Homeless people in Central and Southeastern Europe face serious barriers to housing and healthcare – SOLACE-CEE research data reveals

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In spring 2025, a survey was conducted in five Central and Southeastern European countries as part of the SOLACE-CEE project, which aimed to map the real-life situation of people experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion. Through questionnaires and in-depth interviews, researchers examined living conditions, barriers to healthcare and social services, health literacy, and use of IT tools among people experiencing homelessness. The goal was to collect data to support the development of effective services for homeless people in the CEE region.

The research revealed that homeless people face a combination of challenges that often interact with each other. *"A total of 265 respondents (individuals and household heads) participated in the data collection, and the local teams conducted dozens of in-depth interviews not only with people experiencing housing exclusion but also with healthcare and social service providers in each country. This allowed us to gather not only quantitative data but also to understand the broader context, highlighting the complex needs of the target group,"* stated the research team at the Metropolitan Research Institute Budapest (MRI).

Key findings:

- The potential target group of the local hubs faces severe housing exclusion: 45% of respondents live in shelters, 23% in temporary structures, and only 15% in standard housing. One in ten households is completely without a roof over their heads. The sample included 279 minors (43%). Up to 70% of families with children are single-parent households.

- The groups that the local programs intend to include are very vulnerable in terms of income stability and are on the very margins on employability: 35% of women have only primary or no education at all (compared to 5% of men). Only 15% of respondents have formal employment, while 20% have no income. More than half (53%) rely on social benefits.

- Potential clients face multiple morbidities and their physical health data show significant challenges: 61% of respondents reported at least one health problem, 34% are unable to work due to their health, and 46% were hospitalized in the past two years. Preventive check-ups are almost non-existent, with 40% of respondents not attending medical examinations.

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- The potential clients' mental health is also heavily affected: 80% of respondents have experienced traumatic events. Every second client experienced abuse in childhood, adulthood, or both. One in three lost a close person due to mental health issues, and more than half lived with someone struggling with substance use.

- A key challenge faced by many is discrimination: 25% of respondents were denied healthcare, and 40% experienced disrespectful behavior while using health services. Many clients lack anyone to turn to for support, particularly men with long-term homelessness experiences.

The SOLACE-CEE research results provide a clear picture of the challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness in Central and Southeast Europe. They highlight gaps not only in housing and healthcare but also in the coordination and integration of services.

"The results clearly show that clients' needs are complex, and the approach to addressing them must also be comprehensive. Standalone services without coordination may not adequately respond to all needs," said Alena Vachnová, Chair of the Board of Nadácia DEDO, the lead partner of the project. *"SOLACE-CEE integrates healthcare and social services, enabling the creation of coordinated services directly specialized for the living condition of people experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion."*

Qualitative interviews with professionals also emphasized the need for stable and flexible funding, better collaboration & coordination between social and healthcare services, strengthening staff capacities, and implementing trauma-informed, integrated care approaches including Housing First values. They also highlighted administrative and regulatory gaps and complex bureaucracy as additional barriers.

The summary of survey and interview results provides a foundation for developing effective, coordinated, trauma-informed and integrated services that genuinely respond to the needs of people experiencing homelessness in the CEE region.

About the project:
SOLACE-CEE, funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), is the first joint pilot in the CEE region to integrate healthcare and social services for homeless people. The project brings together seven organizations from five countries: Nadácia DEDO and Všetci pre rodinu, n. o. (Slovakia), Health and Social Development Foundation (Bulgaria), Housing First Poland Foundation (Poland), Casa Ioana (Romania), Metropolitan Research Institute Budapest, and Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta (Hungary).

More information about the project can be found at: www.solace-cee.eu

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