

Ending Street Homelessness in the Vanguard Cities: *Draft Proposals on Definition and Measurement*

By Volker Busch-Geertsema & Suzanne Fitzpatrick, 14th May 2018

1. Introduction

The 12 Vanguard Cities involved in IGH's *A Place to Call Home* initiative have been asked to select one of the following 'goals' to meet by 31st December 2020:

- to end street homelessness across their city;
- to end street homelessness in a particular neighbourhood or within a certain subpopulation in their city;
- to achieve a specified reduction in street homelessness in their city of 25%, 50% or 75%.

Monitoring progress towards the achievement of these goals target requires both:

- a clear *definition* of what it means to 'end street homeless'; and
- a reliable means of *measuring* trends in street homelessness and therefore progress towards the specified goal.

This paper sets out proposals for both these definitional and measurement tasks, informed by an international review of relevant literature and methodological approaches, and an analysis of what may be feasible in the cities participating in the initiative.

Underpinning all of our proposals is an understanding that both the agreed definition and measurement must 'work' across all of the Vanguard cities, with their diverse social, economic, political and cultural contexts. To this end we have gathered data from the Vanguard Cities in the form of a structured questionnaire pro-forma, in-depth interviews with the lead city contact, and a review of local statistical sources and reports. We have been ably supported in all of these tasks by Dr Fiona Jackson, at Heriot-Watt University.

This data gathering process is ongoing, as Vanguard Cities are at different stages of their engagement with the *A Place to Call Home* initiative. The six cities for which we have reasonably detailed data so far are: Adelaide, Bangalore, Chicago, Edmonton, Glasgow and Manchester. We also have some information on the City of Tshwane, South Africa. It should be noted that, with the exception of Bangalore, and partial exception of Tshwane,

all the information gathered so far has been from the developed world so the applicability of our ideas will require further testing with developing world colleagues in particular.

The remainder of the paper is in three parts. The first sets out our proposals for defining ending street homelessness, the second makes recommendation for measurement approaches, and the third summarises relevant information on the existing Vanguard Cities.

There is a further key issue not covered in this paper on *how* the ending or reduction of street homelessness is to be achieved. Investigating what interventions are used, how effective or otherwise they are, and what explains their success or failure, will provide crucial information for future cohorts of cities seeking to end or significantly reduce street homelessness. We anticipate that this will be the subject of in-depth, qualitative case study work at a later point in the process. This work will encompass an 'realistic evaluation' approach focussed on '*What works, for whom, in what circumstances.*'¹

What should also be clear from the outset is that approaches to reducing or eliminating street homelessness that rely on repressive methods, without offering appropriate support and accommodation options to those affected, or simply displace street homeless people from targeted areas, will not suffice to meet the IGH goals. Further development work is needed in specifying these unacceptable methods.

2. Defining 'Ending Street Homelessness'

There has been much recent consideration given to the notion of 'ending homelessness', particularly in the North American context². In Europe, Australia and other parts of the developed world there has been less explicit consideration given to 'ending' homelessness as such, and more attention paid to means of preventing and reducing homelessness and related forms of social exclusion³. England is unusual in the European context in having set out an explicit goal to 'end' one particular form of homelessness - rough sleeping - in its "Vision to end Rough Sleeping: No Second Night Out Nationwide" in 2011⁴, though the current UK Government has now set a more modest target to halve

¹ Pawson, R. & Tilley, N. (1997) *Realistic Evaluation*. London: Sage.

² United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, "Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness" (2015), 10, https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_OpeningDoors_Amendment2015_FINAL.pdf.

³ Turner, A., Albanese, T. & Pakeman, K. (2017) *Discerning 'Functional and Absolute Zero': Defining and Measuring an End to Homelessness in Canada*, The School of Public Policy SPP Research Papers. 10(2): January 2017.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vision-to-end-rough-sleeping--2>

rough sleeping in England by 2022, and eliminate it by 2027⁵. Finland, too, has set out the aim of eliminating 'long-term' homelessness, and has seen significant reductions⁶. At a more symbolic level, the European Parliament has issued two 'declarations' on ending street homelessness by 2015⁷.

Alina Turner and colleagues at the University of Calgary in Canada have undertaken a recent, extensive and very helpful international review of conceptual approaches to ending homelessness across much of the Global North, upon which we draw heavily⁸. Perhaps understandably, the idea of 'ending homelessness' does not as yet appear to have been a major theme of policy or research in the Global South, given the acute housing and economic challenges affecting great swathes of the population in many poorer parts of the world⁹. However, in the context of IGH's work we must ensure that the definition selected is also appropriate to cities in the Global South, offers coherence to the *A Place to Call Home* initiative as a whole, and generates lesson-learning opportunities for future cohorts of cities coming on board the global effort to support 150 cities to end street homelessness by 2030.

With all of this in mind, the criteria set for an appropriate definition of 'ending street homelessness' in the Vanguard Cities and the broader initiative was that it should be:

- observable and objectively quantifiable;
- simple, credible and easy to explain;
- consistent, comparable and meaningful across cities;
- relevant regardless of which specific 2020 goal a city opts for (i.e. the full ending of street homelessness, the ending of street homelessness within a particular group or location, or a reduction target);
- measurable using techniques which are feasible to implement in all of the city contexts.

There are two component elements to this definition: 'street homeless' and 'ending'. We now look at both in turn.

Defining 'street homelessness'

This is the most straightforward of our tasks as the IGH definition of street homelessness has already been developed in a paper written together with Prof Dennis Culhane and

⁵ Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S., Watts, B. & Wood J. (2018) *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2018 Crisis*.

⁶ https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/153258/YMra_3en_2015.pdf

⁷ [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?reference=P6_TA\(2008\)0163&language=EN](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?reference=P6_TA(2008)0163&language=EN)

⁸ Turner, A., Albanese, T. & Pakeman, K. (2017) *Discerning 'Functional and Absolute Zero': Defining and Measuring an End to Homelessness in Canada*, The School of Public Policy SPP Research Papers. 10(2): January 2017.

⁹ Tiple, G., & Speak, S. (2006). Who is homeless in developing countries? Differentiating between inadequately housed and homeless people. *International Development Planning Review*, 28(1): 57-84.

published in *Habitat International*¹⁰. Drawing upon a wide range of conceptual material from both the developed and developing world, we proposed a Global Homelessness Framework containing three broad categories of people who may be considered homeless (see Table 1 below).

We would recommend that Category 1 below, 'people without accommodation', be employed as the definition of street homelessness in the *A Place to Call Home* initiative. This includes people who are sleeping in the streets or other public spaces (Subcategory 1(a)), in public roofed spaces or other buildings not intended for human habitation (Subcategory 1(b)), or vehicles (Subcategory 1(c)), and who are variously referred to as 'roofless', 'sleeping rough', or 'unsheltered' in countries around the globe. An important sub-category of people without accommodation in the Global South are 'pavement dwellers' (Subcategory 1(d)) who live on the street in a regular spot, usually but not always with some form of makeshift cover¹¹. Pavement dwellers are distinguishable from residents of slum/informal settlements, typically located on the urban periphery, in being found in scattered sites in the city centre, and having little opportunity scope to 'consolidate' and improve their dwelling¹².

¹⁰ Busch-Geertsema, V, Culhane, D & Fitzpatrick, S 2016, 'Developing a global framework for conceptualising and measuring homelessness' *Habitat International*, 55: 124–132.

¹¹ Tipple, G., & Speak, S. (2006). Who is homeless in developing countries? Differentiating between inadequately housed and homeless people. *International Development Planning Review*, 28(1), 57-84.; Wardhaugh, J. (2012). Rural homelessness - India. In S. Smith (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of housing and home* (1st ed.). Elsevier.

¹² Tipple, G., & Speak, S. (2009). *The Hidden Millions: Homelessness in Developing Countries*. London: Routledge.

TABLE 1: Proposed Global Homelessness Framework

	Category		Subcategory
1	People without accommodation	1 (a)	People sleeping in the streets or in other open spaces (such as parks, railway embankments, under bridges, on pavement, on river banks, in forests, etc.)
		1 (b)	People sleeping in public roofed spaces or buildings not intended for human habitation (such as bus and railway stations, taxi ranks, derelict buildings, public buildings, etc.)
		1 (c)	People sleeping in their cars, rickshaws, open fishing boats and other forms of transport
		1 (d)	'Pavement dwellers' - individuals or households who live on the street in a regular spot, usually with some form of makeshift cover
2	People living in temporary or crisis accommodation	2 (a)	People staying in night shelters (where occupants have to renegotiate their accommodation nightly)
		2 (b)	People living in homeless hostels and other types of temporary accommodation for homeless people (where occupants have a designated bed or room)
		2 (c)	Women and children living in refuges for those fleeing domestic violence
		2 (d)	People living in camps provided for 'internally displaced people' i.e. those who have fled their homes as a result of armed conflict, natural or human-made disasters, human rights violations, development projects, etc. but have not crossed international borders
		2 (e)	People living in camps or reception centres/temporary accommodation for asylum seekers, refugees and other immigrants
3	People living in severely inadequate and/or insecure accommodation	3 (a)	People sharing with friends and relatives on a temporary basis
		3 (b)	People living under threat of violence
		3 (c)	People living in cheap hotels, bed and breakfasts and similar
		3 (d)	People squatting in conventional housing
		3 (e)	People living in conventional housing that is unfit for human habitation
		3 (f)	People living in trailers, caravans and tents
		3 (g)	People living in extremely overcrowded conditions
		3(h)	People living in non-conventional buildings and temporary structures, including those living in slums /informal settlements

We would recommend that the global effort of the *A Place to Call Home* initiative focuses on these groups with 'no accommodation' for three reasons. First, street homelessness

defined in this way reflects a higher level of commonality across the globe (being present in both the developed and developing worlds) than do some of the temporary, crisis or inadequate forms of accommodation captured in Categories 2 and 3 in Table 1, which can be more specific to particular world regions¹³. Second, street homeless people are often neglected in strategies to tackle 'homelessness' in favour of more numerous and better organised groups living in inadequate housing, such as shack and slum dwellers. Third, many organisations, networks and initiative already exist to focus on slum dwellers, refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced peoples.

Interestingly, reviewing the responses from the six Vanguard Cities from whom we have reasonably complete information, most recognised all of the subcategories 1a-d as part of their existing definition or understanding of 'street homelessness'. This is helpful in terms of providing the basis for measurement of progress towards the goal of ending the phenomenon. But this assent to pavement dwelling (1(d)) as a recognised form of street homelessness across all the cities was possibly surprising, as we had interpreted this as mainly a Global South phenomenon, as does the existing international literature. In Glasgow, neither 1(b) (sleeping in public buildings) nor 1(c) (sleeping in vehicles) were recognised as core elements of the definition of street homelessness, which probably reflects the reality that these are not common manifestations of rooflessness in these cities. However, it is striking that the other UK city, Manchester, takes a different position, ticking both of these boxes. Can things really be so different in two cities in the same country? The other possibly surprising response is that 1(c) (sleeping in vehicles) is not recognised in Bangalore as intrinsic to street homelessness. These points are all worth discussion in Chicago.

It would be useful to discuss these definitional understandings with the cities attending the Chicago meeting.

Another point that worth discussing in Chicago is the position of people living in 'encampments' or 'tent cities'. In our Global Homelessness Framework we categorise living in 'tents', alongside caravans and mobile homes/trailers, as a form of inadequate housing, under sub-category 3(f), and therefore not part of 'street homelessness'. But we do wonder whether we ought to revisit this in light of the close interrelationship between street homelessness and encampments in some Global North cities, and note the commonality in controversies around enforcement measures, for example. 'Unsheltered count' instruments we have seen also include encampments, and it feels 'natural' for them

¹³ Cross, C., Seager, J., Erasmus, J., Ward, C., & O'Donovan, M. (2010). Skeletons at the feast: a review of street homelessness on South Africa and other world regions. *Development Southern Africa*, 27(1), 5-20.

to do so. But there may be some challenges in distinguishing this form of street homelessness from refugee camps, for example.

Should people living in tents or encampments be considered street homeless in IGH's work?

Defining 'ending'

This aspect of the definition takes us into more contentious territory, and specifically into a lively debate in North America about 'Functional Zero' and 'Absolute Zero' conceptualisations of ending homelessness¹⁴. While this debate relates to homelessness as a whole, we can usefully apply its insights to street homelessness in particular.

Functional Zero means, in essence, achieving the position whereby there is enough accommodation and support for all homeless people who need it. In other words, an equilibrium is achieved in broad terms between 'demand' for homelessness services and the 'supply' of those services. One prominent example of this approach comes from Community Solutions "Built for Zero" Campaign which defines Functional Zero for ending chronic and veterans homelessness as having been achieved when

*"At any point in time, the number of veterans experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness in a community will be no greater than the average monthly housing placement rate for veterans experiencing homelessness in that community"*¹⁵

The attention that the Functional Zero approach draws to the need for a systematic response to ensure that homelessness is prevented whenever possible, and resolved quickly when it does occur, with the minimum of barriers to service access, is attractive in many ways. It may help to galvanise change by giving both politicians and the general public a sense of agency, focus and hope about the issue. However, it requires quite sophisticated data on service supply calibrated against demand and this is unlikely to be available in many of the cities that we will be working in. It would be even more difficult to generate this 'supply' data in a comparable way across countries. Some have also argued that the Functional Zero approach is a 'cop out'¹⁶, in that it is possible to bring service 'supply' and 'demand' into balance while still having a large number of people on the

¹⁴ Turner, A., Albanese, T. & Pakeman, K. (2017) *Discerning 'Functional and Absolute Zero': Defining and Measuring an End to Homelessness in Canada*, The School of Public Policy SPP Research Papers. 10(2): January 2017.

¹⁵ Community Solutions (2016) "What Does It Mean to End (and Prove You've Ended) Veteran Homelessness?", <https://cmtysolutions.org/blog/what-does-it-mean-end-and-prove-you%E2%80%99ve-ended-veteran-homelessness>.

¹⁶ Turner, A., Albanese, T. & Pakeman, K. (2017) *Discerning 'Functional and Absolute Zero': Defining and Measuring an End to Homelessness in Canada*, The School of Public Policy SPP Research Papers. 10(2): January 2017.

streets. In that case, though, one would have to question the appropriateness and/or accessibility of the accommodation 'offer' being made to street homeless people, and the dubious implications of it being their 'choice' to remain on the streets.

Absolute Zero, in contrast, is closer to what the popular conception of “ending homelessness” is likely to conjure up, bringing to mind the complete elimination of (street) homelessness as a phenomenon. This is described by Turner and colleagues, and many others, as 'unrealistic' in its most literal sense, if taken to mean a guarantee that nobody will ever have the experience of homelessness ever again. However, a focus on Absolute Zero, rather than Functional Zero, has the advantage of concentrating attention directly on the "lived reality" of whether people are or are not experiencing the distress and dangers of street homelessness. A direct focus on striving to minimise the relevant harms associated with street homelessness seems to us core to the moral mission that we are on with IGH. Moreover, unlike Turner and colleagues, who had a wider remit, we are focussed on the most extreme end of homelessness only, and a literal ending of street homelessness may be closer to hand than an end to all forms of homelessness.

In any case, one can reasonably adopt an ultimate goal of Absolute Zero street homelessness, even if one believes that it is unlikely ever to be fully or perfectly realised. One can draw parallels here with much wider societal debates on, say, liberty or equality. These are societal goals worth striving towards even if it is difficult to conceive of, never mind achieve, a society that is ever 'absolutely free' or 'completely equal'. The lack of perfectibility in these instances is not a good reason to abandon these worthy goals (that would mean irrationally making 'the best the enemy of the good').

It is also possible within the overall paradigm of Absolute Zero to set thresholds for success that are less than the complete elimination of (street) homelessness, but maintain the direct focus on people's lived experiences. In this regard, we are particularly attracted to a phrase in the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) definition of ending homelessness¹⁷. While the USICH's overall approach is rooted in a Functional Zero-style focus on the quality of the 'systematic response' that prevents homelessness wherever possible, it also specifies in more absolute terms that, where homelessness does occur, it should be a *"rare, brief, and non-recurring experience"*. These three criteria - i.e. scale, duration and frequency - also match the emphasis of the international experts consulted by IGH when they commenced consideration of this issue of how to define an end to street homelessness.

¹⁷ United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, “Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness” (2015), 10, https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_OpeningDoors_Amendment2015_FINAL.pdf.

In practice, we think this framing narrative of "*rare, brief and non-recurring*" can be operationalised by defining a relevant cases of street homelessness as follows for the purposes of gauging progress towards the 'ending' of this phenomenon in each Vanguard City. **We propose that, for someone to be considered 'street homeless', they must have:**

- **slept in the circumstances described in Categories 1a-d above;**
- **for at least seven nights in total;**
- **across one or more episodes of street homelessness;**
- **in the city in question (i.e. not elsewhere);**
- **since the IGH initiative commenced (as episodes of street homelessness before the IGH initiative started should not be taken into account in tracking progress).**

We would argue that this definition fulfils all of the criteria set out above. It is objectively quantifiable and simple and easy to explain. It is also comparable and meaningful across different cities and world regions, and at least in principle, should be measurable using techniques feasible to implement in a wide range of contexts (see next section).

It is also relevant regardless of which specific 2020 goal a city opts for. To say that street homelessness has been 'ended' in a particular city would be to say that there is nobody that fills these criteria above. A proportionate decrease in the numbers fulfilling the criteria above would enable one to determine if specific reduction targets are met, and one can apply it to any particular section of the community or geography that a narrower target focuses on (though on geography, the point about displacement made above must always be borne in mind).

The duration of street homelessness selected as the relevant 'threshold' is clearly key to this definition. Any time threshold set will be arbitrary to some extent, and we need to strike a balance between selecting a timeframe that is long enough to exclude purely transitory/'accidental' rough sleeping (e.g. missing the last train home), but short enough that people experiencing serious hardship are not excluded. Seven days - a week - seems like a good balance to us that will make sense and be easy to convey. But this is a key issue to discuss with all of the relevant parties.

Does this definition above meet the needs of IGH? Is 7 days the right duration threshold?

3. Measuring Progress in the IGH Vanguard Cities

Continuous tracking via administrative data

In an ideal world, trends in street homelessness would be tracked on a continuous basis using an integrated data management system, into which a wide array of outreach and other services would upload data in 'real time' that fairly comprehensively covered the 'unsheltered population'. A system along these lines (called CHAIN) operates in London, for example. But this approach requires a) an extensive network of relevant services, particularly outreach services, to already operate in the locality (this will not be the case in all IGH cities) and b) a fairly sophisticated integrated data management system to be established (this can be expensive and takes time to implement).

We therefore assume that this approach will not be practical for IGH purposes in most Vanguard Cities, or indeed in later cohorts of cities that join the initiative. Amongst the existing Vanguard Cities, both Edmonton and Chicago have homelessness-related integrated data management systems. However, both cities carry out snapshot street counts to supplement their administrative (shelter-based) data in tracking homelessness trends over time. We assume that the fact that both cities undertake these counts indicates that their respective administrative systems are unable as yet to satisfactorily capture unsheltered homelessness. However, this would be useful to explore further at the Chicago meeting.

In the case of Glasgow, the local authority has a statutory duty to rehouse all homeless people, and applicants are asked whether they have slept rough the night before their application and/or within three months prior to their application. While this system will not comprehensively cover all street homeless people in the city, we have good grounds for thinking that the great majority of rough sleepers in Glasgow do at some point apply to the local authority as homeless (though not necessarily during every rough sleeping episode). There is also a current aspiration to integrate this 'statutory' administrative data on rough sleeping with administrative data from voluntary sector organisations in order to offer a more comprehensive picture of street homelessness in the city. It is unclear whether this ambition will be realised during the lifetime of the Vanguard City exercise (ie by end 2020).

Thus, in the cases of Glasgow, Edmonton and Chicago it is worth considering whether current administrative data may suffice to allow sufficiently robust tracking of the street homelessness target that they agree with IGH. For all of the other Vanguard Cities we propose that progress towards the goals agreed with IGH on "ending street homelessness" has to be monitored via repeated point-in-time-measurements ('snapshot counts') of night-time street homelessness over the three years until end 2020. We further

recommend that this should be complemented by a survey of services/other locations where people experiencing street homelessness gather in the day-time to supplement the data derived from the street count and to mitigate against the limitations of the snapshot approach. We provide more detail on these proposals below.

It should be emphasised we are not recommending snapshot counts as an 'ideal' means of tracking street homelessness levels. Rather, it is that this seems likely to be the most practical acceptable minimum that can be achieved in most cities. Where there is a possibility instead to establish a comprehensive integrated data management system that can monitor rough sleeping on a continuous basis, that should certainly be pursued.

Furthermore, the 'minimum requirements' proposed in this paper for assessing progress towards ending street homelessness in Vanguard Cities should in no way be interpreted as discouraging cities from developing more advanced performance measurement of specific actions taken to reduce homelessness via, for example, rapid rehousing.¹⁸

Repeated street counts

Ideally, there would be three snapshot street counts over the course of the *A Place to Call Home* initiative:

- baseline street count - the number of people sleeping on the street at a point in time around the date when the cities have formally agreed to join the initiative;
- mid-point street count - an exercise using exactly the same methodology, at the same time of year, in 2019;
- final street count - ditto in 2020.

If resources only allow two street counts, these should be the baseline (which is absolutely critical to undertake) and the final street count.

Implementing street counts

Experience of street counts of people sleeping rough or "unsheltered homelessness" are relatively widespread in the North of America, Australia and Europe and we can also find them in cities of the Global South. While they differ to a certain extent depending on national or local conditions, they share some core principles, which we will build upon

¹⁸ A good example of this, followed by the City of Edmonton, are the "Rapid Re-Housing Performance Benchmarks and Program Standards" published by the National Alliance to End Homelessness: <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/rapid-re-housing-performance-benchmarks-and-program-standards/>

here.

We have already explained at some length different approaches to estimating homelessness in our paper with Denis Culhane quoted above.¹⁹ Several Methodology Guides for the US²⁰ and Canada²¹ exist which we have taken as the basis for our more detailed recommendations on how to measure unsheltered homelessness. In the following we refer mainly to the guide for the US, which is also known in short as the “HUD PIT Count Methodology Guide”. While this guide was developed for the US context, its technical advice can be helpfully adapted for other places.

Street counts of unsheltered people are snapshots for one night covering as many individuals sleeping rough in a certain area as possible and preventing multiple counting as well. As a snapshot in time, street counts are better at capturing longer-term street homelessness than very short-term street homelessness (as those who have only a brief experience have a much lower 'odds' of being found on any particular night than those who have spent many nights in this situation). Given that our main objective is to monitor trends in more sustained forms of street homelessness, this is less of a disadvantage than it would be in other statistical exercises.

To measure the extent of street homelessness in a city on a certain night a considerable number of people are needed to search the whole city or at least all relevant places from where it is known that street sleepers are frequently using them as spots to sleep at night. Therefore often large numbers of volunteers are recruited to carry out the street count.²² The advantage of recruiting volunteers is usually that recruitment and participation of members of civil society in the count has an awareness raising effect. But the effort should not be underestimated: It is not always easy to find enough volunteers, they have to be trained and coordinated by qualified personnel and there are a number of additional requirements to be fulfilled, to guarantee the safety of people involved in the count, to keep up with data protection rules etc. It is also recommended that people with experience of sleeping rough in the city are involved in designing the count, as they might provide in-depth information on the issue, can help with identifying beforehand locations where

¹⁹ See also: Busch-Geertsema, V, Culhane, D & Fitzpatrick, S (2016) 'Developing a global framework for conceptualising and measuring homelessness' *Habitat International*, 55: 124–132

²⁰ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2014) *Point-in-Time Count Methodology Guide*, <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/PIT-Count-Methodology-Guide.pdf>

²¹ Employment and Social Development Canada (2017) *Everyone Counts – A guide to Point-in-Time Counts in Canada – 2nd Edition*, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/communities/homelessness/reports/guide-point-in-time-counts.html> and Jesse Donaldson (2017) *Point-in-Time Count Toolkit*, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/Point-in-Time_Count_Toolkit.pdf. For Canada there is also an interesting workspace available on the internet, where details of counts are discussed: <https://workspaceonhomelessness.ca/>

²² Just a few examples: For the 2017 count of unsheltered homeless persons in Chicago 500 volunteers and staff were recruited, see City of Chicago (2017) *2017 Homeless. Point-in-time Count & Survey Report*, Chicago, p. 3; in the 2016 street count in Edmonton 300 volunteers and 40 agencies participated and a specific app for mobile phones and tablets was used to facilitate the counting and reporting process, see homeward trust edmonton (2016) *Edmonton Point in Time Homeless Count Final Report*, p. 11; for the 2017 street count in Barcelona, Spain, even 998 volunteers were recruited and here also an app for electronic devices was developed and used in the count, see <http://sensellarisme.cat/es/el-recuento-2017-visualiza-1-026-personas-durmiendo-en-la-calle-y-1-954-alojadas-en-equipamientos/>

people use to sleep rough, etc.

A street count of unsheltered homelessness will aim at counting all people matching the definition explained above in a certain night. That means that enumerators will search for people sleeping in parks, railway embankments, under bridges, on pavement, on river banks, in forests, bus and railway stations, taxi ranks, derelict buildings, public buildings, in cars, rickshaws, open fishing boats and other forms of transport as well as for 'pavement dwellers' defined above (and possibly tents/encampments too).

Timing of street counts

Street counts of unsheltered people should be conducted at night at a time when people use to sleep or in the early morning hours.²³ The night chosen should be a “typical” night and dates should be avoided when activities are taking place that would disrupt the typical living arrangements of people sleeping rough. We would recommend counts in Spring or Autumn if possible to avoid the impact that weather extremes may have on the numbers of street homeless people, especially in the far North or South of the globe. In any case, it is critical that the repeated street counts occur at the same time each year in case these seasonal variations affect the numbers.

A “night” may be defined as the time between sunset and sunrise, but this time may be very short in summer and very long in winter in the extreme North or South of the globe. It is probably better to refer to a few hours during the period which is considered as sleeping time. Often a short period of 2 or 3 hours on a particular at night is best to minimise double counting.

Different methods of street counts

There are different ways of undertaking street counts and it will depend on the resources available, and the IGH goal selected, which methods are most appropriate.

First, if sufficient resources are available, the complete territory of a city or, more realistically, the relevant part of a city should be covered. Such a “full coverage approach” is ideal, but also requires a high number of volunteers and coordinators. Often some parts of the city might be excluded from the count because it is known that no street homeless people will be found there. If that is done, the procedure should be transparent and documented, and to be open to corrections if the assumption proves incorrect after the count, e.g. by additional information from services.

Second, if resources are insufficient to conduct a full coverage count the count might

²³ The Canadian guide allows to ask people during the day of the count where they will sleep that night. We would recommend instead conducting the count at night-time, as this will be a more robust 'observable' proof of the reality (except for service-based counts during the days after the night of the count, see below).

focus exclusively on known locations where people are believed to sleep rough regularly. Information about such locations should be collected in advance of the count from all bodies who might know about such places, such as street outreach teams, other services for homeless people, the police, medical experts, faith based organisations, street cleaning services, people with experience of sleeping rough etc. Enumerators will be sent to all those places for which it is known that street homeless people might be found there. This type of measurement in the night of the count should be supplemented by a random sample of other areas (see below) or by a service based/day-time count (after night count, see further below) to cover street homelessness outside the known locations.

Third, if resources do not even allow for covering all known locations, or information on such locations is sparse and incomplete, the best option is to focus the count on a random sample of areas of the city. After excluding areas known for not being used by any street homeless people, a certain proportion from the rest of the areas is selected at random to form a sample representing the whole city. If sufficient information is available, the areas may be stratified first in terms of the probability of finding large/small numbers of rough sleepers, and then from each of these stratas a random sample can be chosen. All areas of a similar type have to have the same odds of being selected. The information gained from surveying the selected areas may then be used to estimate the total extent and profile of street homelessness in the city as a whole.

In this last case it is particularly important to select the sample accurately and use robust methods for estimating the total (including selecting and weighting appropriately areas with known high concentrations of street homelessness and other areas). Statistical expertise in sampling methods is required.²⁴ Random sampling can also be applied if insufficient resources are available to interview all unsheltered people found on the street (or in a complementary service-based/day-time count, see below)²⁵.

Complementary day-time surveys

There is also the option to use a service-based day-time survey after the night-time count to determine the full extent of street homelessness during the night of the count. This is highly recommended as a certain proportion of people sleeping rough might not have been found on this night, because they had succeeded in hiding their sleeping locations or because they were sleeping in locations not covered by the count.

A service-based survey may also be used to gain further information on those individuals having slept rough during the night of the count, as it is often easier to interview people

²⁴ Appendix B of the HUD PIT Count Methodology Guide (2014, p. 76) provides useful recommendations how to proceed in such cases.

²⁵ It is recommended to complete at least 200 interviews if the number of unsheltered people is expected to exceed 400. If less than 400 people are expected to be found at least half of those found should be interviewed (which means that every second person needs to be interviewed). See U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2014) *ibid*, p. 59

over the day. For a service-based survey people will be interviewed after the count at places usually frequented by unsheltered individuals, such as soup kitchens, day centres etc.²⁶ Mindful that in the Global South in particular, and in many poorer cities in the Global North, relevant services may be thin on the ground, it is also recommended that other day-time gathering places for street homeless people are surveyed. This might include, for example, train stations, libraries, etc. depending on the local context.

It is particularly important in this context to screen exclusively for those people who have slept rough during the specific night of the count (rather than at some other time) and to prevent double counting (see below). Only service-based/day-time counts conducted within 7 days after the night of the street count should be used to *supplement* night-time street count approaches, and using solely this type of survey will usually not be sufficient as it would risk missing unsheltered people who do not use services.

Preventing double-counting

It is essential to ensure that unsheltered individuals are only enumerated once in a street count. This is particularly important if the count takes longer than a few hours or if counts at night are supplemented by service-based surveys after this night. Sufficient information needs to be available to reliably detect multiple counting and de-duplicate the street count.

One of the screening questions should always be to ask people if they have been interviewed already during the same count. But to de-duplicate counts some more personal information is needed and can be converted in an anonymised unique identifier: it could for example be a combination of first initial, last initial, age, sex and location where the count of the night was spent (see Table 2).

Table 2: Example of deduplication list based on unique identifiers

First Initial	Last Initial	Age	Gender	Location of sleeping rough (with the city divided into 'zones')
I	A	38	f	7
E	I	45	m	5

²⁶ This approach was implemented by national statistical institutes in France and Spain as the main method to measure different forms of homelessness at national level in cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants, see for France: Youancq F., Lebrère A., Marpsat M., Régnier V., Legleye S. & Quaglia M. (2013) *L'hébergement des sans-domicile en 2012. Des modes d'hébergement différents selon les situations familiales* [Homeless people accommodation in 2012. Accommodation modes differ according to familial situations], INSEE, INSEE Première, n°1455; for Spain: INE (2012) *Encuesta a las Personas sin Hogar 2012* (metodología, diseño de registros y micro datos) [Survey of homeless persons 2012 (methodology, design of records and micro data)], http://www.ine.es/prodyser/micro_epsh.htm

A	M	25	f	3
R	Y	33	m	3
V	A	58	m	5
E	I	45	m	5

There is also the option of producing 'by-name' lists with full names, birth dates and other personal information recorded in a database. This can be a very useful method if the information will be collected by trained personnel who are bound by professional ethics and confidentiality requirements, and are empowered, for example, to help street homeless people access housing and other services. However, the collection of in-depth personal information and identifying details raises ethical concerns when it is being collected by large numbers of volunteers, with little scope for enforcing confidentiality requirements, and who are not in a position to make direct 'offers' of assistance to those with whom they are interacting. In these circumstances, 'data minimisation' principles should be applied, as now discussed.

What to ask?

The minimum requirements to be met for a count in the framework of IGH are screening questions to detect if the person matches the definition of street homelessness, a question to identify whether they have been interviewed already during the current count, a question clarifying their consent to provide some very basic personal details, those questions necessary for de-duplicating the count (such as first and last initial, age, gender), and information about the total number of nights spent on the street during the period since the city joined the IGH campaign (also, ideally, how many separate episodes of rough sleeping, but this is not as essential).

We would propose to develop a standardised survey instrument to be used (after suitable translation) in all of the cities to ensure direct comparability.

In cases when an interview is not possible during the street count (e.g. someone is sleeping or it is not safe to approach rough sleepers in an abandoned building or language barriers make communication difficult) the persons should nevertheless be counted and as much detail as possible on their characteristics (gender, estimated age, location) should be registered based on observations in order to assist with de-duplication. The day-time complementary survey can then be used as a source from which to extrapolate the missing data.

It may always be interesting to learn more about the profile and personal characteristics of homeless people on the street and such questions might be added to the list.²⁷ But street count surveys should be short and should be minimally invasive. Detailed questions about substance use, mental health, experiences of violence and abuse or questions on criminal activities may make participants feel uncomfortable and fall foul of the 'data minimisation' approach recommended when using volunteers who are not in a position to offer direct help to street sleepers and are not bound by professional codes of ethics.

Protection of privacy and safety of all people involved in a street count

It is essential to protect the privacy and safety of all people involved in the count. This relates to enumerators as well as to those being enumerated. Volunteers searching the streets and specific places for people sleeping rough should never be alone, they should be easily identifiable and have a mobile phone to be able to get in touch with team leaders and the police if necessary.

Street counts are usually short, minimally evasive and anonymous. They should be conducted with respect to the rights, welfare and human dignity of the participants and in a non-judgemental way. The rights of homeless people to privacy and to be left alone also have to be respected, especially when they are asleep.

Logistics

There are recommendations regarding the preparation of a street count, the recruitment and training of volunteers, the development of a time-line, the preparation of maps and guidelines, survey forms etc. More information on these practical issues has been already provided in the article for Habitat International, quoted above. Even more detailed recommendations may be found in the handbooks and toolkits mentioned above. These also provide detailed information about the tasks to be performed after conducting the street count, such as collecting completed survey forms, cleaning, de-duplicating and coding the data collected, the publication and further use of the street count data etc.

Minimum requirements for measuring progress in the IGH campaign

Based on all of above, we would propose that IGH Vanguard Cities should be asked to:

- **do a baseline street count and final street count, and undertake complementary day-time surveys; or alternatively, use continuous data management systems to deduce progress towards street homelessness goals, if those systems sufficiently cover the street homeless population and their duration of sleeping rough;**
- **clearly document their methodology;**

²⁷ Additional questions might be asked during a street count to learn more about the profile, homeless history, support needs etc., for examples see the guides mentioned above.

- ensure coverage of street homelessness as completely as possible, using the methods described above;
- prevent double counting; and
- collect information about the total duration of street homelessness of the individuals registered, referring only to the period since the city joined the IGH initiative.

Some of the Vanguard Cities may already have some of the data to hand to satisfy these requirements, and we consider this as part of the next section on the current position of the cities.

4. The current position in Vanguard Cities

Table 3 below summarises our understanding of the current position in the seven Vanguard Cities for which we have some information. A number of key points are immediately apparent and require discussion in Chicago.

First, not all of the 'goals' currently specified by the cities fit with the definition of "ending street homelessness" proposed in this document. Specifically, Manchester and Adelaide seem to have adopted a 'Functional Zero' rather than 'Absolute Zero' paradigm.

Second, while some of the Vanguard Cities can refer to reasonably recent snapshot data on “unsheltered homelessness” (Edmonton, Chicago and Manchester; Adelaide for the inner city area), others appear to have no recent and reliable data to provide a baseline for measuring progress. Population Census data from 2011 (as in Bangalore and in the City of Tshwane) is certainly not a good baseline from where to start from, and at least in Europe population census data on street homelessness are not reliable for most countries neither.²⁸ So in these cases a proper baseline count would need to be conducted in order to measure progress in meeting the goals agreed with IGH. In Glasgow the method used for estimation in 2016 is not suited to tracking trends over time, and nothing is yet published on a recent street count undertaken by the a street outreach service. However, in the case of Glasgow, as well as Edmonton and Chicago, there may be a possible alternative to street counts using administrative data, as noted above.

Table 3: Vanguard cities: Population size, IGH goals committed to and available information about the extent of street homelessness

City	Total population	IGH Goal to be reached by 2020	Latest point-in-time data on extent of street homelessness		Date	Source
			N	Per 10,000 inhabitants		

²⁸ Busch-Geertsema, V., Benjaminsen, L., Filipovič Hrast, M. & Pleace, N. (2014) *Extent and Profile of Homelessness in European Member States*. A Statistical Update (EOH Comparative Studies on *Homelessness*), Brussels.

Adelaide, Australia	23,063	Functional Zero for street homelessness within the inner city*	74	32.1	Sept. 2017	Street count, combined known locations + service-based count; but only in inner city area
Bengaluru, India	9,621,551	Reduction by 25%	4,355	4.5	2011	Census
Chicago, USA	2,704,958	Reduction by 25%	1,561	5.8	Jan 2017	Street count of known locations
Edmonton, Canada	969,068	End chronic homelessness among people experiencing street homelessness	388	4.0	Oct 2016	Street count of known locations
Glasgow, UK	615,070	End street homelessness across the city	120	2.0	"Typical night 2016"	Calculation on basis of a range of sources
Greater Manchester, UK	2,714,900	End the need to sleep rough in the Greater Manchester area*	268	1.0	Night between 1st Oct and 30th November 2017	Street count
City of Tshwane, Africa	2,921,888	Not yet decided	6,244	21.4	Oct 2011	Census

*not precisely matching IGH Goals, as defined in this paper

Third, the Table 3 makes clear the critical importance of getting the total population 'denominator' information right in determining how 'rare' or otherwise street homelessness is, as this has a fundamental impact on overall rates per head of population. In Adelaide, for example, while the absolute number of street homeless is low relative to all the other cities, the rate is higher than everywhere else because the total population is much smaller than in the other locations. We have to be sure that these are the correct population 'denominators' in order to present rates fairly, i.e. can we be reasonably confident that this is the population from which all or most of the enumerated rough sleepers are drawn?

Fourth, as we have indicated above, duration of rough sleeping is a core minimum requirement for assessing progress towards ending rough sleeping according to our proposed definition. However, though not captured in Table 3, it requires further exploration which of the Vanguard cities have the required information on duration of street homelessness available from their last count or other data sources. Only in



Adelaide do the published results contain detailed information on the duration of sleeping rough. Here, 3% (2 of 66) of all unsheltered homeless people stated they had slept rough for less than a week. Both Chicago and Edmonton published information on 'chronic homelessness' (37% and 72% of those unsheltered respectively). While Edmonton has a question in the survey form on the total number of days homeless (but not the number of days sleeping rough) it is not clear for Chicago whether the city would be able to break down the "non-chronic" group into more /less than seven days rough sleeping (the survey instrument is not included as an appendix to the report). There is no duration information available from the Census data for Bangalore or City of Tshwane, nor from the street count in Manchester. In Glasgow, some estimate of duration may be made from the data sources used but this would require bespoke statistical analysis. We believe that a recent streetcount has just been undertaken in the city but we need to acquire details on this, and whether duration was recorded. One way forward in Glasgow may be to ask the local authority to start to record the duration of rough sleeping of those who apply as 'statutorily homeless' (as noted above, applicants are already asked if they have slept rough the night before or three months before application, but not currently the duration of their rough sleeping).