

# MEASURING HOMELESSNESS IN EUROPE THE ROLE OF STREET HOMELESSNESS

Aims, Approaches, Methods

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## OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

- Information Background
- Why Measuring Homelessness?
- Role of Street Homelessness in EU Countries
- How is Street Homelessness Measured?
  - ▶ Some examples (Brussels, Bratislava, Barcelona)
  - ▶ Homelessness Registry Weeks
- Conclusions?

## INFORMATION BACKGROUND

- Edgar, Harrison, Watson and Busch-Geertsema (2007) Measurement of Homelessness at European Union Level (Dundee/Brussels: European Commission)  
[ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/social.../study\\_homelessness\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social.../study_homelessness_en.pdf)
- 2007 – 2009: MPHASIS (Mutual Progress on Homelessness Through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems)  
<http://www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/>
- Edgar (2009) European Review of Statistics on Homelessness (Brussels: European Observatory on Homelessness/FEANTSA)  
[http://www.feantsaresearch.org/IMG/pdf/feantsa\\_2009statsreview\\_en.pdf](http://www.feantsaresearch.org/IMG/pdf/feantsa_2009statsreview_en.pdf)
- Busch-Geertsema, Benjaminsen, Filipovič Hrast and Pleace (2014) Extent and Profile of Homelessness in European Member States. A Statistical Update (Brussels: European Observatory on Homelessness/FEANTSA)  
[http://www.feantsaresearch.org/IMG/pdf/feantsa-studies\\_04-web2.pdf](http://www.feantsaresearch.org/IMG/pdf/feantsa-studies_04-web2.pdf)
- COST Association, COST Action CA15218: Measuring homelessness in Europe  
[http://www.cost.eu/COST\\_Actions/ca/CA15218?](http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions/ca/CA15218?)

## WHY MEASURING HOMELESSNESS?

- Indicator of Social Exclusion
- Measure extent of urgent housing need of homeless people
- Raise awareness of pressing social problem
- Measure trends over time
- Provide data on which groups are most effected
- Measure specific needs/problems
- Develop policies to alleviate and reduce/prevent homelessness for specific subgroups (or all): “informed policy making”
- Measure effectiveness (and perhaps also unintended effects) of interventions
- Cover complete population in population censuses (also those who are difficult to reach)

## WHY MEASURING HOMELESSNESS?

- If “ending homelessness” is an aim, of course measurement is needed to provide the evidence whether aim is reached or progress being made
- Best example in Europe: Finnish strategy to eliminate long-term homelessness – annual housing market survey showing the reduction
- Few examples in Europe with direct connection of a strategy to reduce street homelessness with measurement
  - ▶ Most prominent: Rough Sleepers Initiative first in London (1990-1997), followed by the Rough Sleepers Unit (target across England: reduction by 2/3 within 3 years), and more recently by London Initiative “No Second Night Out”.
  - ▶ Prominent system in London: CHAIN data base (not just a measurement tool, but multiagency case-work tool for outreach services, day centers and accommodation and advice services)
  - ▶ Street counts in Dublin: twice a year, point in time numbers around 100-150 persons; strategy goal of “ending the need to sleep rough” not met

## ROLE OF STREET HOMELESSNESS IN EUROPE

- Street homelessness least controversial category of homelessness typology, but astonishing few examples of national counts
- Street counts to be found more often in cities/regions in the South of Europe: Lisbon, Barcelona, Madrid, cities in Basque country, but also in Brussels (Belgium), in four large cities of the Netherlands or in Bratislava (Slovakia). Not all of these are recurrent counts, some only one-offs.
- Street homelessness in many European countries/cities tiny proportion of overall number of homeless persons:
  - ▶ E.g. in Ireland a rough-sleeper census in April 2016 showed 127 rough sleepers all over Ireland. During one week in April 2016 more than 4,000 persons were registered in emergency services for homeless people
  - ▶ In a service based count in one region of Germany of almost 21,000 homeless people in June 2015, only about 5.6 per cent were registered as living rough
  - ▶ In Barcelona the 2015 homelessness count registered 693 rough sleepers among 2,799 homeless persons on a single day (24.8 %)

## METHODS OF MEASURING STREET HOMELESNESS IN EUROPE

### 🌐 Variety of approaches

- ▶ Brussels (Belgium): Conducted every two years since 2008 (not in 2012), one hour street count (11-12 PM) conducted by volunteers (160 in 2016) and combined with data on shelters, supported accommodation and squats. Involves NGOs, public authorities, police, local security services, religious communities, public transports etc. Very limited info (location sex, estimated age)
- ▶ Bratislava (Slovakia): First homelessness survey 2016 including point in time count on Nov, 9<sup>th</sup> (6-10 PM) in homelessness facilities and on the streets. Ambitious questionnaire (age, sex, household type, health issues and other needs, income, duration of homelessness, housing history etc.). Street outreach workers and volunteers.
- ▶ Barcelona (Spain): Regular annual reporting, probably most advanced in Spain. Count in 2016 involved 800 volunteers, use of a mobile phone app, data show that outreach team data cover about 75 to 85 per cent of those counted in point in time counts.

## METHODS OF MEASURING STREET HOMELESNESS IN EUROPE

### 🌐 Homeless registry weeks in Europe (European End Street Homelessness Campaign Pilot 2015/2016): some considerations

- ▶ Specific approach following examples from US and Canada, conducted in Valencia and Barcelona (both Spain), Westminster and Croydon (both London), led by bshf (Building and Social Housing Foundation)
- ▶ Use of extensive individual questionnaire combined with vulnerability index (VI-SPAT, 32 questions) completed by volunteers
- ▶ Different from most EU counts (which are anonymous) as it collects names and detailed personal information on support needs and personal experiences
- ▶ Some ethical issues
  - Is it ok to let volunteers collect sensitive information on experience of violence, health issues, drug use, social relationships etc.?
  - Is it ok to use a Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Pre-Screen Tool with many question if those collecting the data have nothing to offer and to decide?
  - Shouldn't questions be reduced to the amount of information needed for immediate action?

## CONCLUSIONS

- Data collection on homelessness may serve very different purposes, reducing or ending homelessness only being one of them
- In many European cities street homelessness only a small fraction of total homeless population
- For street counts it is essential to cooperate with all local stakeholders
- Large number of volunteers are often needed; recruitment helps raising awareness, but engaging volunteers in collecting a lot of personal information might raise ethical questions
- Where good outreach is organised professionals might already have good knowledge about majority of those living on the streets
- Need to reflect on extent of personal questions and purpose of these; also on how to prevent creating a purely deficit oriented approach instead of one which is based on strengths and resources

## CONCLUSIONS

- Counting and measuring vulnerability might better be divided into two different exercises
- Ending homelessness requires access to housing and adequate support plus prevention and a local/regional/national strategy to provide necessary resources
- Homelessness measurement is needed to raise awareness and measure progress in reaching the aim, it may inform about the support needs of homeless people and help to develop evidence based policies, but ultimately these policies are the most important factor required to ending homelessness

THANKS FOR YOUR ATTENTION

QUESTIONS?



COMMENTS?

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