



**Ogólnopolska Federacja  
na rzecz Rozwiązania  
Problemu Bezdomności**

# **Support for the homeless in Poland**

Legislation, welfare system & NGO sector



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# Homelessness in Poland

- ❖ Housing crisis started by the post-war baby boom and the bankrupting state's inefficiency in providing new housing in the late 1970s & 1980s
- ❖ „Shock therapy” in the early 1990s leaves many behind – the austerity plan introduces poverty in Poland
- ❖ Post-transformation housing legislation focused on private sector, municipalities sell their housing stock to the tenants, evictions introduced
- ❖ National housing programmes limited to supporting mortgages
- ❖ Degradation of the remaining municipal and co-op housing stock
- ❖ Lack of affordable housing for rent, no legislation on private rentals, social housing almost non-existent
- ❖ Poland remains at the bottom of EU's housing saturation, overcrowding and age of leaving parents' home indexes



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# Homelessness in Poland

- ❖ Modern homelessness emerges at the end of 1970s, intensifies greatly after 1989
- ❖ 1981 – first homelessness focused NGO founded (St. Brother Albert's Aid Society)
- ❖ 1990 – first Social Assistance Act: homeless support becomes a municipal task
- ❖ 2001 – first regional homeless headcount (Pomerania region)
- ❖ 2003 – Public Benefit and Volunteer Work Act regulates commissioning public tasks to NGOs
- ❖ 2004 – Poland joins the EU: ESF projects, Polish NGOs in FEANTSA, migration wave starts
- ❖ 2008 – first NGO call to the government for a homelessness strategy
- ❖ 2009 – first national homeless headcount by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
- ❖ 2013 – national homelessness NGO Federation established
- ❖ 2013-15 – homelessness peaks with over 45 thousand people a year using public services
- ❖ 2016 – major reform of the homeless support system focused on standardisation of shelter and cooperation between municipalities and NGOs



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Problemu Bezdomności

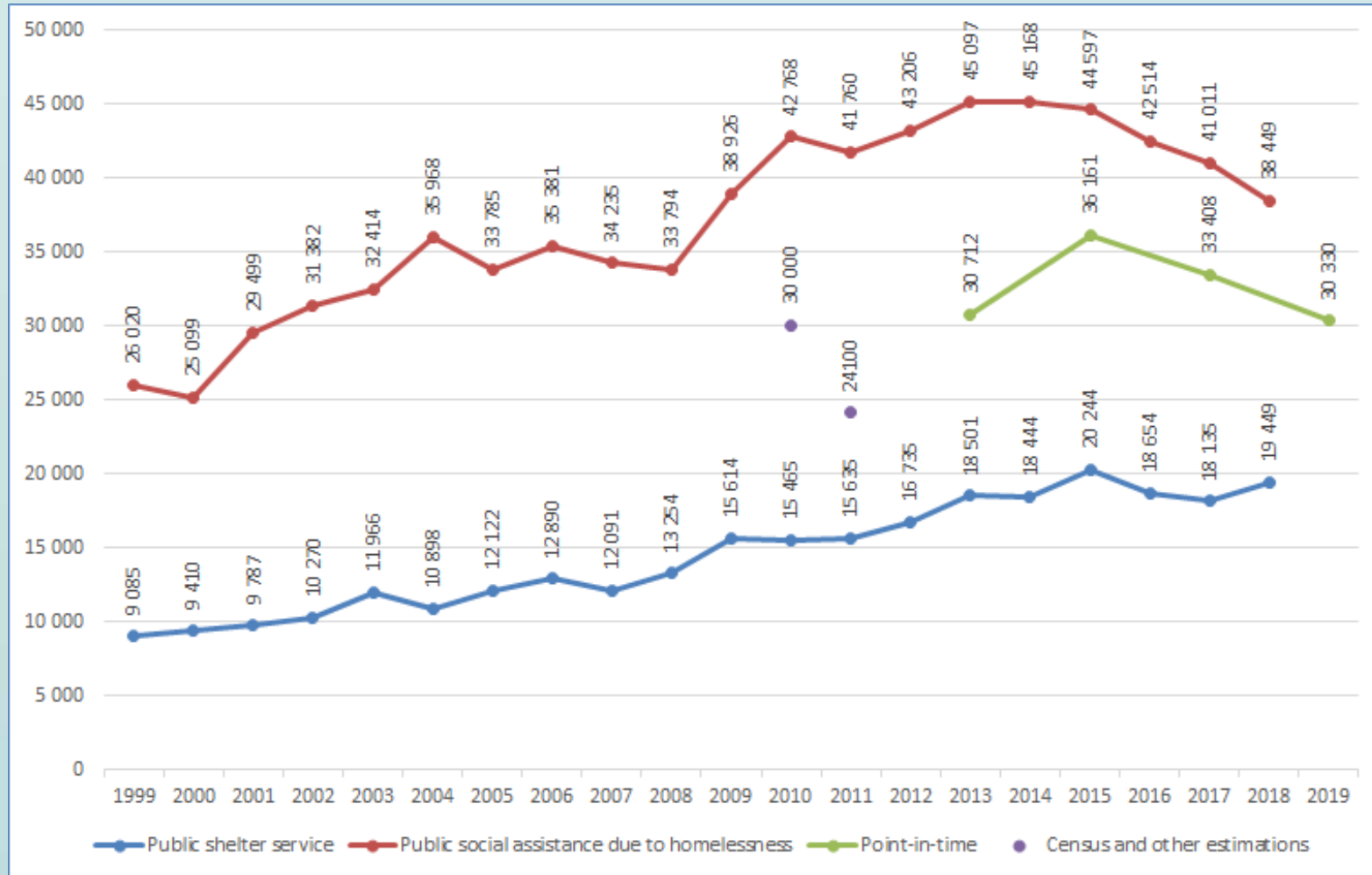
# Homelessness in Poland

- ❖ National headcount of 13/14 February 2019 revealed 30.3 thousand homeless people (decreasing - 33.4 in 2017, 36.1 in 2015)
- ❖ 19.8% (6 thousand) rough sleeping on the headcount day (decreasing)
- ❖ 14.6% homeless are women, 3.3% - children under 18, 2.6% - youth 18-25
- ❖ Majority of the homeless men are in their middle age or elderly, age of women more evenly spread; growing age of the overall homeless population
- ❖ The problem of youth homelessness is not seen by the system



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# Measuring homelessness 1999-2019





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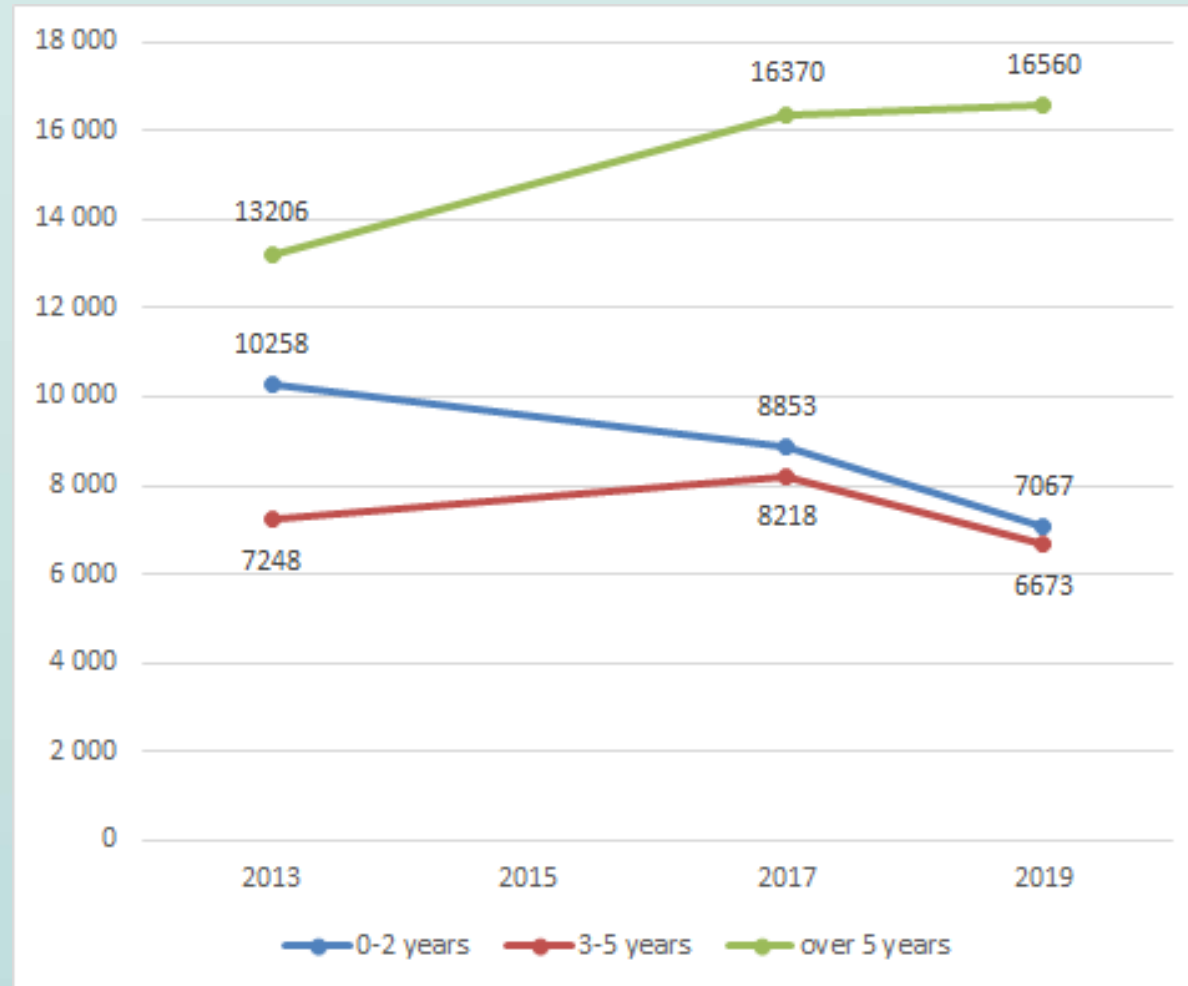
# Homelessness in Poland

- ❖ Growing length of homelessness episodes (54.6% over 5 years; 49.0% in 2017, 43.0% in 2015)
- ❖ Most common reasons given by the homeless: family conflict (9.8 thousand answers), addiction (8.5), eviction (8.0), debts (5.1), unemployment (4.6), health (4.0)
- ❖ Well developed shelter network - 870 facilities with ca. 25 thousand beds; majority provided by the NGOs
- ❖ 5-7 thousand evictions yearly
- ❖ Permanent housing crisis is the major obstacle in reintegration for those remaining in the shelters
- ❖ 70-200 people dying of hypothermia each winter (majority of them are rough sleeping homeless)



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# Length of homelessness episodes







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# Legal framework for homeless support

**Constitution of the Republic of Poland – article 75:**

*„Public authorities shall pursue a policy conducive to meeting the housing needs of citizens, in particular: preventing homelessness, supporting the development of social housing and supporting citizens' efforts to obtain their own housing.”*

...but it does not mean that housing is a right





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# Legal framework for homeless support

## Social Assistance Act of 2004:

- ❖ defines a homeless person
- ❖ imposes obligations on municipalities:
  - ❖ providing shelter, clothing and food
  - ❖ providing social assistance benefits (financial and material)
  - ❖ creating local strategies for solving social problems
- ❖ enables commissioning social assistance tasks to NGOs
- ❖ defines the local jurisdiction in homeless assistance
  - ❖ municipality of last registration
- ❖ defines the principles and tools for conducting social work
- ❖ defines the standards of homeless institutions



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Problemu Bezdomności

# Homeless services

- ❖ Municipality (Municipal Social Welfare Centre):
  - ❖ pays social benefits
  - ❖ provides social work (incl. social interview, social contract, individual programme for leaving homelessness)
  - ❖ provides shelter, food and clothing (administrative decisions)
  - ❖ manages municipal housing stock incl. social housing (different department)
- ❖ NGOs – apply to municipalities for financing their services within municipal tasks or provide assistance regardless of municipalities (charity, social enterprise)
- ❖ The cooperation between municipalities and NGOs is regulated by the Public Benefit and Volunteer Work Act and executed within obligatory local cooperation strategies
- ❖ The system is focused on intervention - no systemic solutions for prevention and reintegration



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Problemu Bezdomności

# Homeless services

- ❖ Homeless institutions defined by the Social Assistance Act:
  - ❖ Emergency shelters (less than 20%) – overnight shelter, warming-up stations (winter only)
  - ❖ Integration shelters – homeless hostels, homeless hostels with care services, hostels for mothers with children
  - ❖ Separate systems for dependent, disabled, elderly and refugees
- ❖ Health services – health insurance required, obtained by registering as unemployed, signing a social contract or by a municipality's administrative decision (in emergency – up to 90 days)
  - ❖ limited access to psychiatric services
  - ❖ problems with post-hospital care
  - ❖ detoxification treatment free only for insured
  - ❖ street services provided by NGOs



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# Homeless services

- ❖ Shelter services for intoxicated – warming-up stations, sobering-up stations (drunk tanks), hospitals (ER), police
- ❖ Labour market services – social employment (social integration centres), public benefit works, supported employment (Employment Fund), social economy
  - ❖ cooperation between social assistance, public employment services and partly NGOs
  - ❖ numerous projects from ESF and other funds
- ❖ Outreach – not regulated, street work and other services for rough sleepers provided mostly by NGOs
- ❖ Food & clothing – widely available, mostly in cooperation with NGOs (Food Banks / FEAD, soup kitchens, „soup on the street”, distribution points)
- ❖ Housing projects – mostly in staircase model (transitional housing)
  - ❖ Housing first starts in 2020 (50 apartments – Warsaw, Gdańsk, Wrocław)
  - ❖ Social rental agencies (Warsaw, Poznań)
  - ❖ Gdańsk social housing programme
  - ❖ Housing-led solution for Roma people in Wrocław



# Dwellings







# Warming-up stations





# Overnight shelters & hostels







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# **Thank you for your attention**

**Jakub Wilczek**

[jakub.wilczek@bezdromnosc.pl](mailto:jakub.wilczek@bezdromnosc.pl)