



YOUNG ADULTS FROM FOSTER CARE AND THE EXERCISE OF THEIR RIGHT TO HOUSING

RESEARCH FINDINGS SUMMARY



The right to housing included in the right to a standard of living is one of the social rights that are not recognized in social policies explicitly as human rights. This may be the one of the reasons why the measures against a growing crisis in housing are not effective enough. Therefore, The Slovak National Centre for Human Rights (SNCHR) is focusing on the right to housing at the research and advocacy level. Previous research activities of the SNCHR have identified several groups with difficulties to exercise the right to housing due to associated adverse factors and thus can be considered as disadvantaged in this respect. One of the risk groups are children and young people from Centres for children and families (Centrá pre deti a rodiny, CDR). They face multiple disadvantages associated with the absence of reliable adults in their life, social exclusion and the risk of poverty.

„Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.“

(Article 25 (1), Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948)

organizations working with the target group in an informal environment. The aim was to have respondents with diverse institutional affiliations, but also to ensure equal representation from different regions of Slovakia.

„In the Committee's view, the right to housing should not be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense which equates it with, for example, the shelter provided by merely having a roof over one's head or views shelter exclusively as a commodity. Rather it should be seen as the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity.“

(Article 11 (1) General Comment 4, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1991)

Based on the results of previous research activities, the SNCHR decided to map the existing situation of the access to safe and stable housing by young adults from CDR and determining factors that have a major impact on their possibilities in this area, to identify strengths and weaknesses of the social "safety net" and facilitate discussion on how to increase the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms.

The research activity was carried out as a series of semi-structured expert interviews with social workers from CDRs, social workers from halfway houses and professionals from non-governmental or charitable

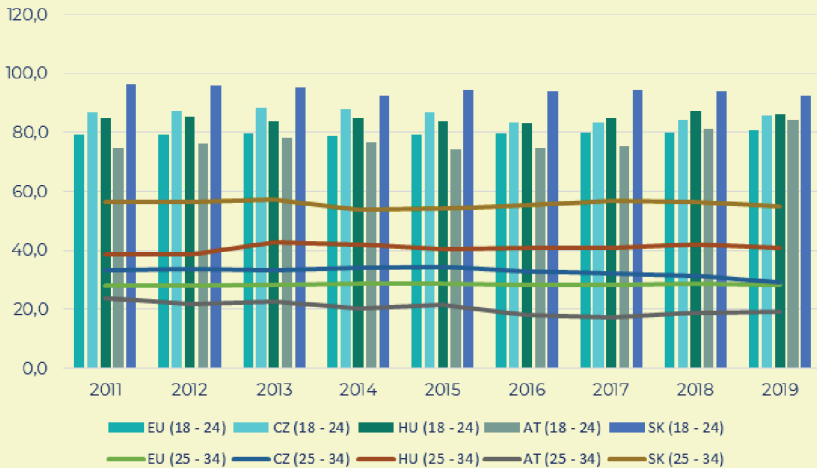


HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT

Housing is not merely a social or socio-economic issue, but first and foremost, it is a human rights issue.

- Housing as part of the right to an adequate standard of living is declared in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25 paragraph 1, 1948) as well as in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 11 (1), 1966).
- UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights defines adequate housing by following criteria: legal security of tenure, availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure, affordability, habitability, accessibility (e.g. barrier-free accessibility, accessibility for disadvantaged and excluded groups), adequate location, and cultural adequacy. (Article 11 (1) General Comment 4, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1991).
- The issue of homelessness is considered within the human rights framework also by interventional approaches of social work, such as housing first or rapid re-housing, which are based on the assumption that stable and dignified housing influence the success in other areas of life, for instance, in the area of work, family life, and health.

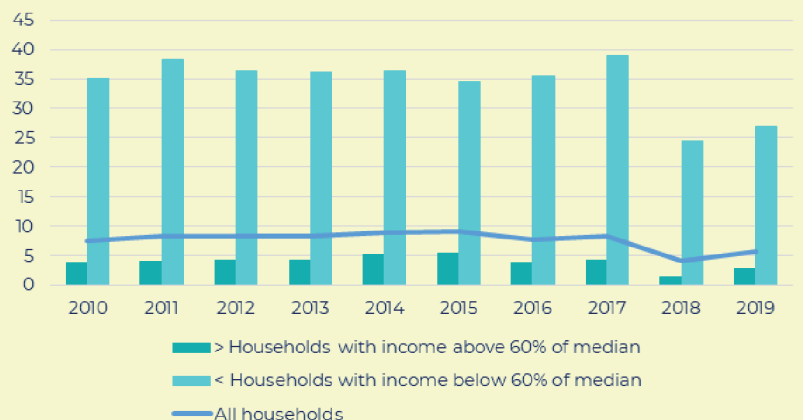
Why Are We Talking About the Right to Housing in Connection to Young Adults from CDR?



Graph 1: Share of young adults aged 18-34 living with their parents during the period 2014 - 2019 in EU, CZ, HU, AT, PL, and SK
Zdroj: (Eurostat, 2021)

Housing is generally unavailable to young people in Slovakia. With a high share of young people aged 18-34 who live in the same household as their parents, 55 % of 25 - 34 years old and 92,6 % of 18 - 24 years old, Slovakia keeps to be ranked at the top of the European Union.

The affordability of housing is also demonstrated by the housing cost overburden rate, showing that in 2019 housing costs exceeded 40 % of total disposable income in 5,7 % of Slovak households and in 26,8 % of households at risk of poverty (Graph 2).



Graph 2: Housing cost overburden rate by income in SR during the period 2010 - 2019
Source: (Eurostat, 2020)

Young Adults from CDRs Have Even More Challenging and Disadvantaged Position

- The vulnerability of children and young people stems mainly from their dependence on adults. In case of their absence, the rights predominantly connected to adult legal guardians, such as the right to housing, are more difficult to exercise.
- The absence of positive role models and especially **the support network** of adults after leaving institutional care results in higher vulnerability throughout the process of becoming independent and entering adulthood.
- Cases of multiple disadvantage are common for young people from CDR – many of them come from Roma families (although they might not identify as Roma themselves), socially deprived households, they might have experienced intensive trauma or they might have been placed in CDR because of other disabilities. In situation of **multiple disadvantage and discrimination**, the possibility of exercising the right to housing is even lower.
- Young adults from CDR also face many obstacles when entering the labour market.
- The intertwining of adverse factors has an impact on whether young adults are able to find and especially maintain stable and safe housing.



Major Challenges and Problems

SNCHR has identified several problems and challenges related to the access to housing by young adults from CDR.



- Social workers view existing **policy instruments to increase housing affordability as inaccessible** to the target group for which they are intended. The instruments do not take into account the specific living situation in which young adults from CDR find themselves after becoming independent. For instance, the State Housing Development Fund offers special conditions for young adults from CDR to receive state funded mortgage, yet the fund does not reflect on their specific living situation resulting in low accessibility and use by the target group (mainly due to administrative burdens, strict conditions, and financial inaccessibility of loans).

- On the contrary, the experience of social workers suggests that mechanisms which should primarily serve as a crisis intervention are much more accessible and thus, are also used more often. Halfway houses, dormitories or shelters remain the only option for many young adults. However, according to the ETHOS¹ definition, living in these types of facilities is already considered a form of homelessness.

- In the period of reaching adulthood, key instruments appear to be a financial contribution when leaving the institution and a possibility to extend the stay in the facility (until the age of 25). **The possibility to remain in the CDR even after reaching the age of majority** is generally evaluated positively, but it should be emphasized that it presents only another form of institutionalized and temporary housing. Also, it has been indicated that the financial contribution at the time of becoming independent as one-off assistance cannot solve the complex living situation of young adults after leaving the CDR.

- The respondents further assessed as **inaccessible or not available at all, the social or municipal rental housing**, which should provide affordable housing also for low-income households, and **social housing programs containing social services**, which encourage the development of independence and provide support in key areas for the target group of young adults (e.g. finding and maintaining work).



- Nevertheless, when identifying the determining factors, children and young people were **problematized to a greater extent** than the social and support system itself by respondents. Thus, attention is paid to mistakes and insufficient basic skills of young people (e.g. weaker communication and social skills, lower perseverance, easier abuse or trustworthiness). However, these are largely determined by the absence of a family support system and conditions in alternative care and social system settings.

¹ The European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) is a uniform European typology developed by the European Federation of organisations working with the people who are homeless (FEANTSA) to unify terminology for data collection, monitoring, and policy-making on homelessness.



Recommendations of the SNCHR

The main recommendations of the SNCHR regarding the access of young adults from CDR to the right to housing are as follows:

Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family should:

- support and motivate the systematic cooperation of the Centres for Children and Families with organizations providing non-formal education and the involvement of children and young people in long-term personal development programs (strengthening social skills, life skills, skills for internal balance and respectful relationships), career guidance programs, and networking, as well as educational programs raising children's awareness of their rights;
- reconsider the classification used to record the housing situation of young people from CDR who have terminated institutional care. In regard to the typology of homelessness, it would be beneficial to distinguish between precarious forms of housing (e.g. living in a hostel conditioned by particular employment) and housing provided within other social services.

Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic should:

- create conditions for development of supported housing as a social service in municipalities to divert young people from crisis intervention services (e.g. halfway houses) to long-term rental housing and strengthen their independence;
- take the necessary steps to obtain up-to-date and comprehensive data on homelessness in general (homeless census) and homelessness of young people while taking into account the ETHOS classification.

Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic should:

- reassess the criteria for the target group of young people from CDR who apply for housing loans and increase the accessibility of this instrument;
- create a legislative environment or financial/subsidy schemes that will motivate and support municipalities to set up a system of social housing also for the target group of youth from CDR.

Municipalities should:

- strengthen cooperation with local Centres for Children and Families in the area of further development of social housing, in order to better comprehend the needs of the target group and their social situation. Municipalities might also consider cooperation with NGOs active in the field of homelessness prevention and social service providers in order to recognize the complex housing situation in the region;
- in the area of social housing policy, remove the obstacles contributing to the exclusion of young people from the CDR from social housing and place this group among the priority applicants.

In addition to the above-mentioned recommendations which directly stemmed from the research findings, SNCHR recommends to ministries and other public institutions to strengthen the cooperation with organizations and field workers in the area of homelessness prevention as they can be useful partners in development of effective forms of financial or non-financial prevention mechanisms.