

---

# Defining and Measuring Homelessness

---

Volker Busch-Geertsema

GISS, Germany

- › **Abstract** *Substantial progress has been made at EU level on defining homelessness. The European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) is widely accepted in almost all European countries (and beyond) as a useful conceptual framework and almost everywhere definitions at national level (though often not identical with ETHOS) are discussed in relation to this typology. The development and some of the remaining controversial issues concerning ETHOS and a reduced version of it are discussed in this chapter. Furthermore essential reasons and different approaches to measure homelessness are presented. It is argued that a single number will not be enough to understand homelessness and monitor progress in tackling it. More research and more work to improve information on homelessness at national levels will be needed before we can achieve comparable numbers at EU level.*
- › **Keywords** *Data, definition, ETHOS-typology, homelessness, housing exclusion, indicators, measurement*

## Introduction

---

When Dragana Avromov, the research coordinator of the European Observatory on Homelessness in the mid-1990s, worked out a first estimate of the extent of homelessness in the European Union, she found a curious mix of sources of information in the twelve EU member states at that time. For Germany and the Netherlands, the projections were based on a statistical model using some empirical survey data. Numbers from the population census were used for France. The Irish data derived from an official assessment of homelessness. UK data related to the numbers of households accepted as homeless under the respective legislation. Italian numbers were deducted from a poverty survey and the population census. The turnover of users of shelters for homeless people in one year was reported from Belgium and Spain, with day counts of service users from Denmark and Luxembourg. The numbers

for Greece and Portugal were estimates based on researchers' 'field experience'. Avramov did her best to 'make preliminary estimates by adjusting the available data in accordance with a number of hypotheses based on research findings' (1995, p.87).

While it was obviously difficult to achieve any comparability of the groups of homeless people included or excluded from the data provided for the different countries and while she had to acknowledge that the validity and coverage of the data varied to a great extent, Avramov at least tried to find a way of making point-in-time and annual prevalence numbers compatible with each other.<sup>1</sup> Using a turnover rate, which had been worked out in a survey on the extent of homelessness in West Germany (Busch-Geertsema and Ruhstrat, 1994), she adjusted the other data:

When data from a one-day census were available I adjusted them according to an estimated turn-over rate to give an indication of the number of people who had passed through shelters or benefited from rehousing over the course of one year; and vice versa, when only data on the number of clients over the course of one year were available they were adjusted according to the turn-over rate to give a cross sectional figure. (Avramov, 2002, p. 5)

In retrospect, she saw this as a rather problematic approach:

The methodological shortcoming of the estimate lies in the fact that it was based on the turn-over rate established for West Germany. It is generally known that turn-over rates may be quite different from country to country and even from one region to another, but I had no research resources to measure them and no primary research was under way in any of the EU countries. (2002, p.5)

Nevertheless, Avramov's estimate of a total number of 2.7 million homeless people, adjusted to the enlarged EU-15<sup>2</sup> in 1996, and including all persons 'who rotate between friends and relatives, furnished rooms rented on a short term basis and services for homeless people' (Avramov, 1996), survived for a long time as the only available number of the quantitative extent of homelessness in Europe. Indeed, no new figure has been produced, despite fifteen years of research and debates about the definition of homelessness and adequate methods of providing a more up-to-date estimate of the extent of homelessness and housing exclusion in the EU, which has meanwhile expanded to comprise twenty-seven countries.

---

<sup>1</sup> In earlier Observatory reports, point-in-time numbers and annual prevalence data (mainly based on estimates) for different countries had been added to reach a European estimate, see Daly 1993 and 1994.

<sup>2</sup> The fifteen member states of the EU prior to 2004: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Has there been any progress in defining and measuring homelessness in all these years? Are we nearer to a common understanding of homelessness and housing exclusion? Do we know more about the quantitative dimensions of the problem and the profile of homeless people, at least at a national level, in the EU member states? What are the open questions and challenges to be taken up by further research and action? This chapter tries to answer these questions. It analyses the developments concerning the definition of homelessness, and then presents the achievements made in developing measurement approaches and a common understanding of which types of data are needed for tackling homelessness (certainly more than one national and European number). The chapter ends with a discussion of the possible directions for further research and advanced development of policies.

## **The Definition of Homelessness**

---

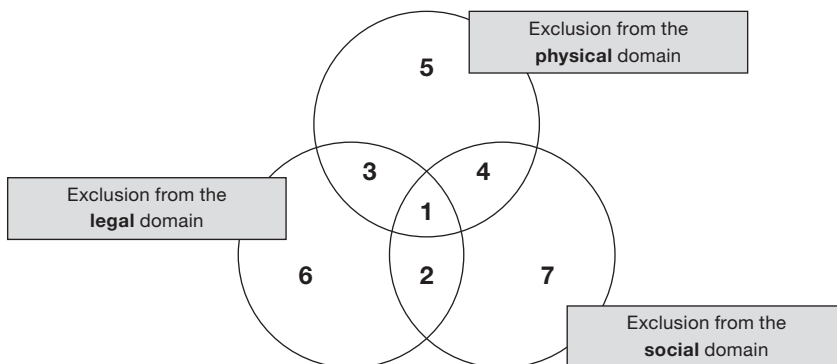
There can be no doubt that much progress has been achieved in creating a European definition of homelessness and housing exclusion. The European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS), adopted and advocated by FEANTSA, was developed as part of the work of the European Observatory on Homelessness, under the coordination of Joe Doherty, Bill Edgar and Henk Meert. Edgar and Meert deserve special credit for elaborating the logic basis and advancing the conceptual framework. FEANTSA members and especially the data collection working group of FEANTSA were actively involved in the development of ETHOS. ETHOS is widely accepted and frequently quoted in almost all European countries and was selected as the most adequate conceptual framework for a new definition of homelessness in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2009).

Not all European governments (if they care at all about any 'official' definition of homelessness) agree on all categories and accept all the different groups mentioned in ETHOS as being part of the homeless population. But almost everywhere, national definitions are set in relation to ETHOS and it can be clarified which of the subgroups mentioned in ETHOS are included in homelessness definitions at the national level and which are not. This is a great advantage when it comes to

comparing numbers from different countries for different subgroups and is a very good basis for any attempts towards further harmonisation.<sup>3</sup>

While the approach to conceptualising homelessness on a continuum, with sleeping rough at one extreme and living in insecure accommodation at the other, was formulated in the first report of the Observatory (Daly, 1992), it took quite some years to arrive at a more differentiated typology and a convincing conceptual framework. In their first review of statistics on homelessness in Europe, Edgar *et al.* (2002) mention four broad categories: rooflessness, houselessness, living in insecure accommodation and living in inadequate accommodation. Their second review (Edgar *et al.*, 2003, p.4) introduced the ‘three domains which constitute a home’ and from which homeless people are excluded to different degrees as the conceptual framework. These were further refined in the third review, which was also the first to seek to collect data for the different subgroups of the new typology (Edgar *et al.*, 2004, p.5): ‘Having a home can be understood as: Having an adequate dwelling (or space) over which a person and his/her family can exercise exclusive possession (physical domain); being able to maintain privacy and enjoy relations (social domain) and having a legal title to occupation (legal domain).’ See Figure 1.1.

**Figure 1.1: The domains of homelessness and housing exclusion**



Source: Edgar *et al.*, 2004

<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of other approaches to define homelessness on the European level, including the INSEE study for Eurostat (Brousse, 2004) and the recommendations of the UNECE/Conference of European Statisticians for the Europe-wide census (UNECE and Eurostat, 2006), see Edgar *et al.* (2007, ch.3, pp.43ff). The authors also discuss a number of non-European approaches (from Australia, Canada and the US). For detailed discussions of definitions of homelessness and studies of homelessness based on long-term and point-in-time data, see also the papers produced in the EU-funded network CUHP (Constructing Understanding of the Homeless Population) and available at: [www.cuhp.org](http://www.cuhp.org).

**Table 1.1: Seven theoretical categories of homelessness**

Conceptual category	Operational categories	Physical domain	Legal domain	Social domain
Homelessness	1 Rooflessness	No dwelling (roof)	No legal title to a space for exclusive possession	No private and safe personal space for social relations
	2 Houselessness	Has a place to live, fit for habitation	No legal title to a space for exclusive possession	No private and safe personal space for social relations
Housing exclusion	3 Insecure and inadequate housing	Has a place to live (not secure and unfit for habitation)	No security of tenure	Has space for social relations
	4 Inadequate housing and social isolation within a legally occupied dwelling	Inadequate dwelling (unfit for habitation)	Has legal title and/or security of tenure	No private and safe personal space for social relations
	5 Inadequate housing (secure tenure)	Inadequate dwelling (dwelling unfit for habitation)	Has legal title and/or security of tenure	Has space for social relations
	6 Insecure housing (adequate housing)	Has a place to live	No security of tenure	Has space for social relations
	7 Social isolation within a secure and adequate context	Has a place to live	Has legal title and/or security of tenure	No private and safe personal space for social relations

Source: Edgar *et al.*, 2004.

As shown in Table 1.1, seven theoretical categories of homelessness and housing exclusion have been identified. While ‘rooflessness’ usually involves exclusion of all three domains (physical, legal and social), ‘houselessness’ is characterised by exclusion from the legal domain and the social domain. Both situations are clearly defined as homelessness, while people living in insecure and/or inadequate housing and/or in social isolation might also be affected by exclusion from one or two domains, but their situation is classified under ‘housing exclusion’ rather than ‘homelessness’.

On the basis of this conceptual understanding and to try to grasp the varying practices in different EU countries, the ETHOS typology was developed, which relates, in its most recent version, thirteen different operational categories and twenty-four different living situations to the four conceptual categories: roofless, houseless, insecure housing and inadequate housing.<sup>4</sup> See Table 1.2.

<sup>4</sup> Apart from documenting progress concerning the measurement of homelessness in different EU countries and reporting on the latest available data, the fourth and fifth reviews of statistics (Edgar and Meert, 2005, 2006) focused on developing and refining the ETHOS definition and considering the measurement issues involved in greater detail.

**Table 1.2 ETHOS – European typology on homelessness and housing exclusion**

Conceptual category	Operational category		Living situation	
ROOFLESS	1	People living rough	1.1	Public space or external space
	2	People staying in a night shelter	2.1	Night shelter
HOUSELESS	3	People in accommodation for the homeless	3.1	Homeless hostel
			3.2	Temporary accommodation
			3.3	Transitional supported accommodation
	4	People in a women's shelter	4.1	Women's shelter accommodation
	5	People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1	Temporary accommodation, reception centres
			5.2	Migrant workers' accommodation
	6	People due to be released from institutions	6.1	Penal institutions
6.2			Medical institutions	
6.3			Children's institutions/homes	
7	People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)	7.1	Residential care for older homeless people	
		7.2	Supported accommodation for formerly homeless persons	
INSECURE	8	People living in insecure accommodation	8.1	Temporarily with family/friends
			8.2	No legal (sub)tenancy
			8.3	Illegal occupation of land
9	People living under threat of eviction	9.1	Legal orders enforced (rented)	
		9.2	Repossession orders (owned)	
10	People living under threat of violence	10.1	Police recorded incidents	
INADEQUATE	11	People living in temporary/ non-conventional structures	11.1	Mobile homes
			11.2	Non-conventional building
			11.3	Temporary structure
	12	People living in unfit housing	12.1	Occupied dwelling unfit for habitation
			13	People living in extreme overcrowding
13.1	Highest national norm of overcrowding			

Source: Edgar, 2009, p.73.

The ETHOS typology provides an extremely useful reference frame and underlines that rooflessness, the category that is least controversial and receiving the greatest attention from the media and the general public, is only the 'tip of the iceberg' making visible a much wider phenomenon. There is a broad consensus that the term 'homelessness' covers more living situations than being without a roof over one's head. However, most definitions of homelessness at national level include either more or (more often) less categories than listed in the houseless category of ETHOS.

Edgar *et al.* (2004, p.5) note that some countries (e.g. Austria, Germany and Luxembourg) make a distinction between those who are homeless at a point in time, those imminently threatened with homelessness and those housed under unacceptable conditions. In this context there might be different opinions as to whether people imminently threatened with homelessness should be classified as 'homeless'. Should people due to be released from institutions with no home to go to be defined as actually homeless<sup>5</sup> or should they be classified as such only from the date of their release? The same question can be asked for people under threat of eviction or violence. In New Zealand, but also in Germany and a number of other European countries, the persons concerned are excluded from the definition of actual homelessness 'until they have moved into one of the homeless living situations' (Statistics New Zealand, 2009, p.12). While this might be controversial, there is a broad consensus that it is useful to have more information about these subgroups as the provision of support to them before they actually become homeless is essential for effective prevention.

Another controversial category concerns people receiving longer term support (due to homelessness). In some countries whether they are 'counted in' as homeless might depend on the type of tenancy rights they have. Some see this type of provision as part of the solution rather than the problem and opt against including this group in a definition of homelessness.

Provision for women in refuges for victims of domestic violence is an integral part of services for homeless persons in some countries (e.g. the Netherlands), while it is rather strictly separated in others (e.g. Germany).

---

<sup>5</sup> This is the case in a number of countries for people who are between four weeks and two months away from release from prison, see Dyb (2009a), Socialstyrelsen (2006), Benjaminsen and Christensen (2007), Edgar *et al.* (2007). About the difficulties of getting reliable data from prison authorities, see Dyb (2009b) and Wygnańska (2009). Especially in some eastern European countries it has been emphasised that persons due to be released from children's institutions/homes have to be included in the definition of homelessness and there was criticism that they were not included in 'ETHOS light' (see below).

In a number of European countries there is also a separation of temporary accommodation for immigrants or some groups of immigrants (as refugees) and governments do not agree to subsume these groups under 'homelessness', although the persons living there face the same (or even a much stricter) exclusion from the legal and social domains constituting a home.

But there are also living situations that are subsumed under 'insecure housing' or 'inadequate housing' in the ETHOS typology, while they are categorised as 'homeless' or 'houseless' in national definitions and surveys. This is particularly true for people temporarily sharing with friends or relatives (living situation 8.1 in ETHOS) and for persons living in mobile homes (11.1), non-conventional buildings (11.2) and temporary structures (11.3). This was an important reason for including these situations in a harmonised definition of homelessness, which was developed for a desk-based study on behalf of the European Commission on the measurement of homelessness at EU level (Edgar *et al.*, 2007) and which has become known as 'ETHOS light' (see Table 1.3). The harmonised definition builds to a great extent on the ETHOS definition, but most of the categories of inadequate and insecure housing are not included because it was seen as more feasible and easier to reach an agreement by focusing on the roofless and houseless categories for a harmonised definition of homelessness and adding some of the others because they are accepted as constituting homelessness in quite a number of European countries. The statistical authorities in New Zealand have followed this approach to some extent and have added 'people living in improvised shelters', 'people staying in camping grounds/motor camps' and 'people sharing accommodation with someone else's household' to their definition of homelessness (Statistics New Zealand, 2009, p.14).

'ETHOS light' had to be compatible with the recommendations of European statisticians for the 2010/2011 censuses of population and housing (UNECE and Eurostat, 2006). This was the main reason why a maximum stay of one year was introduced for defining people living in accommodation for the homeless as 'homeless'. The UNECE/Eurostat (1996) definition of 'homelessness' related to roofless people (primary homelessness) and so-called 'secondary homelessness', defined as including 'persons with no place of usual residence, who move frequently between various types of accommodation (including dwellings, shelters, institutions for the homeless or other living quarters)' (p.109). Persons who have lived in the same place 'for a continuous period of at least twelve months before Census Day' or have moved to a place 'with the intention of staying there for at least one year' are considered as 'usual residents' at this place (p.35). However, it may be rightly criticised that somebody staying in 'temporary' accommodation for homeless people, in a homeless hostel or in a women's shelter should lose his or her status as homeless after living there for more than 365 days.



**Table 1.3 Harmonised definition of homelessness relevant to *Measurement of Homelessness at European Union Level* study, 'ETHOS light'**

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

Source: Edgar *et al.*, 2007, p.66.

It will be an issue for future debates to consider whether some of the categories currently classified as insecure or inadequate housing in the ETHOS definition should be instead subsumed under homelessness, as has been done in 'ETHOS light'.

Concerning wider issues of housing exclusion and housing deprivation, it should be mentioned that a consensus was reached in the Indicators Sub-Group of the Social Protection Committee in 2009 about two commonly agreed EU indicators on overcrowding and on a 'housing cost overburden rate'. See European Commission (2009) for details, and Eurostat (2009) for first results.

Much progress has been made in creating a common basis for defining homelessness in Europe. The ETHOS definition has been widely accepted as a common conceptual and operational framework to which definitions at national level are

<sup>6</sup> The period of one year is chosen to allow consistency with UNECE/Eurostat (2006) census recommendations.

related, but not (yet?) fully adjusted. It is an excellent instrument for comparing national data on homelessness covering different subgroups and has the potential to increase harmonisation of national definitions of homelessness. Nevertheless, we are still some important steps away from achieving an accepted European-wide definition of homelessness that would be the basis for measuring the number of people affected across Europe in the same way in all member states.

## Measuring Homelessness

---

How many homeless people are there? The issue of the quantitative extent of homelessness is often controversial and hotly debated at local, regional and national levels. There is a tendency for those responsible for policies and the funding of services to underestimate the extent in order to minimise public responsibilities and to keep the problem they are expected to deal with manageable. On the other hand, pressure groups tend to overestimate the number of homeless people in order to increase their political relevance and the resources made available to them.

Why do we want to count homeless people? Do we really need to know the numbers? Do we really need to know the number of homeless people in Europe? Avramov (1999, p.159) has, quite emphatically, answered as follows:

In order to reach an agreement that it is unacceptable that people become homeless in the richest countries in the world we do not need to count the homeless. In order to reach an agreement that homeless people are not meritorious enough to share the wealth created by others we do not need to know their numbers. In both cases an ideological stand may suffice. Ideologies do not need figures; services do. We may not need figures to construct policies. We need figures to implement policies and monitor their efficacy.

The important point here is that one single number will not be enough to understand homelessness and to develop and monitor adequate policies to tackle it. If we take the different life situations of homeless people, we want to have not only a single indicator on the number of people experiencing such a situation at a given point in time or during a given period, but also indicators on how many people are becoming homeless and how many manage to end an episode of homelessness (the 'input' and the 'output' of the homelessness system).

At the very least it is important to develop measures that provide not just the number and profile of homeless people at a given point in time (the stock figure) but also the number of people who have become homeless, or ceased to be homeless, over a given time period (the flow figure, which can be divided into

‘inflow’ and ‘outflow’) and the number of people who have experienced homelessness at some point during a given time period (e.g. one year or five years or their entire life, the prevalence figure) (see also Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2009; Edgar *et al.*, 2007).

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, we cannot assume that annual prevalence numbers can easily be deducted from point-in-time numbers and vice versa by using the same turnover figure for all European countries. Metraux *et al.* (2001) have shown that the prevalence of homelessness varied greatly among nine different US jurisdictions. Individual jurisdictions had annual rates of sheltered homelessness ranging from 0.1 to 2.1 per cent of their overall population and the annual population size in shelters and transitional housing was 2.5 to 10.2 times greater than the size at a given point in time. Research is needed to learn more about such relations in different European countries before any serious attempt can be made to reach an overall estimate of the number of homeless people in Europe or to compare annual prevalence numbers of one country with point-in-time figures in another one.

As Edgar *et al.* (2007) emphasised, homelessness strategies should have a number of different aims – and more and more European governments have developed such comprehensive homelessness strategies,<sup>7</sup> setting concrete targets in fields of action such as:

- Prevention of homelessness.
- Tackling the causes of homelessness.
- Reducing the level of homelessness.
- Reducing the negative effects on homeless people and their families.
- Ensuring that formerly homeless people can sustain permanent independent housing.

To implement policy objectives that aim to prevent homelessness and reduce its impact on vulnerable households requires information that reflects the reality of the process of homelessness and housing exclusion. Thus hidden homelessness should be visible to policy makers and service providers. This means having an understanding and measurement of homelessness which includes the situation of people who live in insecure housing, are forced to move constantly between inadequate housing situations and those who are forced to live in housing which is unfit for habitation by commonly accepted norms. If policy intends to ensure that no person should have to sleep rough then information is needed to monitor the number of rough sleepers, the number of clients of homeless services and the

---

<sup>7</sup> For recent accounts of all existing homeless strategies in EU member states, see Edgar (2009) and Benjaminsen and Dyb, Chapter 6 in this volume.

number of accommodation places available. Where policies aim to ensure that fewer people should become homeless, information is needed to monitor accurately the total number of homeless households, the number living in temporary or insecure / inadequate housing and the number who are potentially homeless or are threatened with homelessness. If the policy objective is to prevent homelessness then it is important also to have information on the number of people vulnerable to eviction and the number of people about to leave an institution who do not have a home. The prevention of homelessness also requires the provision of sustainable permanent accommodation for formerly homeless people. This requires information on the number of homeless people who gain access to supported accommodation. (Edgar *et al.*, 2007, pp.11-12)

Much discussed and needed, but often poorly developed, are outcome measures that may prove the effects of service provision on clients while they stay in contact with these services but also, and sometimes even more importantly, some time after they have stopped using the services. Often it is rather difficult and challenging to track former service clients, but this is the only way to learn more about the long-term effects of service provision. Again, more research and better instruments are needed to advance the measurement of service outcomes.

In the field of research on poverty and unemployment, the relevance of time and of the duration of experiencing such forms of exclusion have been fully acknowledged. In the field of homelessness research and measurement, more attention should be directed to this important issue. A number of US studies found that the share of long-term homeless persons among the homeless population is usually overestimated by the frequent focus on cross-sectional studies and point-in-time surveys. Biographical studies on 'homeless careers' or 'pathways through homelessness' distinguish between those leading to only a relatively short single episode of homelessness (short-term homelessness), those involving several episodes of homelessness (episodic homelessness) and those where homelessness has been experienced without interruption for years (long-term or chronic homelessness) (see, for example, May, 2000). US research (e.g. Culhane and Metraux, 2008) has found that the long-term category is the smallest group of users of homeless services in the US but nevertheless accounts for an extraordinarily high proportion of shelter capacities over the course of a year.

Although more in-depth research on the dynamics of homelessness in Europe is needed, there are clear indications that long-term homeless people are a minority among service-provider clients in Europe as well. Data from Germany, for example, show that only 11 per cent of all users of NGO services for homeless persons used these services for more than one year; 47 per cent used them for less than one month (BAG W, 2009). However, caution is needed when inter-

preting these data because short-term users of one service might use other services instead and therefore not using a specific service for homeless persons cannot be equated with not being homeless.

How can we measure homelessness? A variety of approaches to measuring homelessness have been used in different EU countries. EU-funded research has taken stock of these practices and the French INSEE study (Brousse, 2004) and a more recent study at EU level (Edgar *et al.*, 2007) provide a good overview of the available range of approaches. The most up-to-date overview for individual countries is available from the national statements produced by twenty European countries in the framework of the MPHASIS project.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 1.4: Summary of the main approaches adopted to collect data on homelessness and housing exclusion**

Approach	Method	Focus
Surveys (counts)	National counts	ETHOS categories 1,2(3) homeless people Point-in-time (stock)
	Capital city counts	
	Local authority surveys (national / regional)	
Registers	Municipal (client-based)	Homeless services
	Service provider	Social welfare services Profile data
	NGO (client-based)	Prevalence, flow (stock)
Census (market surveys)	Census 2011	All ETHOS categories Point-in-time (stock) Infrequent
	Housing market surveys	
	Housing needs assessments	
	Homeless surveys	

Source: Edgar, 2009, p.28.

<sup>8</sup> Available at [www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/](http://www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/) and summarised in Edgar (2009). MPHASIS stands for 'Mutual Progress on Homelessness through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems' and was a follow-up project to the study on measuring homelessness at EU level (Edgar *et al.*, 2007), financed by the European Commission under the PROGRESS programme and carried through from December 2007 to December 2009. The project aimed to improve monitoring of homelessness and of homelessness policies in the twenty participating EU countries in a coordinated manner and on the basis of the recommendations of the earlier study. On the impact of the European Commission using the Open Method of Coordination for advancing the measurement of homelessness in Europe, see Spinnewijn (2009).

Surveys have been carried out in recent years in a large number of EU member states to learn more about the extent and structure of homelessness at national, regional and/or local levels. Perhaps most advanced regarding the production of a total number of homeless persons in the country and measuring trends over the years are the Scandinavian countries. Finland can already look back on a long tradition of producing a national estimate of the number of homeless persons each year. The annual surveys on homelessness in Finland, being part of a wider housing market survey, began as early as 1986 and national estimates – based on municipal information – have been published every year since (see Kärkkäinen, 1999; Taino and Fredriksson, 2009). Using another approach, Norway, Sweden and Denmark carried out national surveys on homelessness during the last decade that even allow for direct comparison between the three countries (see Bejaminsen and Dyb, 2008; see also the chapter of the same authors in this volume). In Sweden and Denmark, two or three such surveys have been carried out already and allow – with some caveats in Sweden because of changes in the definitions – analysis of trends in the development of homelessness at the national level.<sup>9</sup>

The lack of a possibility for more continuous monitoring is one of the shortcomings of the two very comprehensive<sup>10</sup> and similar interview surveys (on a rather narrowly defined target group) carried out in France in 2001 (see INSEE, 2009, for results in English) and in Spain in 2005 (INE, 2005). Since the Spanish national survey on homeless persons in 2005 only some street counts in some of the principal municipalities (e.g. Madrid and Barcelona; see Cabrera *et al.*, 2008) and two further surveys on the clients of homelessness services in 2006 and 2008 have been carried out (INE, 2007, 2008). The French National Statistical Institute is planning a similar interview survey for 2012. In addition, a study of the institutions for persons in social difficulty (a social establishment survey) has taken place every four years since 1997, and in 2006 a census of homeless people was carried out and is due to be repeated every five years in French municipalities of more than 10000 inhabitants, and by rotation in smaller municipalities.

One-off national counts of people sleeping rough or in overnight hostels have also been carried out in Italy (2001) and in Portugal (2005). In Ireland, more continuous monitoring of homeless service users has been facilitated by repeated surveys in Dublin (the results being published by the Homeless Agency as ‘Counted In’ in 1992, 2002, 2005 and 2008). Annual surveys can be found in the Austrian region of Salzburg as well as, for example, in the Hungarian capital, Budapest. Continuous monitoring of certain subgroups of the homeless population, while not giving a full

---

<sup>9</sup> For detailed descriptions of the surveys, see Benjaminsen and Christensen (2007) for Denmark, Dyb and Johannessen (2009) for Norway and Socialstyrelsen (2006) for Sweden.

<sup>10</sup> The INSEE questionnaire for the 2001 survey included more than 900 variables.

picture of the extent of homelessness in a country or region, at least allows analysis of trends for the subgroups covered, as is the case, for example, with the data on homelessness acceptances under the English homelessness legislation and with the annual survey on persons in municipal temporary accommodation in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany (see Busch-Geertsema and Fitzpatrick, 2008).

Municipal counts of people sleeping rough or in overnight hostels can be found in quite a number of countries, for example in Austria, Belgium, England, Germany (Munich and Hamburg), Hungary (Budapest), Ireland (Dublin), the Netherlands (Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht), Portugal (Lisbon) and Spain (Barcelona and Madrid). However, to get a national or even a European picture of the extent of rough sleepers still remains quite difficult. As Edgar (2009, p.69) concludes:

... it is an irony that the categories of homelessness in which there is total consensus (rough sleeping and living in emergency homeless hostels) are the categories in which it is most difficult to obtain consistent and up-to-date information in a comparable format. It has been clear from the data available... that in many countries only partial information is available for these categories. In most countries, this lack of information is due to the fact that available information is not collated; though it also reflects weaknesses in data collection on this most basic indicator of homelessness.

Client register data from service providers are particularly helpful in improving our profiles of homeless persons using these services and our knowledge of recent profile changes. Several studies have recommended making better use of these data and adjusting data recording to a harmonised set of core variables to allow for transnational comparisons (see Edgar *et al.*, 2007; Busch-Geertsema and Edgar, 2009).

The 2011 census should provide information on the number of homeless people. But whether census authorities are able to provide reliable information on the extent of homelessness (or certain subgroups of homeless persons) in their country will depend not only on the methods of covering homeless persons in their counts, but also on the way of preparing the data so that homeless persons are still identifiable and are not mixed in with other groups living in special types of accommodation or collective living situations.

A number of governance and implementation issues concerning data collection are discussed at length in several recent European publications (Edgar *et al.*, 2007; Edgar, 2009; Frazer and Marlier, 2009). These emphasise the importance of:

- Political commitment at national level.
- Clarification of responsibilities among government departments.
- Involvement and cooperation of all key stakeholders (including municipalities and NGOs).
- Clarification of data protection issues and prevention of double counting.

It is important that there is transparency in the purpose of data collection and that feedback is provided to data producers, thereby also contributing to improvements in the quality of information.

## **Future Directions for Research and Policy**

---

Recent research has provided a good overview of possible methods and made a lot of valuable recommendations on how to measure homelessness. The ETHOS typology has been used already in a number of countries to adjust or refine national definitions of homelessness and to increase comparability between countries, though some subgroups are covered much more often than others and there remain important differences in detail.

But still only a minority of EU countries have developed a more comprehensive homelessness information strategy (which cannot build on a single data source only, but must use a package of relevant data sources) and we are still quite some steps away from having comparable numbers at the national level, let alone a total number of homeless persons in Europe. At the EU level, further progress can be facilitated by organising transnational exchange and cooperation and by making it an obligation for member states to report regularly on national levels of homelessness, with the general aim of preventing and reducing homelessness as far as possible.

A specific and relatively cost-effective approach to the production of comparable information about the prevalence of homelessness in different European countries, but possibly also in other parts of the developed world, would be the inclusion of a standardised set of (retrospective) questions on experiences of homelessness in national (and European) household surveys. Although the results would not provide information on the most recent developments, they would be a great source of consistently measured and comparable information on the overall prevalence of homelessness in the population (assuming questions are formulated in an intelligent and consistent way).



Better use of client record data of homeless services would tell us more about the changing profile of the homeless population. By using the set of harmonised core variables, European comparisons will be facilitated. Harmonised indicators on the outcomes of services for homeless persons should also be developed.

There is a need to improve the common understanding of important issues such as long-term homelessness (what time span?), youth homelessness (which age limit: 18, 21 or 25 years?) and repeat homelessness. In light of the shortcomings of cross-sectional surveys, more robust information is required on the duration of homelessness and on the distribution of transitional, episodic and long-term homelessness among those affected.

Given the growing concern about homeless migrants, especially in western Europe, information on the migration background of homeless persons should be improved and targeted research on these groups is necessary.

Targeted research is also needed to improve our knowledge of homeless persons sharing with friends and relatives (often called 'hidden homelessness').

As prevention is the best and least expensive way of reducing homelessness – and as better measures are needed in most EU countries to prevent the discharge of persons from prisons, hospitals and child-care or other types of institution into homelessness – there is a need for better information sources on persons soon to be released from such institutions who have no home to go to.

Finally, we need targeted studies to measure the costs of homelessness and the benefits of specific interventions.

## › References

- Avramov, D. (1995) *Homelessness in the European Union. Social and Legal Context of Housing Exclusion in the 1990s. Fourth Research Report of the European Observatory on Homelessness* (Brussels: FEANTSA).
- Avramov, D. (1996) *The Invisible Hand of the Housing Market. A Study on Effects of Changes in the Housing Market on Homelessness in the European Union. Fifth Report of the European Observatory on Homelessness* (Brussels: FEANTSA).
- Avramov, D. (1999) Data Sources on Homelessness and Data Necessary for Needs-Based Research, in: D. Avramov (ed.) *Coping with Homelessness: Issues to be Tackled and Best Practices in Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing), pp.145–64.
- Avramov, D. (2002) Figures on the Extent of Homelessness in the European Union Revisited, *Homelessness in Europe, FEANTSA's Magazine*, spring, pp.5–6.
- BAG W, Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe (2009) *Statistikbericht 2007. Zur Lebenssituation von Menschen in den Einrichtungen und Diensten der Wohnungslosenhilfe in Deutschland* [Data Report 2007. About the Living Situation of Persons in Homeless Services in Germany], author: J. Evers (Bielefeld: BAG W Verlag).
- Benjaminsen, L. and Christensen, I. (2007) *Hjemløshed i Danmark. National Kortlægning* [Homelessness in Denmark. National Mapping] (Copenhagen: SFI 07: 22).
- Benjaminsen, L. and Dyb, E. (2008) The Effectiveness of Homeless Policies – Variations among the Scandinavian Countries, *European Journal of Homelessness* 2, pp.45–67.
- Brousse, C. (2004) *The Production of Data on Homelessness and Housing Deprivation in the European Union: Survey and Proposal* (Brussels: European Commission-EUROSTAT), available at: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_OFFPUB/KS-CC-04-008/EN/KS-CC-04-008-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-CC-04-008/EN/KS-CC-04-008-EN.PDF).
- Busch-Geertsema, V. and Edgar, B. (2009) *Survey on the Use and Potential Harmonisation of Core Variables for Measuring Homelessness* (Dundee: MPHASIS Project), available at: [www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/papers/MphaisReport-EvaluationofQuestionnairesonVariables.pdf](http://www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/papers/MphaisReport-EvaluationofQuestionnairesonVariables.pdf).
- Busch-Geertsema, V. and Fitzpatrick, S. (2008) Effective Homelessness Prevention? Explaining Reductions in Homelessness in Germany and England, *European Journal of Homelessness* 2, pp.69–95.

- Busch-Geertsema, V. and Ruhstrat, E.-U. (1994) *Wohnungsnotfälle. Sicherung der Wohnungsversorgung für Wirtschaftlich oder Sozial Benachteiligte Haushalte* [Cases in Urgent Need of Housing. Securing Housing Provision for Economically and Socially Disadvantaged Households], ed. by Bundesministerium für Raumordnung, Bauwesen und Städtebau and Bundesministerium für Familie und Senioren (Bonn: Eigenverlag).
- Cabrera, P. J., Rubio, M. and Blasco, J. (2008) *¿Quién Duerme en la Calle? : Una Investigación Social y Ciudadana sobre las Personas sin Techo* [Who Sleeps in the Street? A Social and Urban Investigation about Roofless Persons] (Barcelona: Fundació Caixa Catalunya).
- Culhane, D. P. and Metraux, S. (2008) Rearranging the Deck Chairs or Reallocating the Lifeboats *Journal of the American Planning Association* 74(1), pp.111–21.
- Daly, M. (1992) *European Homelessness – The Rising Tide: The First Report of the European Observatory on Homelessness* (Brussels: FEANTSA).
- Daly, M. (1993) *Abandoned: Profile of Europe's Homeless People: The Second Report of the European Observatory on Homelessness* (Brussels: FEANTSA).
- Daly, M. (1994) *The Right to a Home, the Right to a Future: The Third Report of the European Observatory on Homelessness* (Brussels: FEANTSA).
- Dyb, E. (2009a) Imprisonment: A Major Gateway to Homelessness, *Housing Studies* 24(6), pp.809–24.
- Dyb, E. (2009b) *Measuring Homelessness among Ex-Convicts and the Prison Population* (Dundee/Oslo: Mphasis Projekt), available at: [www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/papers/MphasisReport-Norway.pdf](http://www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/papers/MphasisReport-Norway.pdf).
- Dyb, E. and Johannessen, K. H. (2009) *Bostedsløse i Norge 2008: En Kartlegging* [Homelessness in Norway 2008: A Mapping] NIBR-rapport 2009: 17 (Oslo: Norsk institutt for by- og regionforskning).
- Edgar, B. (2009) *European Review of Statistics on Homelessness* (Brussels: FEANTSA).
- Edgar, W. and Meert, H. (2005) *Fourth Review of Statistics on Homelessness in Europe. The ETHOS Definition of Homelessness* (Brussels: FEANTSA).
- Edgar, W. and Meert, H. (2006) *Fifth Review of Statistics on Homelessness in Europe* (Brussels: FEANTSA).
- Edgar, W., Doherty, J. and Meert, H. (2002) *Review of Statistics on Homelessness in Europe* (Brussels: FEANTSA).

Edgar, W., Doherty, J. and Meert, H. (2003) *Second Review of Statistics on Homelessness in Europe* (Brussels: FEANTSA).

Edgar, W., Doherty, J. and Meert, H. (2004) *Third Review of Statistics on Homelessness in Europe. Developing an Operational Definition of Homelessness* (Brussels: Feantsa).

Edgar, B., Harrison, M., Watson, P. and Busch-Geertsema, V. (2007) *Measurement of Homelessness at European Union Level* (Brussels: European Commission), available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/social\\_inclusion/docs/2007/study\\_homelessness\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/2007/study_homelessness_en.pdf).

European Commission, Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG, Social Protection and Social Integration, Social and Demography Analysis (2009) *Portfolio Indicators for the Monitoring of the European Strategy for Social Protection and Social Inclusion – 2009 Update* (Brussels: EU Commission).

Eurostat (2009) *Housing Indicators* (statistical article), available at: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Housing\\_indicators](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Housing_indicators).

Fitzpatrick, S., Pleace, N., Stephens, M. and Quilgars, D. (2009) Introduction: An overview of homelessness in the UK, in: S. Fitzpatrick, N. Pleace and D. Quilgars (ed.) *Homelessness in the UK. Problems and Solutions* (Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing).

Frazer, H. and Marlier, E. (2009) *Homelessness and Housing Exclusion across EU Member States. Analysis and Suggestions on the Way Forward by the EU Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion* (Brussels: European Commission).

INE (2005) *Encuesta Sobre las Personas sin Hogar (EPSH-Personas)* [Survey on Homeless Persons] (Madrid: Instituto Nacional de Estadística).

INE (2007) *Proyecto de Encuesta Sobre las Personas sin Hogar (EPSH-Centros 2006)* [Survey Project of Homeless People] (Madrid: Instituto Nacional de Estadística).

INE (2008) *Proyecto de Encuesta Sobre las Personas sin Hogar (EPSH-Centros 2008)* [Survey Project of Homeless People] (Madrid: Instituto Nacional de Estadística).

INSEE (2009) *F2009/06 Economie et Statistique: Special Issue on the Homeless*, English version (Paris: Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques).

Kärkkäinen, S.-L. (1999) Annual Survey on Homelessness in Finland: Definitions and Methodological Aspects, in: D. Avramov (ed.) *Coping with Homelessness: Issues to be Tackled and Best Practices in Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing), pp.165–89.

May, J. (2000) Housing Histories and Homelessness Careers: A Bibliographical Approach, *Housing Studies* 15(4), pp.613–38.

Metraux, S., Culhane, D., Raphael, S., White, M., Pearson, C., Hirsch, E., Ferrell, P., Rice, S., Ritter, B. and Cleghorn, J. S. (2001) Assessing Homeless Population Size Through the Use of Emergency and Transitional Shelter Services in 1998: Results from the Analysis of Administrative Data from Nine US Jurisdictions, *Public Health Reports* 111, July–August, pp.344–52.

Socialstyrelsen [National Board of Health and Welfare] (2006) *Homelessness in Sweden 2005—Scale and Character* (Stockholm: Socialstyrelsen), available at: [www.socialstyrelsen.se](http://www.socialstyrelsen.se).

Spinnewijn, F. (2009) How to Use the Open Method of Coordination to Deliver Policy Progress at European Level: The Example of Homelessness, *European Journal of Homelessness* 3, pp.303–18.

Statistics New Zealand (2009) *New Zealand Definition of Homelessness* (Wellington: Statistics New Zealand).

Taino, H. and Fredriksson, P. (2009) The Finnish Homeless Strategy: From a ‘Staircase’ Model to a ‘Housing First’ Approach to Tackling Long-Term Homelessness, *European Journal of Homelessness* 3, pp.181–200.

Toro, P., Tompsett, C., Philipott, P., Nachtergaeel, H., Galand, B., Schlien, N. *et al.* (2007) Homelessness in Europe and the United States: A Comparison of Prevalence and Public Opinion, *Journal of Social Issues* 63, pp.505–24.

UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) and Eurostat (Statistical Office of the European Communities) (2006) *Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing* (Geneva: United Nations).

Wygnańska, J. (2009) *Measuring Homelessness among the Prison Population: A Case Study of the Polish Penitentiary System* (Dundee/Warsaw: MPHASIS Projekt), available at: [www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/papers/MphasisReport-Poland.pdf](http://www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/papers/MphasisReport-Poland.pdf).