospital after birth. Nobody would ask questions on why... resulting in hundreds of children abandoned each year by their parents - healthy babies who shouldn't grow up in a hospital in the first place, completely forgotten by the state.

Today's unwanted children

The standard of living for Romanian orphans is still grave despite vast improvements since their conditions were leaked to the West after the fall of the Communist government in 1989.

Under Nicolae Ceaușescu, both abortion and contraception were forbidden, leading to a rise in birth rates. This resulted in many children being abandoned and these were joined in the orphanages by disabled and mentally ill people. Together these vulnerable groups were subjected to institutionalised neglect and abuse, including physical and sexual abuse and use of drugs to control behaviour.

Orphanages lacked both medicines and washing facilities, and children were subject to sexual and physical abuse.

The conditions in orphanages had declined after 1982, as a result of Ceaușescu's decision to seize much of the country's economic output in order to repay its foreign debt.

As the realities of life in Romanian orphanages emerged after December 1989, the reaction outside Romania was of shock at the plight of the orphans, and numerous charities were established. Numerous fund-raising activities have been conducted by various parties, such as the 1990 album Nobody's Child: Romanian Angel Appeal, which was compiled by George and Olivia Harrison for AIDS-infected orphans.

In 2006, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh was criticised for a joke in which he said there were so many orphans "over there you feel they breed them just to put in orphanages."

In September 2005, Emma Nicholson, Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne, the European Parliament's rapporteur for Romania, stated "Romania has profoundly reformed [from top to bottom] its child protection system and has evolved from one of the worst systems in Europe to one of the best."

In an accession report published prior to November 2005, European Union observers were positive regarding the situation of the child care system in Romania. [7]

According to a report by the Center for Legal Resources, nearly 1,500 children have died in institutionalized orphanages in the last 4 years. And that's only half the total number of centers, because out of a total of 47 administrative units in the entire country, only 27 have responded to the questions raised by organizations defending human rights, states a report released on 10th of December, 2014.

At central level, however, no one knows exactly what the situation, because there were requested statistics.

Currently, 24,598 children are in total social protection institutions in Romania.

What has changed for Romania's orphans and disabled people since Romania entered the EU? How much have the conditions in the Romanian state institutions improved since Romania has signed the 'Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' and since it has received hundreds of millions of Euro to improve its orphanages and institutions?

The following documentaries and articles shed light into it, and paint a very grim picture...

Learned helplessness

The ultimate indictment, the obscenity that transgresses every law of sentient existence, of humanity, is when 'learned helplessness' is acquired by the most innocent in society. When babies in orphanage institutions no longer cry because they have learned that this is futile and that there will be no response... that no-one cares.'

[Source: <http://sufferinginromania.weebly.com/the-children.html>]

'Homeless Poles living on barbecued rats and alcoholic handwash

Charity says that migrants from eastern Europe who do not qualify for benefits are sleeping rough in appalling conditions

Homeless migrants from eastern [Europe](#) in London who are unable to get benefits have become so impoverished that they are eating rats and drinking lethal cocktails of alcoholic handwash, a homeless charity has warned.

Jeremy Swain, chief executive of Thames Reach, one of UK's biggest homeless charities, said he had been appalled by the conditions of destitute rough sleepers from new EU states, who now make up more than a quarter of those on the streets of the capital.

"We have come across homeless Poles in north London barbecuing rats. We have to explain to them that unlike the rats back home, in London they would be full of poison. The health risks are enormous," he said.

A camp that was home to half a dozen Polish rough sleepers was closed down in March. The Guardian spoke to Megan Stewart of Thames Reach outreach team who found the site. She visited on three occasions and found people eating cooked rats, which had either been toasted over a fire or stewed in a pot.

"It was the worst thing I had seen in three decades of working with the homeless," said Stewart.

Eastern European rough sleepers are often left to fend for themselves. Unless they have worked full-time for a year, migrants from the 10 former eastern bloc countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 do not qualify for welfare such as housing benefits, which British homeless people can use to pay for hostels.

This leaves these rough sleepers open to exploitation. The men eating rats said they were employed by local off-licences to unload deliveries and paid in bottles of superstrong White Ace cider, a three-litre bottle of which contains 22 units of alcohol – more than five times the recommended daily limit for a man.

Extreme alcoholism, said Swain, had claimed lives. "Alcohol is a killer." He added that handwash fluid had been stolen from hospitals. "It's about 70% alcohol. If you don't you mix enough water then it's lethal ... we've had four bodies this year."

Richard Blakeway, the London mayor's director of housing, said it was shocking to hear of the plight of EU migrants but this only confirmed that "rough sleeping really is the worst option". "I think it's clear that employment or returning home are far better ideas."

Many EU rough sleepers stay in London because they think – often incorrectly – there is a only a limited safety net in their own country. Thames Reach has been working with Polish charities to get people home, under a £200,000 scheme funded by the government. The money is used first to detox rough sleepers, reunite them with their families and prepare them for work in their home nations.

Within sight of Canary Wharf, half a dozen rough sleepers live in squalor of rotting mattresses and fetid pools of stinking water. All have similar stories: they have lost jobs and fallen into a world of heavy drinking and rough sleeping.

Vladimir Lipsky, 40, came from [Poland](#) in 2005. Last week he bedded down under a flyover in east London – and slept with one eye open to avoid being pelted by stones hurled by local children. "These kids attack us for no reason. No money. No life. What have I done to them?"

In such dire straits Lipsky says he has volunteered to go home – joining 400 others who have returned in the past 18 months. Swain said sending back rough sleepers paid for itself. He said the scheme saved taxpayers at least £250,000 as the homeless ended up in A&E five times more often than a regular citizen and were 15 times more likely to be a victim of violence.'

[Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/aug/12/homeless-poles-rough-sleepers>]

'A third of refugees in Poland may be homeless

Many of those granted asylum in Poland may be sleeping in shelters, empty buildings, train stations or even night buses.

By: Magda Qandil, ed. Jack Redden | 20 February 2012

WARSAW, 20 February (UNHCR) - A third of refugees granted asylum in Poland may be homeless forced to sleep in shelters, empty buildings, train stations or even night buses.

Zeynab* and her twenty-something son Akhmad are two of those facing the problems identified in Refugee Homelessness in Poland, a pilot study conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs and funded by UNHCR.

Homeless for most of the last three years, they spend many nights in buses, a local mosque, cheap hotels or other people's houses. Recently they have been staying in the flat of a friend who is out of town but do not know where they will go when their host returns. They arrived in Poland in 2004 after their closest family members had been killed during the war in Chechnya, leaving them with very few relatives. They were granted asylum (subsidiary protection) two years later.

"We have only each other," Zeynab sobbed when a social worker suggested the pair separate to increase their chances of finding a home. The widowed mother could never accept such an outcome. There are hundreds of refugees in Poland in a situation similar to that of Zeynab and Akhmad; one third of refugees in the country may be homeless according to the study.

The case of Zeynab and her son illustrated one of the key findings of the study. They lived in a refugee centre while their asylum applications were processed and during the year-long integration programme that followed. The problem came when the programme with its housing and living benefits ended and they were expected to support themselves. They have been homeless ever since.

"The greatest risk of homelessness appears when the integration programme ends," said Kinga Wysieñska, co-author of the study which concluded that the integration programme does not fulfill its function. "In the space of one-year, refugees are not able to learn Polish or acquire professional and socio-cultural competencies necessary to undertake work and function independently in the society," said Wysieñska. Zeynab and Akhmad survive thanks to him finding random and very low paid jobs. The money is enough to buy food, but not to rent a flat. "Look!" Zeynab pointed to their feet. "The last salary let us get winter shoes!" she said, smiling briefly.

She is normally extremely fatigued, appears often lost in thought and her speech can be impeded. She most probably suffers from severe Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder from her experiences in the Chechnya war but receives no professional help in Poland. "Zeynab is extremely vulnerable," said Izabela Majewska, a social worker at Polish Humanitarian Action who has been in touch with her since her arrival to Poland. But the Refugee Homelessness study found that single mothers with small children face the highest risk of homelessness.

Dagman came to Poland from Chechnya with her husband and three kids in the same year that Zeynab arrived, fled the abusive relationship and faced years of homelessness until only recently receiving a council flat. "Everyone knew about it, when we stayed in a refugee centre," she said of the abuse and beatings by her husband that had begun years before. "But no one took any action." It was only when he had beaten their teenage daughter unconscious that Dagman finally made the decision to escape, an extremely risky move as she knew he would pursue them. "He kept calling, asking where we were and threatening that he would burn me alive. I don't know how I survived it, but I did," Dagman said.

She wept as she talked of her children being beaten, but remained composed as she talked of her own suffering. She had spent years moving with her children from one crisis intervention centre to another each time she reached the six-month limit for stays.

Her miracle happened when they were granted a council flat, one of only five allotted yearly by the Warsaw City Council to refugee families. They now enjoy 50-square-meters of safety. "I still can't believe it. I keep thinking that something horrible will happen to us soon. It has been too good for too long," Dagman said. All her children attend school and Dagman works part-time as a cleaner to supplement what she receives in alimony from the government. They can pay the rent and survive, but not much more.'

[Source: <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2012/2/4f426c279/third-refugees-poland-homeless.html>]

'Czech director of Association of Homeless Shelters on "A Night Outside"

Prague, 6.1.2014

In summer one can more or less live on the street, but in the winter it can cost you your life. In addition to a knapsack or plastic bag you also have to get yourself a blanket or a sleeping bag, and if you can't find an old mattress, you need to collect enough cardboard boxes to make your own.

Next you have to find a place where you won't freeze to death in your sleep, like under a bridge, in a park, in a shed, or perhaps in a shelter. You have to not be afraid to go to the people who think about those who are otherwise forgotten. The December 2013 issue of *Romani vod'i* magazine featured the following interview with Dominika Najvert, the director of the Association of Homeless Shelters in the Czech Republic:

Q: Is it possible to estimate how many homeless people there are in our country or to compare us to other countries in terms of numbers?

A: In the Czech Republic there are about 30 000 homeless people and another 100 000 are at risk of losing their housing. The reasons people end up on the street are that they are children who are running away from home, or people with debts they can't pay, or people with non-existent or weak family ties (because of divorce, domestic violence, partners leaving a family with children and other problems), socioeconomic reasons (bad housing policy, high unemployment, the lack of an effective nationwide social housing system), or they are people who are transitioning out of an institution like an orphanage or prison. Most of these are cumulative reasons - several factors play a role simultaneously, it can be hard to choose just one as the main reason. In the European context the situation is different from other countries.

Q: You are the director of the Association of Homeless Shelters in the Czech Republic. Who belongs to your organization and what do you focus on?

A: The Association of Homeless Shelters in the Czech Republic (Sdružení azylových domů v ČR - S.A.D.) was founded in 1993 as an umbrella organization for individuals, institutions, organizations and social service providers involved in the issues of homeless people or those at risk of homelessness. Its priority is to create a professional working environment for its members and to defend their interests. Our members are most often facilities providing services to persons at risk of social exclusion - drop-in centers that are open during the day, halfway houses, hostels, shelters, etc. Today S.A.D. has 90 members throughout the Czech Republic. S.A.D. also conducts research into homelessness, promotes the issue of care for people who have lost the roofs over their heads or who are at risk of losing them, and undertakes various kinds of business and professional activities as well as projects. The association has long collaborated with other organizations, including educational institutions that take an interest in the problems of homeless people, and together we have formed a single platform for negotiating with legislative, municipal and state bodies at all levels of the public administration. We provide advice, consultations, education, information and support to our members. S.A.D. is a member of FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless. In 2011 S.A.D. implemented this country's first-ever census of homeless people together with the Czech Statistical Bureau as part of the general census. In 2012 we organized a summer trip for mothers with children who live in shelters, called "A Different Kind of Vacation". Since 2013 we have been implementing the Krokuz project, which is a series of educational seminars intended for girls and women living in shelters - the name is short for Krok ku zdraví (Step toward Health). Its central topic is health literacy. The project was launched in February 2013 and is planned to go until 2015, and women in all of the shelters that are our members should eventually participate in it. In 2015 we are counting on expanding the program to include men living in shelters.

Q: In November you also organized a unique project, "A Night Outside" (Noc venku). Anyone could try to be homeless for one night and homeless people themselves participated.

A: We have been running "A Night Outside" with the Faculty of Social Studies at Ostrava University since 2012. It has also been running for several years in England. It's hard to figure out when it first began there. The first small "sleeping bag" groups seem to have begun in the 1970s, small groups of students who were not indifferent to the fate of homeless people. Other groups followed in Cambridge, London, Oxford and many other cities. The aim of the event is to familiarize people with the issue of homelessness, to recognize what it's like to sleep outside,

and to also raise money to use to support homeless people. In Britain several actions like "A Night Outside" take place parallel to one another. The one in London in 2012, two weeks before our Ostrava one, included the wife of the grandson of Queen Elizabeth II, Kate Middleton. In 2011 a total of 650 people who slept outside in solidarity with the homeless in Great Britain. Here in the Czech Republic we had 40 brave souls join us that first year in Ostrava. "A Night Outside" is a unique opportunity to spend the night outside without the usual comfort we are accustomed to. It's also a chance to respond to the question of homelessness and to support local homeless people. They are part of the production team from the beginning, and without their contributions the event would mean nothing. The homeless people who are in the roles of guests and spectators have praised the idea and most of them help out during the events. The entry fee is in the form of donated groceries, which are then distributed by local social services providers to homeless people, who are very glad to have that food aid. The social services use the donated groceries during their recreational activities for children and mothers, as well as for their clients who are in financial straits and have no food - their numbers are constantly rising and we frequently witness the fact that mothers have no food for their children. We invite social services providers to "A Night Outside" as well. They get the opportunity to present their projects and services there, or to join with us for this different kind of collaboration. Some clients or the superintendents of social services also make presentations during the event or help us in other ways, such as moderating the evening. This year "A Night Outside" was joined by eight Czech cities and the Slovak capital Bratislava, so nine of these events took place across the territory of the entire former Czechoslovakia on the same day, 21 November 2013. The event was very successful, dozens of people tried spending the night outside all over the Czech Republic, and more than 1 000 people supported the event and its cultural program here. In Opava several town councilors slept outside, including Vice-Mayor Pavla Brada, who gave her auspices to the event. Several directors of social services and other aid organizations slept on the street as part of it, as did employees of the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic.

Q: The project also won an award from the Unruhe (Unrest) Foundation this year, which has been giving prizes since 2005 to socially innovative projects in particular.

A: Yes, "A Night Outside" was also one of 308 projects that competed in 2012 for the SozialMarie Prize. The expert jury was so taken with it that they awarded it second place, it became the most successful Czech project in the past nine years of their awarding prizes and received EUR 10 000 for the development of other innovative activities as part of "A Night Outside". Representatives of the expert jury explained their choice as follows: "The initiative focuses on the still-sensitive topic of homelessness. They succeeded in holding a nighttime event that enlivened the city and also brought together individual actors and participants, including homeless people, members of nonprofit organizations, the public and representatives of universities. They succeeded in presenting this still-marginalized topic to the public very creatively and strikingly... so the public cannot continue to easily ignore this phenomenon...." No other Czech project has ever gotten that far. The fact that the prize was deserved was confirmed by the strong applause given to us by the representatives of the other nominees at the ceremony.

Q: Congratulations! That must have warmed your soul. There is one thing I have a hard time imagining, and that is: What is Christmas like in a homeless shelter?

A: The shelters for mothers with children and other women produce Advent wreaths and decorations before Christmas and it becomes a time for us to bake Christmas cookies together, to decorate gingerbread houses, stuff like that. We also do this with the men. Most social service providers do their best every year to make Christmastime pleasant and special in the various shelters. Anyone who would like to contribute, either by donating clothing, non-perishable groceries, or presents and toys for children can contact S.A.D. through our website, www.azylovedomy.cz, where you can look up a specific facility near where you live.

Q: Do you have a "Christmas story from the homeless shelter" for our readers?

A: There are always positive memories of the clients who today have made it from the very bottom, when they were sleeping on the street in winter, to living in a rental apartment or a starter apartment. They are satisfied, and today I heard from one young lady living in a shelter that those people get back the "twinkle in their eye". What she meant was that they start from a position of someone who is resigned, who has low self-confidence, who has lost faith in society, and on the basis of the dignity and self-confidence they acquire, they once again become people who can give a great deal "to the others" - the rest of us.'

[Source: <http://www.romea.cz/en/en-romano-vodi/czech-director-of-association-of-homeless-shelters-on-a-night-outside>]

'Large numbers of street children discovered in Chechnya

Ruslan Isayev, Prague Watchdog, Chechnya, March 23rd 2007

The "difficult" children, as they are called by the staff of the republic's juvenile rehabilitation inspectorates, are now approaching their favourite time of year, when it becomes possible for them to sleep out in the open. With the arrival of spring, their numbers usually increase.

The lives of such children have a rather narrow focus, which is centred mostly on begging, stealing, or at best a job at a gas station. Many of them start smoking or experimenting with alcohol at any early age. The most common activity is glue-sniffing. Before the war, foreign

cameramen could literally “smell out” the places where such children were hiding, and the estranged faces of young drug addicts often appeared in the world's television news.

Rustam was only 10 when the second war began. His was the usual fate of the neglected child : divorced parents, a bad stepmother, a drunken father. Now he is almost 17.'

[Source: <http://www.gvnet.com/streetchildren/CzechRepublic.htm>]

'Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 31 January 2003

www1.umn.edu/humanrts/crc/czechrepublic2003.html

[63] The Committee is concerned that there is a growing number of children living on the street in urban areas vulnerable to, inter alia, sexual abuse, violence, including from the police, exploitation, lack of access to education, substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS and malnutrition. Furthermore, the Committee notes that the primary response to the situation of these children, as described by the State party in its report, is institutionalization.'

[Source: <http://www.gvnet.com/streetchildren/CzechRepublic.htm>]

'Up To Ten Thousand Czech Children Go Missing Every Year

Dita Asiedu, Radio Prague, 24-05-2005

www.radio.cz/en/section/curraffrs/international-missing-childrens-day-up-to-ten-thousand-czech-children-go-missing-every-year

Although most missing children are found, Mrs Baudysova points to the disturbing fact that in the short time they spend out on the streets, they are at a very high risk of being abused: With time the great majority of the missing children in the Czech Republic do turn up, and statistics include only those cases reported to the police. The number of children who are abducted is unknown but is believed to make up only a fraction of the total number of those who go missing, most of whom are runaways.'

[Source: <http://www.gvnet.com/streetchildren/CzechRepublic.htm>]

'British Ambassador Jonathan Knott visited and handed over donations to the John Wesley homeless kindergarten on 4 April 2013.

In February, staff at the British Embassy Budapest held a charity baking event which raised fifty thousand Hungarian forints in support of the good work of the John Wesley homeless kindergarten. During his visit, Ambassador Knott met with head kindergarten teachers, played with children and handed over the collected amount to the kindergarten's director. The British Embassy Budapest has long been supporting disadvantaged communities. Both in 2011 and in 2012 members of the embassy donated clothes, toys and non-perishable food items to poor and Roma communities. In the past 5 years the embassy also took part in Christmas soup kitchen for the homeless initiatives.'

[Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/world-location-news/british-embassy-in-hungary-supports-homeless-charity>]

'Abandoned Children And Infants

Justin D. Long, Monday Morning Reality Check, 1998

MORE THAN 22,000 ORPHANED AND ABANDONED CHILDREN are in state custody in Hungary. A string of infanticides and stories critical of adoptions by foreigners made the news in 1996. After 54 children were killed by parents who could not afford them, the Agost Schoepf-Merei maternity hospital in Budapest put an incubator at its entrance so mothers could anonymously leave unwanted babies. The majority of abandoned children are Gypsies and few Hungarian parents want them; these are the ones most up for foreign adoption.'

[<http://www.gvnet.com/streetchildren/Hungary.htm>]

'How to help the homeless

The government is grappling with a very visible problem

Dec 7th 2013 | BUDAPEST |

HUNGARY'S homelessness problem is nowhere more visible than in the historic heart of Budapest. Homeless people pull down their trousers and underwear in full view of startled tourists before relieving themselves on the pavement near parliament. Small piles of human excrement dot the back wall of the former headquarters of the state television, where the destitute huddle at night. Some even try to clean themselves on central bus-stop shelters after defecating, leaving brown smears across advertising billboards.

In response, the city council has passed a regulation outlawing what it calls “habitual living” in public spaces, including underpasses, bridges, playgrounds, much of the city centre and Budapest's world heritage sites: the banks of the river Danube and the historic Buda Castle area. Debrecen, a city in eastern Hungary, has followed suit and banned the homeless from the city centre and nearby Nagyerd forest. Offenders can be fined, forced to carry out community service and even imprisoned.

These local rulings follow on the heels of a national law that allows local authorities to take such measures to protect "public order, security, health and cultural values". The first version of the national legislation was ruled illegal by the constitutional court because it gave too much leeway to local authorities. Parliament voted in September to amend the law. Yet the new version has been condemned by homeless organisations. Even the United Nations has weighed in, with two special rapporteurs attacking the government for stigmatising the homeless, fuelling prejudice and abusing their human rights. The new law brings a criminal aspect to a social problem, says Luca Koltai, of Habitat for Humanity Hungary, a housing charity. "People can perceive the homeless not as poor and vulnerable people who lost their homes, but as criminals."

Government officials reject such criticisms. It is not illegal to be homeless, only to set up camp in certain areas. The constitution calls for "decent housing and access to public services for everyone". Local authorities can decide whether to introduce municipal regulations and the courts can review the measures. In Budapest, the new measures codify a broadly similar law which has been in effect since 2010, says Ferenc Kumin, a government spokesman.

According to the government, between 2006 and 2010 131 homeless people died of cold or exposure in the capital but since then only one person has died on the streets. Many other cities in Europe prohibit the homeless from "urban camping". The number of places at public shelters has recently increased by a third, from 8,200 to 11,100, of which 6,000 are located in Budapest. (Up to 50% of Hungary's 15,000 homeless are in Budapest.) This year the government spent €30m (\$41m) on services for the homeless, up from €29m in 2012. In addition, civic organisations and NGOs providing accommodation and training for homeless people received €3m this year. There will always be enough beds, claims Sandor Pinter, the interior minister. The government is ready to double the number of places available.

That may not be enough, say rough sleepers. A new showcase shelter is modern and comfortable, but others are Dickensian. Several homeless people said that they would prefer to spend the night outside, no matter how cold the weather, than to face potential violence or being robbed of their meagre possessions.

As winter bites, sympathy for the homeless is more widespread than might be expected. Many of those on the streets have lost their jobs or have been thrown out of the marital home. Lacking a stable address, foreign language or computer skills, it is very hard for them to find work. The long-term answer is a coherent housing policy for the poor and vulnerable, says Ms Koltai. Such a programme is likely to win popular support. A survey by the Menhely Foundation, which works with the homeless, found that 80% of respondents were not in favour of punishing them and thought they should have better social care; and 7% had a friend or relative who had slept rough.'

[Source: <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21591216-government-grappling-very-visible-problem-how-help-homeless>]

'Homelessness Becomes A Crime In Hungary

Zoltan Szarka grew up in and out of foster care, ending up in Budapest's Danko street homeless shelter after losing his job and apartment. Hungary's new anti-vagrancy laws — the toughest in Europe — now mean that homeless people sleeping on the street can face police fines or even the possibility of jail time. Advocacy and human-rights groups are alarmed by the new efforts to crack down on and effectively criminalize homelessness, where the ranks of the needy have increased during the country's dire financial crisis. Debt, joblessness and poverty are on the rise. The country's bonds have been downgraded to "junk" status, and the nation's currency, the forint, has dropped sharply against the euro.

Hungary's homeless problem is on full display at the Danko street shelter, one of Budapest's largest, where 200 or more sleep every night. I tried to find another job, I tried a lot. But I couldn't find anything. So my landlord had enough and kicked me out. And there was nobody there to help me; I don't have a family to lean on.

Some 30,000 Homeless In Hungary

If you call the Danko street shelter home, chances are you are truly destitute. Advocates for the poor here estimate there are more than 10,000 homeless on the streets and in the shelters in the capital alone and some 20,000 more across the rest of Hungary. A young man approaches. He wants to show me his pencil drawings. Zoltan Szarka has called this place home for the past 3 1/2 months. He says he was in and out of foster care when he was growing up and has been on his own and mostly out of luck since he was in his late teens. He takes his pencil sketches out of a flimsy folder. The self-taught artist's drawings are rough and a bit bawdy, but show promise. "My parents abandoned me at the hospital when I was a baby," Szarka says. "I don't know anything about them. Drawing, my art, is what keeps me alive; this is what gives me strength, otherwise I would fall."

Increased Harassment On The Street

Lately Szarka's rough life has been made even harder by an increase in police harassment. Under a mix of local and national laws, homeless on the street in Hungary now risk steep fines and more. "The new law ... I think is unique in Europe and the only one of its kind in Europe that makes sleeping on the street a crime that's punishable by jail," says Tessza Udvarhelyi, a Budapest community organizer and co-founder of the group The City is For All. "[Hungary] is actually enforcing it, as was the case with [Budapest's] 8th District where they actually enforced it en masse and they detained hundreds of homeless people for sleeping on the streets or begging or rummaging," Udvarhelyi says. "The current government is not only criminalizing homeless people, but poor people as well." In addition to Budapest's street-sleeping ban, a new federal law allows police to arrest homeless who've been "caught" or cited for sleeping on the street twice in a six-month period. In recent years, several districts in Budapest made it illegal to rummage through garbage and beg on the streets, and local politicians created so-called homeless-free zones. But Udvarhelyi says under the current right-wing Fidesz government the crackdown has become more intense and systemic.'

[Source: <http://www.npr.org/2012/04/06/149526299/homelessness-becomes-a-crime-in-hungary>]

'Below you will find some case studies of individuals who have been housed and assisted by House The Homeless.

CASE A: Samantha, a 17 year old who had been excluded from school, was put on a work experience program, following family difficulties, we helped her to find a room in a family house. She learnt various skills and hopes soon to obtain a full-time job.

CASE B: Deidre moved from her home in London to relatives in Oxford, due to domestic violence. When she eventually had to leave her relatives home, the London Council in the area she used to live, declared she no longer had a local connection, we agreed to make representations and liaise with a local councillor, to enable her to obtain social housing.

CASE C: Louise had an assured shorthold tenancy at a house in South London, her landlady asked her to vacate it despite the fact she had spent hundreds of pounds decorating it during the several years she had lived there. She was advised about eviction procedure, the need for properly constituted notices to be served, correctly dated and – ultimately – the need for a Court Order. She is still living at the property

CASE D: Thomas, an 18-year-old care leaver, was advised that he was eligible for a higher rate of housing benefit (The 1 bed Local Housing Allowance) despite him being under the age of 35, the usual cut-off point. He was subsequently able to obtain accommodation

CASE E: A local café offered to supply food for homeless people. We are currently negotiating the best way to ensure those in greatest need receive the food offered.'

<http://www.housethehomeless.com/case-studies/>

'Rebecca's Story

Rebecca from Atherstone found herself homeless at just 16 years old. With help from the BBC's Children In Need she now faces a brighter future. In this video, for the first time, she shares her story - http://www.doorway.org.uk/rebeccas_story.html

In this moving video, we are given a rare insight into the situation of a young person facing homelessness. Rebecca had to leave her broken parental home at 16 years old and found herself sleeping on various friends' sofas until she eventually moved into a hostel in Atherstone http://www.doorway.org.uk/rebeccas_story.html

'Story 1

Mums house

I lived here with my family and I was very happy and settled until my relationship with my mum broke down. After many arguments she told me to leave. I left late one night; I was scared and didn't know where to go.

My friend's house

My friend took me in; I slept on her sofa as she only has 2 bedrooms and didn't want her children disrupted. I found it hard living here as it was always chaotic and busy and it never felt like my home. I tried not to stay here all the time as I didn't want to outstay my welcome.

My Auntie's house

Over the next few months, I stayed with my auntie for three nights every week, and the other four nights with other friends and family friends. It was alright here because my Auntie looked after me, but the overcrowding in her house meant it was usually very messy and I didn't have my own space.

Local Council Visit

I came here to see a Housing Options Advisor because I was homeless and needed help. The lady was unable to help, however she was able to refer me to Doorway.

Doorway

One of the Housing Needs Advisors saw me and was very friendly; she talked to me about what had happened and asked me lots of questions, explaining that this would help Doorway to offer me the correct advice. She told me I would go on a waiting list and Doorway would contact me when a property was available.

First home

One day I got a phone call from Doorway saying there was a one-bedroom flat available in an area that was only 5 mins walk away from the town centre! I went to look at this with the same lady I had met and this made me feel confident to ask questions. I was nervous as a flat of my own was a massive responsibility and something I had no experience of!

This was my first ever independent tenancy. It meant a lot to me because I could finally escape the homelessness and stop relying on other people all the time. Although I was scared and excited all at the same time, I knew that I would get help and could stop feeling like I was a burden to my friends. I finally had my own independence! My Housing Support Worker was really helpful in setting me up and helping me manage my money once I moved in and I managed really well.

Next home

My partner and I were housed after my Housing Support Worker helped us to register on the councils Uchoose website. We bid on several properties and were lucky to be offered this one. I was excited about moving in here as I knew that with the skills I have learnt over the past few months I will be able to manage the tenancy and build a good life. I have rebuilt the relationship with my mum and life is now much better than I could have hoped for when I first left home on that dark night.

Story 2

Since I have received Doorways support, I have become a very confident person and am able to express my views and feelings more than I have ever done before. I became involved with Doorway when I was 17 years old, this was due to the reason my mother got herself and all of my siblings evicted from our home, due to the fact she stopped paying the bills as she became an alcoholic.

Since that point Doorway has helped me in every way possible to help me achieve an independent lifestyle, helped me within myself i.e. independence, self-esteem and help me believe in myself.

I have been through quite a lot since I have been receiving support. I was very shy and would never open up to my Support Worker but by meeting me regularly I overcame this. My support worker also helped me with:

- Bereavement
- Unfair dismissal
- Domestic violence (from former partner)
- Pregnancy
- Attending meetings with social workers
- Attending courses

I can't thank my Support Worker and Doorway enough for the service they have provided for me and all of the other young people they support. I think it's a great service that Doorway provides.

I started off being homeless, had no confidence, no self-esteem, felt very vulnerable, an easily misled teenager, to a young women, with two beautiful children, a house, independence, a lot of confidence, a lot of self-esteem and I am now married to my partner of nearly 3 years. I have created a website for the course I attended to help them get funding and they said I could have a job as a business development manager.

I hope I can help or work with Doorway in some way now or in the future. I have a lot of respect for all of the team and they should keep up the good work.

Video: Former Care-leaver Naz who received support from St Basils Walsall scheme shares his story 25 OCT 2016 Naz's story Young St Basils resident Naz shares his story - from leaving Care to becoming homeless, Naz then found St Basils Rewriting Futures project in Walsall.'
- See more at: <http://www.stbasils.org.uk/news-resources/news/video-former-resident-naz-who-received-support-from-st-basils-walsall-rewriting-futures-scheme-shares-his-story/#sthash.K7MDYB7a.dpuf>

'Youth Homeless Parliament

Funded by The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and managed by St Basils, the Youth Homeless Parliament (YHP) is made up of 100 young people aged 16-25 from across England, who are currently homeless and receiving support from one of 8 homelessness charities.

Young people who form this group travel to Westminster to meet with Ministers and MPs. Each December the YHP meet with Ministers and Mps from across section of political parties. Any government Minister or MP can book to meet with a sub-section of this group at any time.

The young people who form YHP, are nominated by homelessness charities, they are supported to prepare their manifestos at the House of Commons Westminster each year.'

- See more at: <http://www.stbasils.org.uk/youth-engagement/youth-homele/#sthash.NLlSkHHA.dpuf>

'National Youth Reference Group

The National Youth Reference Group (NYRG), established in 2008, is made up of young people from communities across England who are aged 16-25 and have experienced homelessness

They take part in consultations and offer workshops and training on how best to involve other young people in reviewing services in order to improve those services. In the past 8 years they have worked with local governments, universities, hospital trusts and housing and youth charities and organisations. This work is funded by DCLG.

NYRG are available to deliver workshops, presentations, consultations, staff training and Q&A sounding boards for a few hours free of charge. Interested in finding out more or booking us? Visit the [NYRG contact page](#).'

- See more at: <http://www.stbasils.org.uk/youth-engagement/national-youth-reference-group/#sthash.S2GMALqg.dpuf>