

HOW TO MEASURE AND MONITOR HOMELESSNESS AT EU LEVEL



This paper is divided into the following sections:

- I. The EU policy context for measuring and monitoring homelessness
- II. FEANTSA recommendations

I. EU policy context for measuring and monitoring homelessness

EU policy framework

EU countries have different policies in the area of social inclusion, pensions, health and long-term care. However, they have agreed common EU objectives in this area, as well as common indicators so that they can compare best practices and measure progress towards these common objectives. These common indicators consist of an overall list of 14 headline indicators, the "**overarching list**". It is complemented by specific indicators relating to three main areas: poverty and social exclusion, pensions, and health and long-term care. The use of commonly agreed indicators to monitor progress towards commonly agreed objectives is an essential component of the EU anti-poverty strategy. The current set of common indicators was approved in 2006.¹ Updated indicators on **health** were agreed in 2008 and on **material deprivation** and **housing** in 2009.

These indicators are used for the overall National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion as well as for the Joint Report presented by the European Commission and the Council. EU Member States are expected to use the indicators agreed under this new framework in their national strategy reports on social inclusion, if only to emphasise that in the context of the EU anti-poverty strategy, poverty and social exclusion are a relative concept that encompasses income, access to essential durables, education, health care, adequate housing, distance from the labour market.

In March 2010, the [Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion](#) (the most important strategic document in EU anti-poverty policy, adopted jointly by the European Commission and the Council of Ministers) calls for the development of national homeless strategies and of appropriate measurement tools to monitor progress on homelessness. The EU policy framework is more favourable than ever for the development of reliable homelessness data and indicators.

Towards common indicators on housing

In their 2001 Laeken list, the representatives of the SPC recognised that they were unable to present a proposal for housing indicators, but agreed on the following common approach: "NAPsIncl should contain quantitative information covering three issues: (1) decent housing, (2) housing costs, (3) homelessness and other precarious housing conditions."

For housing, the EU adopted two new indicators in July 2009, indicators which are based on information available in EU-SILC (the EU survey on income and living conditions). The indicators are the following:

- Housing costs overburden rate: Percentage of the population living in a household where total housing costs (net of housing allowances) represent more than 40% of the total disposable household income (net of housing allowances)
- Overcrowding rate: Percentage of people living in an overcrowded household - All households and excluding single households.
- Housing deprivation by item: Percentage of the population deprived of each housing deprivation item, and by number of items
- Share of housing costs in total disposable household income: Median of the distribution among individuals of the share of housing costs (net of housing allowances) in total disposable income (net of housing allowances)
- median for the total population + - median for people at-risk-of poverty

¹ The first list was adopted in 2001 after the EU agreed for the first time on common objectives to combat poverty and social exclusion, and is referred to as the "Laeken list". See more on the Eurostat website: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-NK-03-008/EN/KS-NK-03-008-EN.PDF

Towards a European framework for measuring and monitoring homelessness

For **homelessness**, there are currently no common EU indicators, but the EU is making steady progress in this area. In 2006, the European Commission commissioned a study² on measuring homelessness in the EU aiming to make some concrete steps towards statistical capacity building for the purpose of measuring the extent and nature of housing deprivation and homelessness across the EU. As such, the study is of a methodological nature and aimed at identifying methodologies and practices for the development of data collection on homelessness at national level. The study shows, *inter alia*, that measurement of homelessness in Europe is developing in most countries, and four principle methods of measurement are currently being used across Europe to measure different forms of homelessness:

	Operational category	Data source
1.	People Living Rough	Survey
2.	People in Emergency Accommodation	Client record systems
3.	People Living in Accommodation for the homeless	
4.	People Living in Institutions	Administrative Records
5.	People Living in Non-conventional Dwellings due to Lack of Housing	Census/Housing Surveys
6.	People Living Temporarily with Families and Friends	Surveys/Census

The study also includes a number of **recommendations** for the improvement of measurement and monitoring of homelessness such as recommendations to national authorities e.g. “Prepare a national Homelessness Monitoring Information Strategy developed in consultation with all relevant Ministries and stakeholders”, and recommendations to the European Commission e.g. “Encourage national statistics offices to play a coordination role in the collection of data on homelessness for use in EU level initiatives” (see all recommendations in [Annex](#)). The MPHASIS project (2008-2009) was then funded to start or strengthen national initiatives in 20 countries on the issue of homelessness measurement and the [MPHASIS](#) outcome statement clearly calls for “the European Commission and EU Member States to agree on a common framework providing guidelines for measuring, monitoring and reporting on HHE”.

II. FEANTSA Recommendations

FEANTSA has closely monitored these different initiatives. In order to develop comparable quantitative homelessness data at EU level, FEANTSA makes recommendations for:

- A European Typology on Homelessness and housing exclusion ([ETHOS](#)).
- A Europe-wide monitoring system on homelessness
- The use of EU-SILC to collect information on homelessness, through the use of retrospective modules.

² Edgar et al (2007), *The Measurement of Homelessness at EU level*



FEANTSA

1. A European Typology of Homelessness and housing exclusion

The SPC in their 2001 report agreed that the National action plans on social inclusion should contain quantitative information on homelessness and other precarious housing conditions. **Yet, comparative homelessness statistics are still lacking.** Quantitative data is urgently required in order to develop indicators to monitor trends in the numbers and profiles of homeless people. This is crucial for measurement of homeless policies and the situation of homeless people in the EU. In the March 2010 Joint Report, the European Commission and national delegations agreed on the need to develop measurement and monitoring of homelessness and, as referred to above, steps have been taken to fill existing gaps in this area. A crucial first step would be to agree on a European definition of homelessness.

ETHOS

FEANTSA carried out annual homeless statistics reviews through its European Observatory on Homelessness. The reviews have shown wide differences in the availability and nature of homelessness statistics. The “Review of Statistics on Homelessness in Europe” (2003) prepared for FEANTSA by Edgar, Doherty and Meert comments: ‘There is no single and consistent method of collecting data on homelessness employed by the national statistical offices or other official sources of statistics in the Member States of the European Union’.

Through the annual statistics reviews produced by the Observatory between 2002 and 2006, the FEANTSA Data Collection Working Group and the European Observatory on Homelessness jointly developed a European Typology of Homelessness and housing exclusion (ETHOS) as a basis for measuring homelessness:

	Operational Category	Living Situation	Generic Definition	
Conceptual Category v	POORLESS	1 People Living Rough	1.1 Public space or external space	Living in the streets or public spaces, without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters
		2 People in emergency accommodation	2.1 Night shelter	People with no usual place of residence who make use of overnight shelter, low threshold shelter
	HOUSELESS	3 People in accommodation for the homeless	3.1 Homeless hostel	Where the period of stay is intended to be short term
			3.2 Temporary Accommodation	
			3.3 Transitional supported accommodation	
	4 People in Women's Shelter	4.1 Women's shelter accommodation	Women accommodated due to experience of domestic violence and where the period of stay is intended to be short term	
	5 People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1 Temporary accommodation / reception centres	Immigrants in reception or short term accommodation due to their immigrant status	
		5.2 Migrant workers accommodation		
	6 People due to be released from institutions	6.1 Penal institutions	No housing available prior to release Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing No housing identified (e.g by 18th birthday)	
		6.2 Medical institutions ⁹		
		6.3 Children's institutions / homes		
	7 People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)	7.1 Residential care for older homeless people	Long stay accommodation with care for formerly homeless people (normally more than one year)	
		7.2 Supported accommodation for formerly homeless people		
INSECURE	8 People living in insecure accommodation	8.1 Temporarily with family/friends	Living in conventional housing but not the usual or place of residence due to lack of housing Occupation of dwelling with no legal tenancy Illegal occupation of a dwelling Occupation of land with no legal rights	
		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)	Where orders for eviction are operative Where mortgagor has legal order to re-possess		
	9.2 Re-possession orders (owned)			
10 People living under threat of violence	10.1 Police recorded incidents	Where police action is taken to ensure place of safety for victims of domestic violence		
INADEQUATE	11 People living in temporary / non-conventional structures	11.1 Mobile homes	Not intended as place of usual residence Makeshift shelter, shack or shanty Semi-permanent structure hut or cabin	
		11.2 Non-conventional building		
		11.3 Temporary structure		
12 People living in unfit housing	12.1 Occupied dwellings unfit for habitation	Defined as unfit for habitation by national legislation or building regulations		
13 People living in extreme overcrowding	13.1 Highest national norm of overcrowding	Defined as exceeding national density standard for floor-space or useable rooms		



FEANTSA

The pathways model is at the basis of the ETHOS typology. It is important to note that the ETHOS typology is an open exercise which makes abstraction of existing legal definitions in the EU Members States. It provides a simple but comprehensive definition of housing vulnerability as persons experiencing one of the following situations: rooflessness, houselessness, living in insecure housing, living in inadequate housing. These 4 conceptual categories are broken down into operational categories. The “Living situations” take into account national differences in order to have a better understanding of the perception of homelessness in the different member states.

ETHOS Light

The European Commission study on measurement of homelessness at EU level proposes the following harmonised definition of homelessness:

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
		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 No housing available prior to release
		8	Penal institutions	
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 building	
		11	Temporary structure	
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

This is a useful European definition of homelessness (already often referred to as “ETHOS Light”) developed specifically for the statistical tasks of the EU study, and is a definition which allows for political consensus and international comparisons in the framework of the EU social inclusion strategy. The proposed definition of the EU Study is very much in line with the homelessness categories of the ETHOS typology (please note: ETHOS proposes a wider typology with additional conceptual categories of housing exclusion).

Both typologies are *European* definitions and are currently not used as *national* definitions. For instance, ETHOS is increasingly being used as a reference by NGOs and public authorities for policy and data collection purposes; however it is not necessarily being transposed directly into national and local initiatives but is rather used as a basis for discussions and then being operationalised differently according to the local context. It is intended to give policy-makers a common framework and language to work from at EU level, so that different statistics and definitions used at national/local level can be “translated” into EU categories when EU comparisons are necessary.

Recommendations

- FEANTSA firmly believes that ETHOS provides a more complete reflection of the reality of homelessness than ETHOS Light, as a dynamic process linked to other forms of housing exclusion. ETHOS is an integrated definition which allows for measurement of the different homelessness policy objectives of prevention of homelessness, crisis intervention, and rehabilitation.
- FEANTSA proposes to use ETHOS as a European definition of homelessness and housing exclusion, while accepting ETHOS Light for specific EU statistical initiatives (see below).



FEANTSA

2. A Europe-wide monitoring system on homelessness

The March 2010 [Joint report on social protection and social inclusion](#) refers to wide recognition of “The need to develop or improve ways of collecting statistical data to improve the understanding of homelessness and housing exclusion in the various Member States...The lack of data is at least partly responsible for the lack of a consistent and robust **information and evaluation strategy** in most Member States.”

Indeed, any EU wide monitoring system would have to be based on robust national data collection systems. In this respect, the 2007 study on “Measurement of homelessness at EU level” is a very useful source of information with concrete proposals for improving the measurement of homelessness with all relevant stakeholders, namely ministries, national statistics institutes, homeless service providers and local authorities. We recommend that all countries take this into consideration when developing a national homeless strategy.

Recommendations

We recommend the following steps to be taken to start developing a framework for collecting EU statistics on homelessness (based on the recommendations of the 2007 study on Measuring homelessness at EU level):

- To take up the recommendation of the EU study on measuring homelessness regarding the development of a **Homelessness Monitoring Information Strategy** in every EU country. It is critical for the knowledge of NGOs to be at the centre of development of a national information strategy on homelessness.
- To appoint person at EU level to **monitor progress** towards the creation of Homelessness Information Monitoring Strategies in all EU countries.
- To adopt the proposed harmonised definition of homelessness of the EU Study specifically for developing a **database of homeless services** for every EU country in order to collect data on homeless households using homeless services every year.
- To recognise ETHOS as a **European definition** of homelessness and housing exclusion and collect data on all 13 operational categories, and to consider the different dimensions of homelessness and housing exclusion when carrying out cross-country comparisons of homelessness.
- To take up the recommendation of the EU Independent experts on social inclusion³ and the recommendations of the MPHASIS project which encourages EU countries to agree on a **common framework and common guidelines** for measuring, monitoring and reporting on homelessness and housing exclusion.

3. The use of EU-SILC to collect information on homelessness, through retrospective modules.

While developing the statistical capacity of Member States through the approach in section 2 on developing an EU-wide homelessness monitoring system, and while using the housing deprivation and overcrowding indicators to measure parts of housing exclusion (see common housing indicators above), it may also be interesting to investigate the potential of using modules on retrospective episodes of homelessness in EU-SILC household surveys.

Evidence shows that such modules have been used in different ways (in general household surveys or in specialised thematic surveys) and for different purposes at national or local level (for finding out about past episodes of homelessness, about reasons for homelessness or about duration of homelessness).⁴ Some modules use questions related to past episodes of rough sleeping, while other examples cover rough sleeping as well as other more hidden forms of homelessness and housing exclusion such as living temporarily with friends or family, threat of eviction, and living in dwellings unfit for habitation.

³ See report adopted in December 2009: <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/network-of-independent-experts/2009/homelessness-and-housing-exclusion>

⁴ See FEANTSA paper on retrospective modules for different examples: http://www.feantsa.org/files/AC/AC%20and%20EC%20Zaragoza%202007/retrospectivemodule_final_en.pdf



FEANTSA

The conceptual categories of the ETHOS typology provide a good framework for better understanding how these different living situations relate to homelessness, and can offer general guidelines on the type of living situations to integrate in questions on retrospective episodes of homelessness. Individual countries could then be encouraged to add subsets of questions adapted to their national context and use national definitions in relation to each situation.

Recommendations

For the purpose of integrating retrospective questions on homelessness in national household surveys or more specialised surveys on housing conditions, FEANTSA would suggest the following retrospective questions on homelessness to use in household surveys:

Have you experienced any of the following living situations during the last 10 years? If so, for how long were you in this situation?

- I have been obliged to stay with family or friends because of lack of resources to afford my own accommodation;
- I have stayed in an shelter or hostel for homeless people;
- I have slept rough (on the street, in shed, in public places) during at least 1 night because I had no other home to go to;
- I have lived in an institution (due to lack of any other housing option);
- I have stayed in a dwelling with no legal tenancy;
- I was asked to leave my parental home when under 18 years of age;
- I have had to leave my family home due to threat of violence;
- I have been threatened with eviction;
- I have lived in overcrowded conditions (involuntarily);
- I have lived in non-conventional forms of housing which were not fit for habitation;
- I have never been in any of these situations.

In addition, we would like to highlight some important issues to take into consideration in the preparation and use of retrospective questions:

- The *definitions* of living situations in retrospective survey questions have to be clarified, including the definition of different types of collective dwellings (shelters, temporary accommodation, hostels, institutions), the definition of non-conventional dwellings, the definition of notions such as “eviction” and “overcrowded conditions”;
- Given the different perceptions and interpretations of “homelessness” (wider or narrower) across Europe and even within a single country, it is best for comparability purposes not to mention the words “homeless” or “homelessness” in the questions, but rather to describe living situations which amount to forms of homelessness or housing exclusion;
- In order to allow for comparisons between countries, more information on the lengths of homelessness episodes would be required;
- All relevant agencies should be consulted for any preparation of retrospective modules on homelessness, including homeless service providers;
- In order to have relevant samples, retrospective measurement of homelessness should extend back over a significant period of time (at least 10 years);
- It is likely that any sample of formerly homeless people obtained from the use of a retrospective homelessness module is likely to under-represent people experiencing long-term homelessness;
- Such retrospective questions can in fact provide revealing data about people who consider themselves to be experiencing forms of homelessness and housing exclusion at the time of the survey;
- Information collected about past experiences of homelessness can also be useful for investigating characteristics of people with experience of homelessness and understanding homelessness pathways, and links between different forms of homelessness such as rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing and inadequate housing;
- The information gathered from such methods could also be useful in generating a sample of people with experience of homelessness which could then be studied further using either a one-off retrospective quantitative or qualitative survey. This is an ideal opportunity to study a group of people who have broken the cycle of homelessness, and would therefore be able to provide crucial information on ‘routes out’ of homelessness.

For more information, contact the FEANTSA office at liz.gosme@feantsa.org

Annex I: Key recommendations from the Study on measurement of homelessness at EU level

Recommendations for **national authorities**:

1. Prepare a national Homelessness Monitoring Information Strategy developed in consultation with all relevant Ministries and stakeholders.
2. Identify (or establish) a co-ordinating mechanism or agency for homelessness data collection.
3. Adopt the harmonised definition of living situations and homelessness from this report as a basic framework for data collection.
4. Adopt the set of standard core variables from this report and their definition as a basic set of variables to be employed in data collection.
5. Adopt a national definition of services for homelessness.
6. Establish and maintain a directory/database of services for homeless people.
7. Ensure that funding for homeless service providers requires the provision of basic anonymised data on clients and provide funding to facilitate this as necessary.
8. Establish a strategy for collection of data from service provider client registration systems.
9. Ensure added value of data collection for the services and homeless people.

The report also makes a number of overall recommendations for the **European Commission** for action at EU level:

1. Encourage Member States to develop in the framework of the streamlined EU strategy for social protection and social inclusion national strategies to combat homelessness.
2. Require Member States to identify progress reached with the development of national strategies and whether this incorporates a homelessness monitoring information strategy.
3. Monitor progress of Member States towards continuous client recording systems.
4. Encourage national statistics offices to adopt the harmonised definition of homelessness for data collection while recognising that alternative definitions may be used for policy purposes.
5. Encourage national statistics offices to play a coordination role in the collection of data on homelessness for use in EU level initiatives
6. Reduce the obstacles to achieving homeless information monitoring (e.g. through the use of funding under FP7, structural funds and European research programme).