

MEHOBEL

MEASURING HOMELESSNESS IN BELGIUM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY ‘MEASURING HOMELESSNESS IN BELGIUM’	7
RÉSUMÉ ‘LA MESURE DU SANS-ABRISME EN BELGIQUE’	11
ABBREVIATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS	13
1. INTRODUCTION	15
1.1. DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS	16
1.2. STRATEGIES TO FIGHT HOMELESSNESS.....	22
1.3. MEASURING HOMELESSNESS	24
1.4. THE NEED FOR A MONITORING STRATEGY.....	26
2. MEASURING HOMELESSNESS: INSPIRATION FROM EUROPE	28
2.1. COUNTS	28
2.2. SURVEYS.....	32
2.3. REGISTERS	34
2.4. CENSUS (MARKET SURVEYS).....	38
2.6. TRAJECTORIES.....	43
2.7. INSPIRING EUROPEAN PRACTICES.....	44
3. EXPLORATORY STUDY IN BELGIUM: METHODOLOGY	67
3.1. A HYBRID METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO ADDRESS A COMPLEX PHENOMENON	67
3.2. INTERVIEWS AND CONTACTS WITH DATA EXPERTS	68
3.3. FOCUS GROUPS WITH DATA COLLECTORS	69
3.4. FOCUS GROUPS WITH STREET LEVEL WORKERS IN AN URBAN CONTEXT	69
3.5. INTERVIEWS WITH STREET LEVEL WORKERS IN A MORE RURAL CONTEXT.....	69
3.6. EXPLORATION OF THE PREVALENCE OF HOMELESSNESS IN A (MORE) RURAL CONTEXT	70
3.7. MEETING WITH TARGET GROUP REPRESENTATIVES	70
3.8. INTERVIEWS WITH HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS	70
3.9. INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH HOSTEL EMPLOYEES	71
3.10. ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE WITH FLEMISH YOUTH HOSTELS.....	71
3.11. ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE IN BRUSSELS	71
3.12. EXPERT PANELS	71
4. POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES TO MEASURE HOMELESSNES IN BELGIUM	72
4.1. AT FEDERAL LEVEL	72
4.2. REGISTRATION AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS REGISTRATION: FLANDERS.....	91
4.3. REGISTRATION AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS REGISTRATION: BRUSSELS	101
4.4. REGISTRATION AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS REGISTRATION: WALLONIA.....	112
4.5. SWOT ANALYSIS REGISTRATION PRACTICES	120
5. SPECIFIC CHALLENGES	121
5.1. HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS	121
5.2. RURAL HOMELESSNESS.....	139
5.3. MIGRATION INTERTWINED WITH HOMELESSNESS	145
6. BUILDING BLOCKS TO MEASURE HOMELESSNESS	146
6.1. OVERVIEW TABLE.....	163
7. FROM BUILDING BLOCKS TO STRATEGY	169
7.1. GENERAL REMARKS FROM THE STAKEHOLDERS.....	169
7.2. POINTS OF ATTENTION FOR EACH BUILDING BLOCK.....	172
7.3. PROPOSAL FOR A BELGIAN STRATEGY.....	174
8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	181
9. REFERENCES	182
ANNEXES	
Annex I. Working paper. Estimating the homeless population, sampling strategies.	
Annex II. Working paper. More than a roof, a statistical profile of homeless people in Belgium	

Tables

Table I	Factors of vulnerability and risk of housing exclusion (Edgar, 2009)	15
Table II	ETHOS typology (www.feantsa.org)	20
Table III	ETHOS Light (Edgar et al., 2007, p. 66)	21
Table IV	Summary of the main approaches adopted to collect data on homelessness and housing exclusion	28
Table V	Number of partners involved in each Relais Social	37
Table VI	Housing outcomes for CTI, ICM and ACT interventions (in Benjaminsen, 2013)	48
Table VII	Overall development in homelessness 2009-2013, Strategy and non-Strategy municipalities (Benjaminsen, 2013)	49
Table VIII	Results from the Brussels city count of November 2016 and March 2017. Source: La Strada	105
Table IX	Activity of the Walloon Relais Sociaux (IWEPS, 2016)	112
Table X	Pros and cons of staying with friends and family (Robinson & Coward, 2003)	123
Table XI	Methodology concerning hidden homelessness	125
Table XII	Amount of homeless guests per year in Flemish Youth Hostels. Online survey, 15 answers	135
Table XIII	Average duration of stay of homeless in Flemish Youth Hostels. Online survey, 14 answers	136
Table XIV	Population info Diest, Scherpenheuvel-Zichem, Glabbeek, Bekkevoort and Tienen	140
Table XV	Homeless clients according to ETHOS Light amongst active client files in an exploratory study in intermediate rural PCSW	141
Table XVI	Amount of people living in ETHOS Light categories in an exploratory study in rural PCSW (Diest, Scherpenheuvel-Zichem, Bekkevoort, Glabbeek, Tienen)	142
Table XVII	ETHOS Light categories measured by the building blocks	146

Figures

Figure 2.1	The capture-recapture method	39
Figure 2.2	Note on website of http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/advice_topics/eviction	53
Figure 2.3	Number of applications and assessments as homeless in Scotland (Shelter Scotland, 2016)	54
Figure 2.4	Applications assessed in 2014-2015 by main reason for application: Scotland (Scottish Government, 2015)	55
Figure 2.5	Prior housing circumstances of applicants in Scotland in 2013-14 and 2014-15 (Scottish Government, 2015)	55
Figure 2.6	Action taken by local authority where applicant was assessed as homeless (Scottish Government, 2015)	56
Figure 2.7	The number of homeless people in Finland from 1987-2014 (Source: ARA, 2015)	60
Figure 2.8	Homelessness in Finland by demographics (Source: ARA, 2015)	61
Figure 2.9	Estimation of the amount of homeless in The Netherlands divided by origin (CBS 2016)	65
Figure 4.1	Detail selection Novaprima Form B. Source: https://primabook.mi-is.be/nl/home	75
Figure 4.2	Guest information in VLASTROV	91
Figure 4.3	Differences in the amount of registration between organizations that reach the homeless in Ghent	93
Figure 4.4	SWOT analysis registration of homelessness in Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia	119
Figure 5.1	Types of inadequate housing as found in the street counts of 2016 and 2017	132
Figure 5.2	Overview of living situations of respondents 2 weeks prior and the day after the street counts of 2016 and 2017	134
Figure 5.3	Map of Flemish Youth Hostels	135
Figure 5.4	Attitudes of Flemish Youth hostel personnel towards homeless guests. Online survey, 19 answers	137
Figure 5.5	Degree of urbanisation in Belgium according to Eurostat concept. Situation on 01.01.2008. Source: http://statbel.fgov.be/nl/statistieken/cijfers/leefmilieu/geo/typologie_gemeenten/	138
Figure 5.6	A view on the rural PCSW visited	141

SUMMARY ‘MEASURING HOMELESSNESS IN BELGIUM’

The goal of the MEHOBEL-study is the development of a full-term strategy to measure and monitor homelessness in Belgium. The fight against homelessness is one of the current priorities of the Belgian and European anti-poverty. Even though policy makers and practitioners in Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels region, this information is less comparable and, as a consequence, doesn't allow statements concerning homelessness at the Belgian level. In this study, homelessness is defined by means of the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS), which distinguishes between rooflessness, homelessness, insecure housing and in inadequate housing. During the research process, ETHOS Light is used as operational instrument. This version is developed as a research instrument and distinguishes between 6 types of homelessness.

The methodology is participative and consists of different phases. First, an analysis was made of international good practices and the possibilities to make use of current administrative databases and registration systems of social services. Second, focus groups consisting of practitioners, data experts, policy makers and homeless persons were organized.

The first important conclusion is that measuring homelessness can't be realised by means of one method or instrument. To monitor this social problem comprehensively, a combination of methods is needed. A second conclusion is to develop a monitoring strategy that realizes a balance between available results in the short time and a long-term strategy to map homelessness comprehensively. A third conclusion is that the monitoring strategy needs to be based on 13 crucial principles which were identified together with all relevant stakeholders.

The main principles are:

- (1) the monitoring strategy needs to be part of a national action plan to fight homelessness,
- (2) is based on a mixed methods approach so that no sub group is disregarded
- (3) all relevant stakeholders are involved in all steps of the monitoring process, including during the process of interpretation of the collected data
- (4) a clear engagement of all policy levels is needed to base future policies on the results of the monitoring strategy.
- (5) in any event, the collection of information has no negative effects on the homeless themselves

The Belgian monitoring strategy consists of five different methods

1. Organise a national point-in-time count

A two- or four-yearly point-in-time count is inspired by the European good practices. In the short time, such a count gives an insight into the number and profile characteristics of the homeless population. A minimal version counts on one specific day the users of homeless services (night shelters, residential services and temporary housing offered by the PCSW). In addition, specific information concerning their profile characteristics can be collected (based on a short questionnaire). A more ambitious approach also focuses on the users of low-threshold services and rough sleepers in the larger cities. Specific attention needs to be paid to more rural areas and persons staying temporarily with friends or family.

2. Produce yearly statistics concerning

- a. the total number of persons with a reference address
- b. the total number of persons and household that pay more than 40 % of their income to housing (EU SILC)
- c. the total number of persons and household with housing difficulties (EU SILC)
- d. the total number of judicial evictions
- e. the total number of persons on a waiting list for a social dwelling

3. Integrate ETHOS Light in all registration systems and administrative databases of services who interact with homeless persons (especially among the PCSW).

4. Adapt administrative databases to make the capture-recapture method feasible

5. Repeat the SILC-CUT study

SILC-CUT is a light version of EU SILC, better adapted to the collection of profile information in samples of excluded groups such as the homeless. These data are comparable to the key indicators resulting from SILC. A repetition every 4-5 years can help monitor shifts in the profile, living conditions and needs of the homeless, including the effects of targeted policy measures.

We recommend to set up a task force that is responsible for the operationalization of the monitoring strategy. The data collection needs to be coordinated by a research group together with the Interfederal Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service.

In a sub study, we also show that homelessness is not merely an urban phenomenon. Based on a qualitative analysis of 953 active client files in five more rural Public Centres for Social Welfare, 1 out of 13 social service users is homeless based on the ETHOS Light typology. More than half of them are 'hidden homeless': they don't sleep rough or stay in specific residential services, but stay temporarily with friends or family (the so-called couch sleepers or sofa surfers) or in non-conventional dwellings (a garage, a car, a garden house or a squat). This rural homeless population deserves more attention from policy makers and practitioners, who often underestimate their vulnerable situation. Also more research into hidden homelessness is needed.

SAMENVATTING ‘HET METEN VAN DAK- EN THUISLOOSHEID IN BELGIË’

Het doel van de MEHOBEL-studie is de ontwikkeling van een gedragen strategie om in België dak- en thuisloosheid op een uniforme wijze te meten en te monitoren. Dak- en thuisloosheid terugdringen is een van de prioriteiten in zowel de Belgische als Europese strijd tegen armoede. Ook al verzamelen beleids- en praktijkwerkers in Vlaanderen, Wallonië en het Brussels Gewest heel wat gegevens, de informatie is slechts beperkt vergelijkbaar en laat nauwelijks uitspraken toe over België. Deze studie definieert dak- en thuisloosheid aan de hand van de European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) die een onderscheid maakt tussen dakloosheid, thuisloosheid, onzekere huisvesting en ontoereikende huisvesting. Tijdens het onderzoeksproces is ETHOS Light het operationeel instrument. Deze Light versie is speciaal ontwikkeld als onderzoeksinstrument en maakt een onderscheid tussen 6 categorieën van dak- en thuisloosheid.

De onderzoeksmethodologie van deze studie is participatief. Eerst werd een analyse gemaakt van buitenlandse goede voorbeelden en werden de mogelijkheden van het beter benutten van administratieve databanken en bestaande registratiesystemen van organisaties onderzocht. Daarnaast vonden in de drie regio's gesprekken plaats met diverse stakeholders waaronder data-experten, praktijkwerkers, dak- en thuislozen en beleidsmakers.

Een eerste belangrijke conclusie is dat het onmogelijk is om dak- en thuisloosheid te meten aan de hand van één methode of instrument. Om de problematiek omvattend in kaart te brengen is dus een combinatie van instrumenten nodig. Een tweede belangrijke bevinding is de nood aan een strategie met een evenwicht tussen beschikbare resultaten op korte termijn en een langetermijnstrategie die dak- en thuisloosheid uitgebreid in kaart brengt. Een derde belangrijke conclusie is dat een monitoringsstrategie gestoeld is op een aantal principes die de gegevensverzameling in goede banen moet leiden.

Samen met de betrokken stakeholders identificeren we 13 cruciale principes. De belangrijkste zijn:

- (1) de strategie moet deel uitmaken van een nationaal actieplan
- (2) is gebaseerd op een mixed-methods benadering zodat geen groepen worden uitgesloten
- (3) betrek de verschillende stakeholders in elke stap van de monitoringstrategie. Zo ontvangen alle betrokken actoren feedback over de verzamelde gegevens
- (4) er is een duidelijk engagement van beleidsmakers om het beleid te stoelen op de resultaten van de monitoring
- (5) het verzamelen van gegevens mag nooit een negatieve impact hebben voor dak- en thuislozen.

Hieronder stellen we de vijf instrumenten voor die samen de Belgische monitoringsstrategie vormen.

1. Organiseer een nationale point-in-time telling

Een twee- of vierjaarlijks meetmoment in België, geïnspireerd op goede Europese praktijken. Dit geeft op korte termijn een zicht op het aantal en het profiel van de dak- en thuislozen.

Een minimumaanpak peilt op een welgekozen dag naar de gebruikers van diensten specifiek voor dak- en thuislozen (residentiele opvangcentra, nachtopvang en OCMW

doorgangswoningen). Een meer ambitieus plan brengt eveneens de gebruikers van laagdrempelige diensten en personen die op straat slapen in grote steden in beeld.

Het is noodzakelijk dat er eveneens aandacht uitgaat naar dak- en thuislozen in kleinere gemeenten, in het bijzonder naar personen die tijdelijk inwonen bij familie/vrienden.

2. Presenteer jaarlijkse statistieken omtrent

- a. Het aantal personen met een referentieadres
- b. Huisvestingsmoeilijkheden (EU SILC)
- c. Het aantal huishoudens die meer dan 40 % van hun inkomen aan huisvesting besteden (EU SILC)
- d. Het aantal gerechtelijke uithuiszettingen
- e. Het aantal personen op wachtlijsten sociale huisvesting

3. Start met de integratie van ETHOS Light in alle registratiesystemen van de diensten die werken met dak- en thuislozen (in het bijzonder bij de OCMW) en bij andere publieke diensten

4. Start met aanpassingen voor de capture-recapture methode

5. Herhaal SILC-CUT op geregelde tijdsintervallen

SILC-CUT was een lichte versie van EU-SILC, beter geschikt voor de verzameling van profielgegevens bij steekproeven van uitgesloten doelgroepen zoals dak- en thuislozen, en vergelijkbaar met kerngegevens van EU-SILC. Een herhaling om de 4-5 jaar kan helpen verschuivingen in het profiel, de leefomstandigheden en behoeften van daklozen te volgen, inclusief de effecten van gerichte beleidsmaatregelen.

We bevelen aan zo snel mogelijk een taskforce op te richten die deze monitoringsstrategie operationaliseert. De gegevensverzameling wordt het best gecoördineerd door een onderzoeksgroep in samenwerking met het Steunpunt tot bestrijding van armoede, bestaansonzekerheid en sociale uitsluiting.

In een deelstudie tonen we bovendien aan dat dak- en thuisloosheid niet enkel in steden voorkomt. In een studie bij 5 meer rurale OCMW analyseerden we samen met 27 sociaal werkers 953 actieve cliëntdossiers. In deze rurale OCMW vinden we dat **1 op 13 OCMW cliënten dak- of thuisloos** is volgens de ETHOS Light typologie. Meer dan de helft van deze cliënten is 'verborgen dak- of thuisloos': ze verblijven niet op straat of in specifieke opvangdiensten voor dak- en thuislozen, maar tijdelijk bij familie/vrienden (de zogenaamde sofa-slapers of –surfers) of in niet-conventionele ruimtes (zoals een garage, een auto, een tuinhuis, een kraakpand). Het is noodzakelijk dat deze omvangrijke kwetsbare groep meer aandacht krijgt, in de eerste plaats in de praktijk, die vaak hun kwetsbare situatie onderschat. Maar ook in de politiek en de wetenschap moet de kennis rond verborgen en rurale dak- en thuisloosheid op de agenda komen.

RÉSUMÉ 'LA MESURE DU SANS-ABRISME EN BELGIQUE'

L'objectif de l'étude MEHOBEL est le développement d'une stratégie globale de mesure et de suivi du sans-abrisme en Belgique. La lutte contre le sans-abrisme est une des priorités actuelles de la lutte contre la pauvreté en Belgique et en Europe. Malgré les efforts des décideurs et des travailleurs de terrain en Flandre, en Wallonie et en Région bruxelloise, les informations sont peu comparables et, en conséquence, ne permettent pas de se prononcer sur l'ampleur du sans-abrisme au niveau national. Dans cette recherche, le sans-abrisme est défini au moyen d'ETHOS (European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion), qui distingue les sans-toit, les sans-logement, les logements précaires et les logements inadéquats. Pour la recherche, ETHOS Light a été utilisé comme instrument opérationnel. Cette version a été développée comme outil de recherche et comporte 6 catégories de sans-abrisme.

La méthodologie est participative et a consisté en différentes phases. En premier lieu, une analyse des bonnes pratiques internationales a été réalisée, ainsi que des potentialités d'usage des bases de données administratives et des systèmes d'enregistrement des services sociaux. Dans un deuxième temps, des focus groups regroupant des personnes de terrain, des experts en données, des décideurs et des personnes sans-abri ont été organisés.

La première conclusion importante est que la mesure du sans-abrisme ne peut être faite avec un instrument ou une méthode unique. Pour un suivi global du problème, il est nécessaire de mettre en œuvre une combinaison de méthodes. Une deuxième conclusion est que la stratégie doit comporter un équilibre entre l'obtention de résultats à court terme et une vision à long terme qui envisage le sans-abrisme dans son intégralité. Une troisième conclusion est que la stratégie de suivi doit se baser sur 13 principes de base qui ont été identifiés avec l'ensemble des acteurs concernés.

Les principaux principes sont:

- (6) La stratégie de mesure et de suivi doit faire partie d'un plan d'action national de lutte contre le sans-abrisme
- (7) Est basé sur des méthodes mixtes assurant qu'aucun sous-groupe ne soit négligé
- (8) Toutes les parties prenantes sont associées à toutes les étapes du processus de suivi, y compris pendant la phase d'interprétation des résultats récoltés.
- (9) Un engagement clair de tous les niveaux de pouvoir est nécessaire pour baser les politiques à venir sur les résultats de la stratégie de mesure
- (10) En aucun cas la collecte d'informations ne peut avoir un impact négatif sur les personnes sans-abri elles-mêmes

La stratégie de mesure et de suivi belge consiste en cinq méthodes différentes.

1. Organiser un dénombrement ponctuel national

Un dénombrement tous les deux ans ou tous les quatre ans est un enseignement des bonnes pratiques européennes. A court terme, un tel dénombrement donne une visibilité sur le nombre et certaines caractéristiques de profil de la population sans-abri. Une version minimaliste se base sur le comptage, un jour donné, des usagers des services pour sans-

abri (abris de nuit, centres d'accueil et logements d'urgence des CPAS). En complément, des informations spécifiques sur leur profil peuvent être collectées (au moyen d'un questionnaire court). Une approche plus ambitieuse inclut aussi les usagers des services d'accueil à bas seuil et aux personnes dormant en rue dans les grandes villes. Une attention particulière doit être portée aux zones plus rurales et aux personnes logées temporairement chez des amis ou dans leur famille.

2. Produire des statistiques annuelles sur:

- a. Le nombre total de personnes ayant une adresse de référence
- b. Le nombre total de personnes et de ménages qui consacrent plus de 40 % de leur revenu au logement (EU SILC)
- c. Le nombre total de personnes et de ménages qui ont des difficultés de logement (EU SILC)
- d. Le nombre total d'expulsions judiciaires
- e. Le nombre total de personnes sur une liste d'attente de logement social

3. Intégrer ETHOS Light dans tous les systèmes d'enregistrement et les bases de données administratives de services en contact avec des sans-abri (en particulier dans les CPAS).

4. Adapter les bases de données administratives pour rendre praticable la méthode capture-recapture.

5. Répéter l'enquête SILC-CUT

SILC-CUT est une version light d'EU SILC, plus adaptée à la collecte d'informations de profil auprès d'échantillons de groupes exclus tels que les sans-abri. Ces données sont comparables aux indicateurs-clé de SILC. Une répétition tous les 4-5 ans peut aider à surveiller les changements dans le profil, les conditions de vie et les besoins des sans-abri, y compris les effets des mesures politiques ciblées.

Nous recommandons la mise en place d'un groupe de travail responsable de l'implémentation de la stratégie de mesure et de suivi. La collecte de données doit être coordonnée par un groupe de chercheurs en collaboration avec le Service interfédéral de lutte contre la pauvreté, la précarité et l'exclusion sociale.

Dans un volet annexe de la recherche, nous montrons aussi que le sans-abrisme n'est pas un phénomène purement urbain. A partir de l'analyse qualitative de 953 dossiers actifs dans cinq CPAS plus ruraux, 1 bénéficiaire sur 13 est sans-abri au sens de la typologie ETHOS Light. Plus de la moitié d'entre eux sont des « sans-abri cachés » : ils ne dorment ni en rue ni dans des centres d'hébergement, mais sont provisoirement chez des amis ou des parents (les dénommés « couch-surfers »), ou dans des logements non-conventionnels (garage, voiture, abri de jardin ou squat). Cette population sans-abri rurale mérite davantage d'attention de la part des décideurs politiques et des professionnels, qui sous estiment souvent leur vulnérabilité. Un complément de recherche sur le sans-abrisme caché est également nécessaire.

ABBREVIATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

Abbreviation	English term	Dutch term	French term
AMA	Federation of residential centers for homeless	Federatie van opvangtehuizen	Fédération des maisons d'accueil et des services d'aide aux sans-abri
CAW	Centres for general Welfare	Centrum algemeen welzijnswerk	-
CCRS	Central Client Record System	Centraal registratie systeem	Système de recueil central
CGG	Mental health center	Centrum Geestelijke Gezondheidszorg	
COCOF	French community commission	Franse gemeenschapscommissie	Commision communautaire francaise
	Combat poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service	Steunpunt tot bestrijding van armoede, bestaansonzekerheid en sociale uitsluiting	Service de lutte contre la pauvreté, la précarité et l'exclusion sociale
DUS	Social emergency service	Sociale urgentie dienst	Dispositif d'urgence sociale
EOH	European Observatory on Homelessness	-	-
ESS	European Statistical System	Europees Statistisch Systeem	Système Statistique Européen
ETHOS	European Typology of Homelessness and Social Exclusion	Europese Typologie voor dakloosheid en sociale uitsluiting	Typologie européenne de l'exclusion liée au logement
EU SILC	EU statistics on income and living conditions	EU statistiek van inkomens en levensomstandigheden	UE statistiques sur les revenus et les conditions de vie
FEANTSA	European Federation of National organisations working with the Homeless	-	-
FPS Interior	Federal Public Service Interior	FOD Binnenlandse Zaken	SPF Intérieur
FPS	Federal Public Service	FOD Federale Overheidsdienst	SPF Service Public Fédérale
FPS SI	Federal Public Service Social Integration	POD Maatschappelijke Integratie	SPP Intégration Sociale
GGC/COCOM	Common community commission	Gemeenschappelijke gemeenschapscommissie	Commussion communautaire commune
	Hidden homelessness	Verborgen dak- en thuisloosheid	Sans-abrisme caché
IPH	Scientific Institute of Public Health	WIV Wetenschappelijk Instituut Volksgezondheid	ISP Institut Scientifique de Santé Publique
ISIP	Individualized Social Integration Contract	GPMI Geindividualiseerd project maatschappelijke integratie	PIIS Project individualise d'integration sociale
IWEPS	Walloon Institute of Evaluation, Prospective Statistics and	Waals instituut voor de evaluatie, prospectie en statistiek	L'Institut Wallon de l'Evaluation, de la Prospective et de la Statistique

LOI/ILA	Individual reception initiatives	Lokaal Opvang Initiatief	Initiative Locale d'accueil
	Low-threshold centers	Laagdrempelige dagopvang zoals CAW inloopcentra	
MPD	Minimal Psychiatric Data	MPG Minimale Psychiatrische Gegevens	RPM Résumé Psychiatrique Minimum
MSOC/MASS	Medical Social care centers	Medisch sociaal opvang centrum	Maison d'Accueil socio-sanitaire
	National Register	Rijksregister	Registre National
NEO	National Employment Office	RVA Rijksdienst voor arbeidsvoorziening	ONEM Office national de l'emploi
PAAZ/SPHG	Psychiatric services in general hospitals	Psychiatrische Afdeling Algemeen Ziekenhuis	Services psychiatriques d'hôpitaux généraux
PCSW	Public Centre for Social Welfare	OCMW Openbaar centrum maatschappelijk welzijn	CPAS Centres Publics d'Actions Sociale
PPS SI	Public planning service Social Integration	POD Maatschappelijke Integratie	SPP Intégration Sociale
RIZIV/INAMI	National institute for health and disability insurance	Rijksinstituut voor ziekte- en invaliditeitsverzekering	Institut national d'assurance maladie-invalidité
RS	-	-	Relais Social
	Rural homelessness	Landelijke dak- en thuisloosheid	Sans-abrisme rurale
TDI	Treatment Demand Indicator	-	-
VG/VGC	Flemish community commission	Vlaamse gemeenschapscommissie	Commission communautaire flamande
WGC	Community health center	Wijkgezondheidscentrum	
WVG	Welfare, Public Health and Family	Welzijn Volksgezondheid en Gezin	-

1. INTRODUCTION

Homelessness is an extreme manifestation of poverty and social exclusion (EC, 2010). Not only does it reduce one's dignity as well as his productive potential, it is a waste of human capital. Often homelessness is caused by a complex interplay between structural, institutional, relational and personal factors (European Consensus Conference on Homelessness, 2010). Homelessness is a severe form of poverty, and low income is a key factor in the persistence of homelessness. Personal causes can be individual factors (lack of social support, poor health, relationship breakdown); family background (disputes, abuse, addiction problems) and institutional history (army, prison, care). Most common reasons are: the break-up of a relationship; the loss of a job leading to the repossession of a home or the inability to pay rent; an addiction and/or psychiatric problems.

Table I Factors of vulnerability and risk of housing exclusion (Edgar, 2009)

Cause	Factor of vulnerability	Comment
Structural	Economic processes	Effect on income, stability of employment
	Immigration, citizenship	Discrimination, access to social protection
	Housing market processes	Access to affordable/social housing
Institutional	Available mainstream services	Shortage of services to meet demand or care needs
	Allocation mechanisms	Inappropriate needs (spatial concentration, delivery procedures)
	Lack of co-ordination between existing mainstream services	Affects continuum of support
	Institutional procedures	Admissions, discharge procedures
Relationship	Family status	Single people more vulnerable
	Relationship situation	Abusive partners, step-parents
	Relationship breakdown	Death, divorce, separation
Personal	Disability/long-term illness	Includes mental health and learning disability
	Educational attainment	Low attainment
	Addiction	Alcohol, drugs, gambling
	Age/gender	Young/old, female
	Immigrant situation	Refugee status/recent arrival

Besides the personal factors, there are also structural causes of homelessness. One of them is poverty. Fifteen percent of the Belgian population is at risk of poverty (EU SILC, 2014). Another often cited structural factor is the lack of affordable housing. Ten percent of the Belgians live in a household that spends 40% or more of their equivalised disposable income on housing (EU SILC, 2014). The proportion of the population whose housing costs exceeded 40% of their [equivalised disposable income](#) is the highest for tenants who pay market price rents (38.1%) and still 13.3% for persons who can rent at reduced price (Eurostat, 2014). In Belgium, social housing makes up for only 6.5 % of the total housing stock (Pittini, Ghekière, Dijol, & Kiss, 2015), which is relatively low compared to neighbouring countries.

1.1. Definition of homelessness

There is no common global nor European definition on homelessness. There are legal definitions, varying from country to country. But also at national levels, definitions are not always clear-cut and organizations often put a slightly different emphasis. The United Nations use the generic term 'sans domicile fixe'. At the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Conference of European Statisticians in Geneva in 2009, the Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses defined homelessness into two broad groups: primary homelessness (or rooflessness) and secondary homelessness (persons with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodations including dwellings, shelters and institutions for the homeless or other living quarters; UN, 2009).

The definition of homelessness that dominates public perception is the one of 'street sleepers' or 'roofless'. Yet the group of homeless people is a lot more diverse. Numerous differing life stories can lead to homelessness often with very different trajectories that lead to homelessness. Chronical homeless with severe addictions or mental health problems are only a small part of the larger homeless group. It is still possible to be homeless if you have a roof over your head. For example people can experience a relationship breakdown causing them to temporarily couch surf with family or friends. Others stay for short or longer periods in hostels or hotel rooms, before or after a stay with friends or relatives or in homeless care. Others are living for short or longer periods in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g. a garage, a car).

Consequently, a variety of homelessness definitions can be found. Next we present the ETHOS typology to be used in this study and provide a short overview of definitions on homelessness used in Belgium. The ETHOS typology is also the definition that was agreed upon in the Cooperation agreement homelessness between the federal state, the regions and communities of 2014.

1.1.1 In Belgian law and homelessness organizations

LEGAL DEFINITION

A substantial part of help for homeless in Belgium is provided by the Public Centres for Social Welfare (PCSW; OCMW in Flanders and CPAS in Wallonia). Present in each of the 589 Belgian municipalities, they are responsible for the granting of social assistance benefits and provide general social support as well as a variety of financial support measures specifically for homeless such as housing benefit, installation premium and housing guaranty. They can also grant a reference addresses or offer people who seek help an integrated social integration project (GPMI/PIIS). In addition, several PCSW also have their own housing stock and can offer a person in need temporary housing. The definition of homelessness they use, is provided by the law of May 26th 2002 concerning the right for social integration. This federal/legal definition has a strong focus on housing. Here a homeless person is described as:

A person who does not have his own housing, who does not have the resources to provide this on his own and therefore is residing or staying temporarily in a home until housing is made available.

Next to the federal PCSW, a variety of other organizations offer help to homeless persons. These organizations differ from region to region and even in the already small regions, a different focus in definition can be found.

IN FLANDERS

For Flanders, next to the PCSW, 10 CAW (Centres for General Welfare) are the main providers of help for homeless. They exploit night shelters (mainly financed by the municipality or city), accommodation for homeless, day centres and they provide ambulant and floating social support. The CAW definition of a homeless person describes the personal, relational and social vulnerability (Van Menxel, Lescrauwaet, & Parys, 2003):

Homeless are people who are unable to acquire or retain a home due to financial-economic, social and / or psychological causes and circumstances

IN BRUSSELS

The policy about homelessness is a shared responsibility of the Joint Community Commission (GGC/CCC), the French Community Commission (COCOF) and the Flemish Community Commission (VGC). Their competence on personal matters, health and welfare, is linked to activities and organisational matters. The bilingual GGC/CCC is competent as a consultation and coordination body between the French Community and Flemish community. Only the GGC/CCC can take measures applying directly to individuals and institutions which are not attached to one of the Communities. The Government Brussels -Capital Region has regional competences as housing and employment,

Due to this fragmented policies we note different definitions of the users of services for homeless and homeless persons:

- The target group for the residential services funded by the COCOF is defined as adults, unaccompanied minors, underage mothers, pregnant minors and their children with relational, social and material vulnerability, who are unable to live an independent life.¹
- The definition for the CAW in Flanders is also applicable for the Brussels CAW
- The GGC/COCOM refers to the users of the ambulant and residential services as adults in difficulty². The policy paper on homelessness announces a global approach in cooperation with the VGC, COCOF and the Brussels-Capital Region³. For the first time homeless persons are defined according to the categories of ETHOS Light. A corresponding legislative proposal will be submitted in 2018.
- The housing policy includes next to public and private (SVK) social housing measures to create and to fund organisations 'integration through housing' and transitional supported accommodation, *solidair wonen* (co-housing in solidarity), intergenerational housing. Extra but limited priority access to social housing can be given to vulnerable households, clients of PCSW and female victims of domestic violence. The public and private real estate agencies can sign covenants with residential centers for homeless persons and housing first projects⁴.
- A specific measure of the Brussels-Capital Region is the additional re-housing premiums (housing allowance + installation premium) to help homeless persons to get installed in their new home and to pay the rent. Only homeless persons with an attestation of the PCSW can benefit this re-housing premium⁵.

¹ Décret du 27 avril 2017 du Gouvernement francophone bruxellois modifiant le décret du 27 mai 1999 relatif à l'octroi de l'agrément et de subventions aux maisons d'accueil

² Ordonnantie van 7 november 2002 van de Gemeenschappelijke Gemeenschapscommissie betreffende de centra en diensten voor bijstand aan personen

³ Algemene beleidsnota inzake hulp aan daklozen van 22 oktober 2015

⁴ Brusselse Huisvestingscode:

<http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/eli/ordonnantie/2003/07/17/2013A31614/justel#LNK0044>

⁵ <http://huisvesting.brussels/premies-en-steunmaatregelen/herhuisvestingstoelage-dakloze>

IN WALLONIA

The Walloon policy about homelessness mainly provides, since 2003⁶, the possibility that dedicated structures called “Relais sociaux” be created in partnership between public (mainly CPAS, but also hospitals and other relevant organisms) and associative bodies for dealing with “deep precarity” and “people in situation of exclusion” (*personnes en grande précarité sociale; personnes en situation d'exclusion*). A “Relais Social” can be either urban or “intercommunal” in rural areas. Actually, seven Relais sociaux have been organized in urban areas only. Their role is to coordinate actions toward people in precarity along 4 axes: night shelters; day care; social urgency, street work. While they are the main tool for fighting homelessness, their public is wider and there's thus no specific definition of homelessness in the relevant legal texts.

However, priority access to social housing is ranked following criteria which include homelessness as high priority cases. Homelessness was initially not defined, as it was up to the relevant local PCSW (CPAS) to deliver an attestation of homelessness. In 2007, the Minister answered a MP question with a draft of definition where the homeless person was, *among other*, in one of the following situations: hosted in an accommodation for homeless; compelled to leave an institution; repatriated indigent and without housing; sleeping in public space. In the edict of December 19 2008⁷, guidelines for CPAS granting the homelessness attestation had a “homeless household” defined as:

a household who, during the month preceding the renting of the social housing, either:

- *had no right of occupation of a housing (sleeping at hotel, precarious occupation of housing, roofless,...);*
- *was hosted temporarily or exceptionally by: persons (family, friends,...), institutions (accommodation for homeless, prison,...), temporary accommodation (shelter, transit housing,...);*
- *or, while having no right of occupation of a housing, was hosted for social, medical or psychic reasons in a dedicated institution (psychiatric hospital, protected housing, institution for disable, for children,...);*
- *or a household who, during the three months preceding the renting of the social housing lived in a holiday housing in a leisure area.*

People leaving a housing because of domestic violence are also listed, not under the “homeless” definition, but rather under the larger definition of social emergency, as a separate category.

While this definition is quite detailed and includes people temporarily hosted by family or friends, its validity is limited to a priority ranking for access to social housing and not for other rights or services.

1.1.2 In Europe: the ETHOS typology

The development of the ETHOS typology⁸ in 2005 by FEANTSA⁹ has been a great step forward in finding a common language. At the 2010 European Consensus Conference,

⁶ Décret relatif à l'insertion sociale du 17 juillet 2003; Arrêté du Gouvernement wallon relatif à la reconnaissance et au subventionnement des relais sociaux du 29 janvier 2004.

⁷ Arrêté du Gouvernement wallon modifiant l'arrêté du Gouvernement wallon du 6 septembre 2007 organisant la location des logements gérés par la Société wallonne du Logement ou par les sociétés de logement de service public

⁸ European Typology of Housing and Social exclusion

⁹ European Federation of National Organizations working with the homeless

stakeholders and the European Commission agreed on the ETHOS definition for homelessness and housing exclusion (EC, 2013). This definition is derived from the physical, social and legal interpretation of what a 'home' means. These domains are used as a conceptual structure to frame the reflections about the measurement of homelessness. The ETHOS framework does not refer to individuals but to living situations. Four living circumstances as homelessness or extreme forms of housing exclusion are distinguished: **roofless**, **houseless**, **insecure housing** and **inadequate housing** (see Table II).

ETHOS provides a framework on homelessness which is useful not only for debates and transnational exchange but also for the monitoring and measuring of homelessness. It is also the guiding framework in Belgium to conceptualise homelessness, as stated by the Agreement of Cooperation between the Federal State, the Communities and the Regions. However, the ETHOS framework has also been subject of criticism (examples see Amore, Baker, Howden-Chapman, 2011). A first one is that it provides only a static look on the nature of homelessness. In real life, persons don't fall under one ETHOS category but jump from one category to another. 'Belonging' to one category can be either for short or longer periods. One person can sleep rough one night, find a couch with a friend for the next two nights, and then sleep again in a shelter for some nights. Another person can live in housing for homeless several months after leaving prison.

A second objection is the nationally different interpretation for certain ETHOS categories. European studies demonstrate how homelessness is perceived and addressed differently in the EU Member States, hence there exists considerable variations in how homelessness is defined (Busch-Geertsema, Benjaminsen, Filipovič Hrast, & Pleace, 2014). Whereas ETHOS category 1 (people living rough) and 2 (people in emergency accommodation) are widely agreed upon, other categories are more controversial (Busch-Geertsema, 2010; Pleace & Bretherton, 2013):

- Should people threatened with homelessness be classified as homeless?
 - People due to be released from institutions (6)
 - People living under threat of violence (10)
- Should homeless people who have been housed still be classified as homeless?
 - People receiving longer term support due to homelessness (7)
- Should people in insecure housing be classified as homeless?
 - People living temporarily with family and friends (8.1)
 - People living in mobile homes (11.1)
 - People living in non-conventional buildings (11.2)
 - People living in temporary structures (11.3)
- Should women in services related to domestic violence be classified as homeless?
 - People in women's shelter (4)
- Should specific accommodation for immigrants be included?
 - People in accommodation for immigrants (5)

These categories are included in some countries and excluded in others.

However, taking into account these restrictions, ETHOS is widely accepted and used in European countries, as the use of this common framework has many advantages. It has proved to be a convincing tool to stimulate coordinated national policy developments. Hereby including promoting access to housing and preventing homelessness (Edgar, 2012).

Table II *ETHOS* typology (www.feantsa.org)

	Operational category		Living situation		Definition
ROOFLESS	1	People living rough	1	Public space/external space	Living in the streets or public spaces without shelter that can be defined as living quarters
	2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Night shelter	People with no place of usual residence who make use of overnight shelter, low threshold shelter
HOUSELESS	3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3.1 3.2 3.3	Homeless hostel Temporary accommodation Transitional supported accommodation	Where the period of stay is intended to be short term
	4	People in women's shelter	4.1	Women's accommodation shelter	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 5.2	Temporary accommodation/reception centres Migrant workers accommodation	Immigrants in reception or short term accommodation due to their immigrant status
	6	People due to be released from institutions	6.1 6.2 6.3	Penal institution Medical institution Children's institutions/homes	No housing available prior to release Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing No housing identified (e.g. by 18 th birthday)
	7	People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)	7.1 7.2	Residential care for older homeless people Supported accommodation for formerly homeless people	Long stay accommodation with care for formerly homeless people (normally more than one year)
	8	People living in insecure accommodation	8.1 8.2 8.3	Temporarily with family/friends No legal (sub) tenancy Illegal occupation of land	Living in conventional housing but not the usual place of residence due to lack of housing Occupation of dwelling with no legal tenancy illegal occupation of dwelling Occupation of land with no legal rights
	9	People living under threat of eviction	9.1 9.2	Legal orders enforced (rented) Repossession orders (owned)	Where orders for eviction are operative Where mortgagee has legal order to re-possess
INADEQUATE	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
	11	People living in temporary/non-conventional structures	11.1 11.2 11.3	Mobile homes Non-conventional building Temporary structure	Not intended as place of usual residence Makeshift shelter, shack or shanty Semi-permanent structure hut or cabine
	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

On behalf of the measurement of homelessness at EU level, a light version of ETHOS (see Table III) was developed in 2007. This version is compatible with recommendations of European Statisticians for surveys and statistical research.

Table III ETHOS Light (Edgar et al., 2007, p. 66)

Operational category		Living situation		Definition
1	People living rough	1	Public space/external space	Living in the streets or public spaces without 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 accommodate	
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

This Light version focusses on the more easily agreed upon categories of roofless and houseless and partially redefines them. Categories on inadequate and insecure housing are not included in this Light version. This has several advantages for the measurement of homelessness (Pleace & Bretherton, 2013).

A first advantage of ETHOS light is the more explicit mentioning of 'hidden homeless' (ETHOS Light 5 and 6). In ETHOS, these categories were labelled as inadequate housing. This group of people living with family/friends and in non-conventional dwellings is assumed to be an extensive part of the homeless group. As staying with friends and family is often a first step into homelessness. A step to shelters and other types of social care is often taken when no more options can be found in one's own social network. So only a part of those who stayed with friends will eventually end up in services for the homeless. A variety of terminology is used when referring to this group: hidden homeless, doubled up, couch sleepers, etc. It is a group that should not be forgotten in homeless research, because their situation is potentially very vulnerable. Their 'official' address is uncertain, what can be important in order to receive social benefits such as unemployment or pension. Placing their address (even temporarily) with family or friends can cause troubles in the household where they stay, as people fear bailiffs, a reduction of the own benefits, or problems with their (social) landlord.

Disadvantages of ETHOS light is that it pays less attention to people living under the threat of eviction and people in accommodation for immigrants. In Belgium this means collective federal Fedasil centers as well as individual reception initiatives (LOI/ILA) housing provided by PCSW.

1.1.3 In MEHOBEL

Following FEANTSA guidelines and the Cooperation agreement on homelessness between the federal state, regions and communities of 2014, it is agreed upon in the guidance committee and concluded together with the user organisations of this project to make use of the **ETHOS-typology**. All parties agree that making use of the complete ETHOS framework is necessary to keep a broad view on homelessness, not only focussing on the most vulnerable and most visible groups. Homeless people are people in poverty who don't have (the capacity to provide) their own housing. Recommendations will be made for each type of homelessness and housing exclusion.

In addition, **ETHOS Light** will be used **as an operational tool**. Choosing ETHOS Light for particular parts of this project has above all a practical ground. The focus on roofless and houseless is more manageable, for practical reasons as well as budget expenditure. In addition, as ETHOS Light was developed specifically for research hand statistical purposes, using this version allows to join in the work of the transnational research carried out by the European Observatory on homelessness. Yet the researchers decided to add 'people living under the threat of eviction (9) to ETHOS Light. As this is an important group in homelessness prevention strategies, for example in the Flemish Strategy against homelessness.

1.2. Strategies to fight homelessness

1.2.1 In Belgium

To date, there is no integrated national homelessness strategy in Belgium, even though the fight against homelessness is one of the four main priorities of the current **Belgian action plan on poverty reduction**. At Federal level, homelessness was included in the National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion, and is integrated into the 2012 National Reform Programme in the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy. In 2009, the Interfederal Center for Combating Poverty devoted the second part of their biannual poverty report to the fight against homelessness.

Even though a national strategy against homelessness is still lacking, the first steps in that direction have been taken. One step forward was the **Cooperation agreement homelessness** between the federal state, the regions and communities concluded on May 12th 2014¹⁰. This agreement decides upon the role and responsibilities of the federal government, regional governments, provincial and local level. Cooperation and structural dialogue between the various levels is to become standard. Accompanied by clear agreements on common efforts and in active dialogue with those directly involved and the organizations on the ground. Based on this list, an inter-ministerial conference will ensure follow-up and implementation of the agreement. The working group will also coordinate the data collection and exchange at various levels. The Cooperation Agreement also describes arrangements for winter shelters for the homeless. All parties are to make particular efforts so that each homeless person can have a place to sleep and / or social assistance to during the winter period (November 1st to March 31st - extension possible).

¹⁰ http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/mopdf/2014/11/10_2.pdf#Page4

IN FLANDERS

A third regional anti-poverty plan was launched for 2015-2019. The **Flemish Action Plan Poverty Reduction** (Vlaams Actieplan Armoedebestrijding-VAPA) was concretized in 2015 aiming for a preventive and housing-led policy for Flanders. Policies are written out on the basis of fundamental social rights such as: participation, income, family, education, leisure time, work, living and health. With regard to homelessness, VAPA aims at preventing homelessness and provide qualitative housing for those who become homeless. Social partners who commented on VAPA ask the government to set a main goal and clear priorities, foresee realistic budgets and apply poverty checks consequently (SERV, 2015; Vlaamse Woonraad, 2016).

Recently, a first Flemish **Global Homelessness action plan** was developed for **2017-2019** by a multi-stakeholder steering group. Based on the strategic goals set by FEANTSA, the Flemish action plan against homelessness formulates four strategic goals to end homelessness:

1. Prevent evictions
2. Avoid youth homelessness
3. Tackle chronic homelessness
4. Develop an integrated homelessness policy

For every goal, several sub goals and corresponding actions are described. Follow-up of actions and results is provided by a collective homelessness platform set up by a diversity of Flemish housing and welfare actors. Monitoring and evaluation of the goals is foreseen as part of the plan.

IN BRUSSELS

The first Brussels action plan on homelessness (May 2005)¹¹ aims to reorganize the homeless sector according the results and the recommendations of the research by GERME on the issue of homelessness in the Brussels Region, January 2001. One of the objectives that was realized is the creation of la Strada.

The policy paper on homelessness (October 2016)¹² announces a second action plan and legislation on homelessness. A corresponding legislative proposal will be submitted in 2018. This new attempt to restructure the homeless sector has as general goals:

1. Introduction of ETHOS and ETHOS Light to define homelessness
2. Update of the legal framework to include day care center, night shelters, housing first and 'house hunting' to support homeless persons and services
3. Strengthen the cooperation with the Brussels PCSW's
4. Creation of a regional public institution for central orientation of homeless persons, coordination of homeless services and research on homelessness
5. Common registration tool for electronic client files based on national number to share client information with all relevant services and field workers

¹¹ An initiative of the GGC in agreement with the COCOF and the VGC.

¹² https://www.lastrada.brussels/portail/images/PDF/notes/20151120_NoteDePolitiqueGenerale.pdf
https://www.lastrada.brussels/portail/images/PDF/notes/20151022_DaklozenAlgemeenBeleidsnota.pdf

IN WALLONIA

In July 2014, the Walloon Government designated the Walloon anti-poverty network. The aim of this network is to strengthen the dialogue with the poorest thanks to a working plan assessed on annual basis. Besides this, a coordinating committee was set up to fight against over-indebtedness.

The 2015-2019 “Plan for the fight against poverty”¹³ was the Government’s declaration of policy in this domain. It addresses, as first chapter, housing issues, including access to housing, creation of a common pool of renting guarantees, and aims to extend the function of “capteur logement”, i.e. persons in charge of helping precarious people in their seek for adequate housing. However, the plan doesn’t deal explicitly with homelessness nor states an intention of specific actions.

The change of government majority in 2017 didn’t impact the existing plan at this date, however the policy measures announced by the Minister-President in October 2017¹⁴ in relation with fighting poverty (cancellation of TV tax, reduction of inheritance taxes, tax reduction for student housing) are even further away from specifically tackling homelessness.

1.2.2 In Europe

The past decade, remarkable progress has been made concerning developing national strategies against homelessness. In 2009, Edgar published an overview of ten strategies of European countries, listing their strategic objectives and targets. In his analysis, he describes how social democratic welfare regimes such as Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark have been particularly good at developing national strategies against homelessness. With Ireland and the UK, the liberal welfare regimes also have been putting this topic high on the policy agenda. In continental Europe, policy attention for homeless is steadily increasing. Service provision for homeless people is already relatively extensive and provided for by a legislative framework. In several countries, national legislation is in place to set out the obligations of municipalities in terms of social service provision. Yet designing comprehensive strategies against homelessness seems to be taking more time. Starting with the Netherlands, Portugal and France, we now see that also Spain, Luxembourg and Czech Republic have developed national homelessness strategies.

For more details on the national strategies against homelessness, we refer to the FEANTSA website where country fiches are available¹⁵. Fiches are produced by national experts and updated annually. Almost all European countries are represented.

1.3. Measuring homelessness

Producing reliable information on the number and profile of homelessness is a crucial part of a national action plan. This allows to monitor and to evaluate the effectiveness of a national policy program and specific initiatives to resolve homelessness.

¹³ Plan Wallon de lutte contre la pauvreté, Gouvernement wallon, 10/09/2015.

¹⁴ <http://borsus.wallonie.be/home/presse--actualites/articles/publications/tous-unis-pour-lelimination-de-la-pauvrete.publicationfull.html>

¹⁵ <http://feantsa.org/spip.php?article853&lang=en>

Yet when it comes to measuring homelessness, plenty of different terminology is used. We name some:

- Measuring homelessness
Used when looking at the extent, dimensions, quantity of homelessness, ascertained especially by comparison with a standard. This will sometimes be similar to counting and aims to provide an estimate of the number of homeless.
- Stock data
The amount of homeless persons at a point given in time
- Flow data
The amount of people who have become homeless (inflow) or those who ceased to be homeless (outflow) over a given time period
- The prevalence number
The number of people who have experienced homelessness at some point during a given time period, for example in the past 10 years.
- Monitoring homelessness
Used to observe and check the progress of homelessness, to maintain regular surveillance.

Studies mention that a part of homelessness is hidden from the public and social welfare services. They are often referred to as the dark number. Notwithstanding their invisibility, this is assumed to be a rather large group, and therefore should not be forgotten when measuring homelessness. Another expression of a specific form of homelessness is hidden homelessness: several terms appear when talking about this group of homeless such as dark number, hidden homelessness, couch sleepers... The dark number is a measurement issue, referring to all those who don't appear in counting and registration systems. Whereas in this study, 'hidden homelessness' refers specifically to a specific form of homelessness, namely those temporarily staying with family and friends (ETHOS Light 6). Yet sometimes hidden homelessness is used to refer to homelessness in rural areas, indicating those unseen and hidden from social services. Another group that is often hidden from services are undocumented migrants as they often have no or less rights to shelter than the local population. Glasser, Hirsch and Chan (2014) describe following challenges for measuring hidden homelessness:

- Mobility
- Tenuous attachment
- Not wanting to be found
- Pretending to be housed
- Usual address as a limited concept

Attention for the measurement of homelessness is still quite recent. A first attempt to estimate this number was made by Avromov in the mid-1990s, who was at that time research coordinator of the European Observatory on Homelessness. Twenty years later, still no official European statistics on homeless exist. Yet in recent years, significant progress was made. Several European countries have been or are busy with the development of ways to measure and monitor their homeless population. An action that has been promoted by the European commission through the funding of the MPHASIS (Mutual Progress on Homelessness through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems) project in 2009. At international level, the UN is promoting national population and housing censuses.

In 2014, the European Observatory on Homelessness executed a study in order to get a better view on the 'Extent and Profile of homelessness in European Member States' (Busch-Geertsema, et al., 2014). For this, they asked for the collaboration of 15 EU Member States experts on homelessness from following countries: Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK. In the report, the authors give an overview of the methodology used in the respective countries to measure homelessness.

In European countries where (some) data on homelessness is available, data show that homelessness is on the rise (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2014). Possible causes of this rise are: socio-economic changes and policy-related changes such as the effects of the recent financial and economic crisis (Minnery, 2007; Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010), austerity measures (Loopstra et al., 2015; FEANTSA, 2011), the extensiveness of the welfare state (Benjaminsen & Andrade, 2015), various kinds of migration processes (Pleace, 2010), the lack of affordable dwellings (Pittini, et al., 2015). Looking more specific at care for the homeless, Busch-Geertsema (2010) adds to this list: shortage in customised care for homeless, lack of cooperation between services and discharge procedures from residential institutions.

1.4. The need for a monitoring strategy

Measuring homelessness is often a controversial debate on local, regional and national level (Busch-Geertsema, 2010). The fight against homelessness is one of the four main priorities of the Belgian action plan on poverty reduction. Although recent efforts were made on local and regional level to measure homelessness such as the Brussels city count, the baseline measurement in Flanders, the Brussels central client registration system (CCRS), the harmonization of registration by the Walloon Relais Sociaux, a nationally coordinated monitoring system is still lacking. Among other reasons, this is partially caused by the complex division of responsibilities between the national, regional and local level (Hermans, 2012; Robeyns, Demaerschalk, & Hermans, 2012; Demaerschalk & Hermans, 2010; Nicaise et al, 2009).

This research project has a policy-oriented and a scientific goal. On the one hand, we want to develop a methodology to measure and monitor homelessness in Belgium. On the other hand, we want to contribute to the growing evidence base concerning measuring and monitoring homelessness, and more specifically we aim to develop innovative approaches to measure the dark number of homeless people, to produce stock and flow data and to integrate the lived experience of homeless people into the monitoring strategy.

We distinguish between four sub-goals:

- (1) To review the scientific evidence base concerning measuring and monitoring homelessness. Based on this study, four national good practices are selected. The applicability of these national strategies for Belgium is a crucial point.
- (2) To analyse the current measurement and monitoring strategies in Belgium. This analysis will zoom in on administrative databases (such as CBSS, NOVAPRIMA, Belgian Census 2011, EU SILC CUT) as well as registration systems of services for the homeless.
Special attention will be paid to the possibilities of linking databases and the use of a unique client identifier.
- (3) To develop methodologies for the measurement of hidden homelessness (also known as the dark number). A part of this work package is to study the possibilities of the

capture-recapture technique. Policy makers and practitioners will be involved to bring into light the extent and accessibility of this phenomenon. Special attention will be paid to the experiences of homeless persons with data collection and the accessibility of services.

- (4) To develop and validate a Belgian homelessness monitoring strategy.

2. MEASURING HOMELESSNESS: INSPIRATION FROM EUROPE

Different methods exist for measuring homelessness. A summary of those methods is presented in Table IV. Next, the different approaches are handled in more detail, together with examples of the methods used in Belgium in recent years. The chapter is completed with a description of four inspiring practices from Denmark, Scotland, Finland and The Netherlands.

Table IV Summary of the main approaches adopted to collect data on homelessness and housing exclusion

Approach	Method	Focus	In Belgium
Counts	National homeless counts	1 or more ETHOS categories	Point-in-time count
	Capital city counts	Point-in-time (stock)	Brussels
	Local authority counts	On extent	Baseline measurement Flanders
Surveys	Sample surveys	All ETHOS categories	SILC-CUT
	Local authority surveys	On profile	Household survey Flanders
	Housing market surveys	Point-in-time (stock) Infrequent	EU SILC
Registers	Municipal (client-based)	Homeless services	CCRS Brussels
	Service provider	Social welfare services	Relais Sociaux Wallonia
	NGO (client-based)	On profile Prevalence, flow (stock)	
Census	National counts	Administrative data bases	Census 2011
Estimates	Capture-recapture	Administrative data bases	Feasibility part of this project
Trajectories	Longitudinal follow up	On trajectories Service use Inflow and outflow	Zonder (t)huis Flanders

As a result of our scientific literature review, a summary of existing methods is presented in the table below with examples of current registration practices in Belgium.

Through the use of all the above methods, different types of quantitative information on homelessness can be collected.

- Size population (number, size of a specific group)
- Profile (characteristics of a group such as age, sex, income)
- Trajectories (follow-up of a certain group through time)

The measurement of the impact and duration of trajectories are amongst the most recent developments.

2.1. Counts

Some European countries carry out periodic large-scale homeless counts in a specific period. Examples can be found in Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Poland, Spain, and Sweden.

Counts differ on several points. A first difference is the **duration** of the count. Some counts are done in one day (e.g the street count in Brussels is done even in one hour), others on longer terms such as a week (e.g the count in Denmark) or two weeks (e.g the baseline measurement in Flanders). A second difference is the **geographical size** of the count. Some counts are done nationally (e.g Finland), whereas others are carried out at the level of a local authority. A third difference is the **recurrence** of the counts. Some European countries carried out one single survey such as Italy and Portugal. Whereas other countries have been organizing them on annual (e.g. Finland) or bi-annual basis (e.g. Denmark). A fourth difference

is the **focus** that can be merely on extent (e.g. Brussels) or also on profile (e.g. Denmark). A fifth difference is to what extent attention is devoted to the **inclusion of hard to reach groups** (such as hidden homeless) in the count and the methods used to cover this.

More recently, counts are combined with a statistical method to estimate the size of the homeless group. One example is the capture-recapture method. In this survey, a specific sampling method is used to collect a first sample group, for example by contacting the first predetermined amount of people at a service provider. In a subsequent survey, the same method is repeated. This method will be investigated in further on in this chapter.

In their report on the 'Extent and Profile of homelessness in European Member States' (Busch-Geertsema, et al., 2014) the authors also give an overview on the countries that organize counts to measure homelessness:

- **Finland**
Housing Market Survey since 1987. Study is conducted by ARA, Housing Finance and Development Center of Finland. Each municipality is asked to report the extent of homelessness the 15th of November each year (see further on in this chapter)
- **Denmark**
Biannual national count since 2007 by SFI Danish National Centre for Social Research, on behalf of the Ministry of Children, Gender Equality, Integration and Social Affairs. The count is extended service based also including other (than homelessness) social services and local authorities. Organizations fill out a two page individual questionnaire for each homeless person they are in contact with during a count week. High quality and response rate. (see further on in this chapter)
- **Sweden**
National homelessness count in 1993, 1999, 2005 and 2011. Counts are comprehensive but infrequent.
- **Hungary**
Annual count on February 3rd since 1999. Self-completion questionnaires, voluntary participation by users of services.
- **Germany**
BAG W produces an annual estimate of homelessness prevalence in Germany, including all ETHOS light categories and also an assessment of hidden homelessness. This estimate is based on an extrapolation from an original study in 1992.
- **France**
Homelessness surveys are conducted by the National Statistical Institute (INSEE) and the National Institute for Demographic Studies.

An often heard disadvantage of point in time counts is the overrepresentation of long-term homeless. As counts are largely based on the collaboration of services, those not in contact with services remain uncouned. An important and assumingly large groups is the one that tends to make more often use of informal arrangements (such as staying temporarily with family/friends).

2.1.1 Illustration: street count in Brussels

Since 2008, la Strada organises a biannual point-in-time count (2010, 2014, 2016/2017) to understand the nature and scope of homelessness and the needs of homeless people in the Brussels Region. The methodology is a combination of 3 different methods to cover 7 of the 13 categories of the ETHOS typology.

- **A street count** to estimate the number of people sleeping in the streets or public places (1) carried out between 23pm and 24pm in November before the start of the winter emergency plan.
- **A data collection** of people staying at that same moment in: night shelters (2), shelters and accommodation for homeless women, men and (one-parent) families (3, 4), supported accommodation for formerly homeless people (7), people living in temporary/non-conventional structures (11) and people living in unfit housing as squats (12)
- **Interviews** (2 weeks before and the day after) with people using day shelters, social restaurants to collect information on the different situations of hidden homelessness

The point-in-time count is organised by la Strada but carried out in collaboration with the service providers for homeless people and stakeholders or volunteers from closely related sectors as the general public and private welfare services, physical and mental health care, migration, poverty, disability, addiction, prisoner integrated services, youth assistance, religious communities and NGO's as the Belgian Red Cross and Doctors of the World. Police, local authorities and security and prevention services are officially informed. The involvement of public transports companies is important because most rough sleepers are counted in the vicinity of the 3 railway stations or subway stations.

La Strada appeals to the experience and knowledge of formerly homeless people and of social workers and volunteers of the stakeholders to:

- identify the locations of rough sleepers at night and occupied dwellings unfit for habitation. The objective is to focus the street count on priority locations to enhance the quality of the data and estimation.
- participate as volunteer at the street count. To cover the territory of the Brussels Region at least 170 volunteers are required.
- report the numbers of people staying that night at the different shelters and temporary accommodations for homeless people and other temporary accommodations.
- support or participate at interviews of users of daycare centres to collect information about hidden homelessness living with family or friends and in non-conventional structures or unfit housing.

The collaboration is based on respect for the privacy of the homeless people and the confidentiality of the collected data. Information on the location of squats can be political sensitive and people living with family or friends could be accused of social fraud. La Strada insist that all data collected is only to be reported to one of their researchers for the analysis of the extent and profile of homelessness in the region on that specific moment. All stakeholders are invited to the presentation of the first analysis and validate the results.

The point-in-time count is considered as a collective project of the homeless sector and other stakeholders. The participation is voluntary but and until now comprehensive. But the mobilisation of volunteers and the data collection in preparation of the street count is time

consuming and becomes with every edition more difficult. As a result of the increase of homeless people, more priority locations are observed spread over the region therefore more volunteers are required.

For the winter of 2016-2017 la Strada organised two point-in-time counts: one before the start of the winter emergency plan, the second a month before the closing date. Next to the evolution in comparison with precedent editions, comparison between snapshots of the situation before and during the winter emergency plan can be analysed.

2.1.2 Illustration: baseline measurement in Flanders

A first project aimed at collecting comprehensive data was commissioned by the Flemish minister of Welfare and carried out by Meys and Hermans in 2014. A count was carried out between 15th of January until the 15th of February 2014 including:

- Users of winter and night shelters (ETHOS 1-2)
- Users of residential CAW centers (ETHOS 3-4-7)
- Users staying temporary in PCSW housing
- Court eviction orders received by PCSW (ETHOS 9)

For the **(winter) shelters**, separate questionnaires were filled out for the persons staying in the shelter from 15-31st of January 2014. This was done by the social worker, alone or together with the homeless person.

For residential **CAW centers and temporary PCSW housing**, questionnaires were available. For CAW it was also possible to fill out the registration in their own We-Dossier. PCSW included their temporary dwellers from January 15th until February 15th 2014.

In the same time period, PCSW were asked to fill out a questionnaire on the **eviction orders** they received from the District Court from January 15th until January 31st 2014 (ETHOS 9).

This first measurement shows following global results:

- 711 adults and 53 children were roofless (those staying in winter and emergency shelters)
- 3019 adults and 1675 children were homeless (staying in accommodation for homeless from Centres for General Welfare (CAW) and emergency housing of Public welfare services (OCMW/CPAS)
- 599 claims for evictions in 179 Public Welfare Services (OCMW/CPAS)

2.2. Surveys

In surveys data are collected from a (representative) sample. An example of a large scale European Survey is EU SILC, the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions. Launched in 2003, EU SILC aims at collecting comparable and longitudinal microdata on income, poverty, social exclusion and living conditions. The 2018 version of EU SILC, an ad hoc module on housing difficulties will include some questions on the prevalence of homelessness. The questions are a proposition of FEANTSA and are yet to be tested. The following question will be asked:

In the past 10 years, have you had to live in the following situations? [Yes/No]

1. *Staying with friends or relatives temporarily so as to avoid sleeping rough, sleeping in a public space, or staying in emergency or temporary accommodation?*
2. *Staying in emergency or temporary accommodation such as a night shelter, a women's refuge, a hostel or a hotel room provided for people who are homeless?*
3. *Staying in a place not intended as a permanent home (e.g. mobile home other than those for tourism)*
4. *Staying in a dwelling with non-conventional building, temporary or semi-permanent structure e.g. makeshift shelter, shack, hut or cabin*
5. *'Sleeping rough' or sleeping in a public space*

Questioning homelessness in large scale surveys brings along extra points of attention. Firstly will it be crucial how homelessness is defined and which terminology is used. Using the general term 'homelessness' might not lead to the answer aimed for. As people might have been in one of the ETHOS categories without seeing themselves as homeless, for example when having stayed with friends for a while. Secondly, when calculating the prevalence it is important to study the best time span to use. Asking for life time prevalence might lead to a (too) big proportion. Whereas a too small proportion (having been homeless in the past year) can be influenced by policy measures. An in between range can be a 10 years.

2.2.1 Illustration: the SILC-CUT survey of 2010¹⁶

The SILC-CUT survey was carried out in 2010 as a pilot 'satellite survey' of EU-SILC among specific high-risk groups in Belgium, including homeless people - so that comparisons could be made between each of these groups and the 'mainstream' EU-SILC data. The concept of 'satellite surveys' means that targeted surveys are carried out among specific subpopulations with an increased poverty risk, using questionnaires and methods that are adapted to the realities of these populations and yet as comparable as possible with the instruments of the main EU-SILC survey. One of the samples included in SILC-CUT consisted of 277 homeless people from all Belgian regions (see Schockaert et al., 2012; and Nicaise & Schockaert, 2014 for methodological details).

A separate report from the Mehobel project (Bircan, Schockaert & Nicaise, 2018) sketches a statistical profile of this group. It confirms the exposure of homeless people to more extreme

¹⁶ The SILC-CUT research was funded by the Agora Research Programme of the Belgian Science Policy (<http://www.belspo.be>) upon request from the "Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service" (<http://www.combatpoverty.be>), which was established by the Federal Government, the Regions and Communities as an instrument in the fight against poverty, insecurity and social exclusion.

damage from poverty in several dimensions of life: education, family life, income, work, housing and health. A few key findings are summarised here:

- With regard to the *housing situation* we conclude that *roofless* people are deprived of more than just a roof: often they have no access to the most essential amenities such as drinking water, a toilet or washing facilities. They also report obstacles in the access to shelters, as well as persistent difficulties to obtain a reference address (which is crucially important to access other rights). The latter obstacle is also faced by homeless people living in shelters.
- Almost all homeless people experience severe *income* deprivation. The figures suggest that more than 7 out of 10 homeless people live below the financial poverty threshold, and even approximately half of them below the guaranteed minimum income level in Belgium¹⁷.
- Whereas one in six to seven homeless adults (mainly men) is '*in work*', their jobs are highly irregular and precarious. Poor education and health appear to be the main causes of this marginal position of homeless people vis-à-vis the labour market.
- 24% of the interviewees estimate their general *health* to be poor to extremely poor (with a higher incidence among women than men). The fact that 37.2% of them are disabled or chronically ill suggests that their subjective assessment must be viewed as an underestimation. Moreover, our survey also suggests that homeless people tend to suffer more from stress and mental health issues.

The report advocates a continuous monitoring system based on similar surveys at intervals of 4-5 years; it also discusses a number of policy implications based on the findings.

2.2.2 Illustration: Household survey in Flanders

Two large Flemish Housing Surveys (GWO: Grote woononderzoek) were carried out by the Center for Housing Studies (Steunpunt Wonen). The first one of 2005, is a detailed survey of the housing situation of 5.216 Flemish households. In the second survey in 2013, ten thousand Flemish households were contacted about the affordability, quality and security of their house (Winters et al., 2015). These Housing Surveys focus above all on the ETHOS categories of people living in insecure (cat 8-10) and inadequate housing (cat 11-13). Housing affordability can be seen as an important indicator for poverty, and hence linked to homelessness. One important indicator is the living quote or the percentage of the income spent on housing. For total living costs (cost of rent plus additional costs) the norm is 40% of total income.

¹⁷ Depending on the household type, the guaranteed minimum income level in Belgium lies 23-28% below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold

2.3. Registers

A second approach to collect data on homelessness is by making use of register data. Several service providers and NGO's register data on homelessness and hold data on the level of their organizations as well as on client level. This client register data can be particularly useful in imaging profiles on homeless using these services.

Some European countries hold national level administrative databases, often based on register data. In their 2014 report, Busch-Geertsema and colleagues provide an overview of European countries with national level databases:

- **Ireland**
The PASS (Pathway Accommodation and Support System) was established by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive and rolled-out nationally in 2013. It is a web based bed management system capturing the details of people in state funded emergency accommodation.
- **Denmark**
Nationwide client registration system database derived from a client registration system used in all homeless shelters since 1999 (see further on in this chapter)
- **Slovenia**
All shelters for homeless report the number of users to Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Yearly publication of the data by Slovenian Social Protection Institute
- **Hungary**
Central online database KENYSZI set up in 2012 to record data on all service users in social and child protection sector. Primarily to monitor expenditure. Data is not entirely comprehensive, there are complaints about reliability.

In some countries that don't dispose of a national database, a regional data base on homelessness exists, for example in the region of North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany. Other European countries produce administrative databases but they deem insufficient to judge the scale and nature of the homeless population. Examples are Portugal, where AMI services have a common database in their local branches, filter homeless people using AMI services. Or the UK, a data rich environment, different sets are disjointed and uncoordinated (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2014).

An advantage of register data is that client data that is readily available in organizations can be transferred to a common register. On the ground that similar data are registered. On the ground that similar data are registered, can be asked for a coordinated approach.

Using register data also has some disadvantages. A first one is the so called 'service paradox': providing services for homeless will lead to the use of these services. Whereas providing no care or accommodation will give the idea that there are less homeless. This can make it difficult to compare European countries on this matter as it can reflect the level of social protection provided for poor and vulnerable people. For example, in some countries homelessness is relatively concentrated among young people, whereas in other countries there is a substantial part made up by people aged 60 and over (eg. Hungary and Poland). A second disadvantage is that register data are confined to those in contact with services. This makes certain groups, for example those people staying with family or friends, invisible. When using register data of municipalities, an additional disadvantage is that people who lack an official address often don't appear in these counts (Edgar et al., 2007).

2.3.1 Illustration: central client registration system (CCRS) in Brussels

Since 2010, client registration for homeless services is centralized in a common central client registration system (CCRS). The data consists of the three registration systems for temporary accommodation which correspond with the different policies (GGC/COCOM, COCOF, VG/VGC) in Brussels. A convention is signed with these stakeholders. The general objective of the central database is to provide a comprehensive picture of service use by homeless people at the regional level and to support the development of a regional homeless strategy.

The CCRS is based on the following three registration systems on client level used by the Brussels temporary accommodation for homeless providers:

- (1) We-dossier for the Brussels CAW -> same system as in Flanders
- (2) AMAstat for the COCOF services providers
- (3) BruReg for the GGC/COCOM services providers

The development of the CCRS is a participatory process. A working group with representatives of the federations and CAW Brussel was created in 2010 to harmonise the variables, to discuss the centralisation and to analyse the data and the ongoing evaluation of the central registration system. The common variables are:

- socio-demographic characteristics:
 - o gender
 - o civil and family status
 - o age
- region of last declared domicile
- origin of orientation
- number of supported families
- economic situation (before and after)
- education level
- nationality and residence permit
- type of residence (before and after)
- period of stay

Via an anonymous client identifier (name, surname and date of birth of the client) created by the 3 registration systems, la Strada centralises and monitors the quality of the data. The collected data and the first analysis are presented to the members of the working group (including social workers) for discussing and validation to be published in a yearly report. The same working group is designated to evaluate the number and quality of the variables and registration guidelines and the user-friendliness of the registration system.

The CCRS is a comprehensive registration system with a coverage of 84% (830 out of 985 places) of the capacity of the temporary accommodation for the homeless (the night and emergency shelters are not included). The different stakeholders and social workers responsible for the registration have, despite the guidelines, different interpretation of variables and modes of registration (continuous or once a year).

2.3.2 Illustration: harmonization of data in Wallonia

The reporting of the RS was done, in the beginning, in a very custom way, each service having its own templates for activity reports, and that prevented the DGO5 from assessing properly the use of the budget in the existing Relais Sociaux. In 2009, a "research" was granted by DGO5 aiming at issuing a standard template for activity reports to be used by the Relais Sociaux partners. Those activity reports are the base for justification of the subsidies received during the elapsed year.

The decree provided the possibility to create Relais Sociaux either "urbains" on territories where a town of at least 50,000 inhabitants is the centre of the arrondissement, or "intercommunaux" where no municipality reaches such a threshold. So far, only the seven above mentioned Relais Sociaux were founded, none in more rural area. In theory, each Relais Social should extend its activities in the whole arrondissement it belongs to. In consequence, the Relais Sociaux activities, and thus the data they are in position to gather, are limited to seven urban arrondissements.

While each Relais Social counts many partners in its General Assembly, only some of them are subsidised: the important actors, often founding members of the Relais Sociaux (or created as to fill gaps wrt. the decree 4 domains when there was no actor in some domains), or newcomers whose innovative projects were selected for funding.

The data collection by the Relais Sociaux has thus been initiated on a local base, where each Relais tried to harmonise the data from its partner's activity reports. So far, the only aim was to have a consistent way of computing activity dashboards: number of people, opening hours, workforce, number of meals or amount of assistance, etc.

In 2008, the Regional Minister in charge prompted the Regional Statistics Office (IWEPS) to seek cooperation of the Relais Sociaux and DGO5 in order to create an observatory of social exclusion and provide a transversal view of the Relais Sociaux activities. The next 4 years were needed to build a common understanding of the data requirements, first attempt of coding templates and interpretation of available data, and a first analysis attempt was presented in 2012 as work in progress, leading to a first report on the project in April 2016. Not all Relais Sociaux were involved in the beginning, and even now some of them provide only part of the requested data, directly copied from the activity report.

Basically thus the IWEPS attempt to build an observatory relies on the willingness of the Relais Sociaux partners to cooperate with the process of harmonization of data collection, and computes activity indicators and users profile data only to the extent that the partners are willing to collect and share the information.

In almost each Relais Social, one deputy coordinator is (part time) in charge of data collection and processing, and is responsible for the Relais Social's figures in its own activity report and for data forwarded to the IWEPS database. Basically, IWEPS only adds and computes the data coming from the Relais Sociaux and tries to improve the process with long term projects for improvement. Construction of standard data collection templates was completed over the first 5 years, current work aims at a shared glossary.

Data from the Relais Sociaux is organized according to the decree's 4 domains. Table V summarizes the number of partners providing data in each Relais Social.

Table V Number of partners involved in each Relais Social.

	Night accommodation	Day centres	DUS (social emergency)	Street work
Liège	4	14	2	1
Charleroi	4	4	1	1
Namur	1	6	1	3
Mons	2	5	1	1
La Louvière	1	3	1	1
Verviers	2	2	1	0
Tournai	0	0	0	0

These numbers include in some cases (not all) winter shelters, and not all partners collect exhaustive data, that means that data provided by some services is only partial: collection only when social workers are available for such a task, or data collected only for the first contact with a new user, for instance. In some cases, it is unclear whether data is exhaustive or not. The number of partners will change over time, when some new are selected for funding, or instead quit being supported by the Relais Social (either because evaluation of service is not good enough or when the limitation of budgets commands choices).

Limitations of the data collected

In most cities, there are further associative or volunteers services to homeless (night accommodation, day centres, street work) not funded by the Relais Social, thus providing no data.

The data aggregated on the base of this IWEPS project allows thus to monitor some evolutions in the number or the profile of users, as far as data is available and comprehensive, but preventing double counting is done only at the level of the Relais Sociaux, and only for night accommodation. Charleroi, Mons and Liège clean the night shelter data manually for double counting, with nominative data (Liège and Charleroi) forwarded confidentially to the Relais Social in order to perform the task. Mons performs an anonymization of the identifier by issuing a code for each user for further data processing. Such a work is not carried out on day centre data, since no identification is available, and especially centre specialized in prostitution or drugs addiction are very concerned with the privacy of their users, and thus oppose to the introduction of any kind of identification that could be shared with third parties. On the other hand, double counting is not an issue where there is a single service in any category, yet of course, since there's no kind of identification across Relais Sociaux, there's no way to check whether single users may have travelled from a city to another and thus be counted in several Relais Sociaux statistics.

While night accommodations services may assume that all their users are in some homelessness category at the moment of their use of the services, day centres, social emergencies and street workers deal with people in some precarity, but not necessarily homeless. There is thus a need for some profile key in the data which could allow to count homeless people among a wider public. Day centres may mostly record the housing situation of the user, but being sure that every centre asks the same questions is not granted so far, and typically in day centres with low threshold, a considerable amount of "unknown" or "missing info" is recorded. Street workers fill a variable about housing status. However, not all contacts are coded, and there is a significant amount of "unknown", which most probably means that the question has not been asked or recorded. DUSs splits interventions between help at house

and help to find a housing. When "no autonomous housing" is recorded, situation is unknown in more than 25% of the cases. Also at DUSs, data collection is far from being exhaustive in every service.

2.4. Census (market surveys)

Data on homelessness can also be collected through a census. The Census 2011, organized by the European Statistical System (ESS), a major project to provide high-quality, detailed and comparable data on the size and characteristics of the population and the housing stock of Europe.

2.4.1 Census in Belgium

Belgium has a large tradition in organizing their 10 yearly census (volkstelling/recensement). Starting in 1846, 15 censuses have been organized. The main goal was to count the number of inhabitants. Later on, the census gained more administrative and socioeconomical use. The emergence of the National Register and national number made the count more and more redundant. The last census involving a personal questionnaire for every national stems from 2001.

In 2011 the first census was organized purely based on administrative data. In order to gather this data for Belgium, no extra survey was carried out but a vast amount of information was recovered from administrative databases such as the national register of natural persons and the Crossroads Bank for Social Security. The 2011 European census also obliged member states to cover the topic of homelessness for the first time. Yet the results were disappointing, with 13 European countries (including Belgium) reporting to possess no data on homelessness. Of the European countries who did present data, some reported their data to be patently unreliable.

The European Observatory on Homelessness (EOH, 2012) analysed the execution of the census study regarding homelessness. One of their observations is how different definitions and methodologies were employed by the respective countries to measure the target group. They also report important differences between countries using a register-based and non-register based methodology for census enumeration. As they tend to be based on a home or institutional address, register-based methodologies miss out on the population without a fixed address.

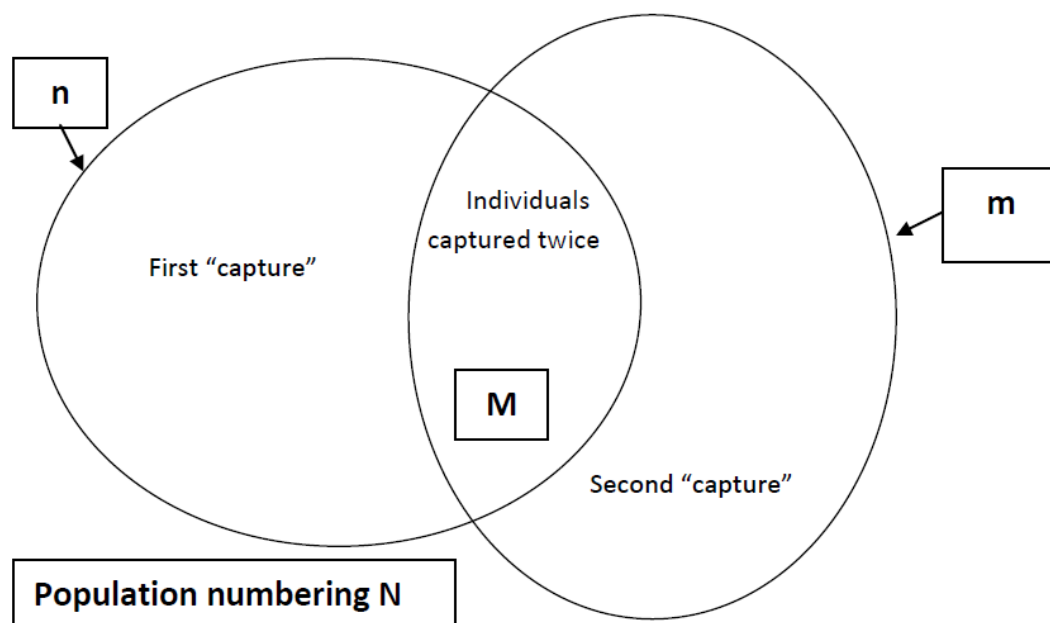
2.5. Estimates

Many quantitative studies of homeless people have not attempted to directly enumerate, but use alternative sampling strategies to estimate the number of homeless people. In what follows, the most important sampling methods used to estimate the number of homeless will be discussed.

Capture-recapture

The capture-recapture method has its origins in biology and refers to the estimation of an unobserved part of a certain population. The technique is based on at least two independent observations (or sources) of the target population. In order to estimate the size N of the target population, the number of persons in the populations observed the first time (n), the number of

persons observed the second time (m) and the number of persons observed on both occasions (M) need to be known. N is then estimated by calculating $(n \cdot m) / M$.



Source: Marpsat & Razafindratsima (2010)

Figure 2.1 The capture-recapture method

In the field of homelessness, there are two main variants of capture-recapture applications:

- Using two or more independent observations of the study population in their own environment. In the case of homeless persons, the observations are made, for instance, where homeless make use of services.
- Using incomplete administrative lists with members of the study population (Trochim, 2006): Assuming we have two lists, the unobserved part of the population is calculated by using the ratio between individuals registered only once and individuals registered on both lists.

Whereas the capture-recapture method's underlying concept is simple, the hypotheses that must be met in order for the model to remain valid are fairly restrictive

Location sampling

In the case of mobile or "elusive" populations that are not easily linked to any one place (such as the homeless), a potential promising strategy to estimate their number often involves 'indirect sampling', i.e. sampling places or services where the members of the elusive population are likely to be encountered (Kalton, 2014). The general condition for location sampling is that the population of interest visits a certain number of places that, conversely, are not often visited by the rest of the population. In the case of homeless people, these places can be shelters, services providing meals, accommodation, clean clothes, etc. These places can be sampled after an exhaustive list has been made of them, and then a sample can be

taken of the persons visiting those places. However, attention must be paid to the number of times when the target population visits the premises.

Location sampling has been used to sample a variety of hard-to-sample populations. The general requirement is that a set of locations can be identified such that a high proportion of the target population will visit one or more of these locations during the data collection period. With the visitor as the unit of analysis, the unequal probability of visits across individuals during the data collection period must be taken into account, because persons who visit a service more often have a higher probability of being included in the sample (Trochim, 2006). The SILC-CUT survey, which was used to sketch the profile of homeless people in Belgium in section 2.3.1, was based on this methodology.

Network-based sampling

Network-based sampling is an approach enabling the researcher to become an active and trusted participant in the community under study and the members of the community to become active participants in the research. Because of this process, recruitment methods have evolved that trace social links or relationships in the community, which allows the researcher to penetrate more deeply and become more substantially integrated with the community. The purpose of these methods is to collect demographic information about hard-to-reach groups by reaching members of these groups through their social networks. Some network-based approaches, such as respondent-driven sampling recruit respondents directly from other respondents' networks making the sampling mechanism similar to a stochastic process on the social network.

Snowball sampling, and its more recent outgrowth respondent-driven sampling (RDS), are the most popular forms of network sampling intended to reduce the problems of identifying members of rare or stigmatized populations such as the homeless. Snowball sampling begins with a convenience sample of initial subjects. These subjects serve as 'seeds', through which wave 1 subjects are recruited. Wave 1 subjects in turn recruit wave 2 subjects and the sample subsequently expands wave by wave like a snowball growing in size as it rolls down a hill. This process continues until the desired sample size is obtained or the survey period is over. Respondent-driven sampling (RDS) is a sampling design in which members of the hidden population are enlisted to do the actual sample recruitment based on their social connections. It can be seen as an advanced version of snowball sampling. Note however that homeless people are often socially isolated, so that snowball sampling methods appear to be less successful than expected.

Evaluation

The overview of sampling strategies used to estimate the homeless population shows that each method entails important limitations. Nevertheless, the extent to which sampling strategies are suitable for the estimation of the homeless population differs:

- Regarding **location sampling**, one of the main downsides is that establishing and updating the list of the places visited and the times at which they are visited is often time-consuming and costly. Where a high proportion of the population of interest does not visit these places or does so only very rarely, it can lead to a coverage bias. This is certainly the case among the homeless population given that not all homeless people frequently visit shelters or other selected locations.

- Though **network-based sampling** strategies can be advantageous, financial and logistic challenges often prevent researchers from employing these methods, especially on a large scale. Persons with a poor social network have a lower probability of being reached. Moreover, it is necessary to verify whether each person recruited is a member of the population of interest. This is not easy for all populations and may be intrusive.
- Taking into account that, due to financial and logistic constraints, the **capture-recapture** methods based on visual observations are limited to no more than a few observations, deviations from the assumptions may lead to significantly different estimates. Moreover, the ambiguity in defining who is homeless based on visual observation inevitably leads to inaccuracies which jeopardize the estimations. However, the more advanced capture-recapture technique based on linked administrative sources allows researchers to comply with less stringent assumptions and is less dependent on limited observations. Another major advantage is that this approach deals with incomplete lists, which is often an evident problem using registers of this population.

Based on the overview of sampling strategies to estimate the number of homeless people, we therefore conclude that the capture-recapture method based on administrative sources seems highly recommendable as it saves time, reduces costs and yields reliable and plausible figures about the homeless. However, adoption of this methodology is only worthwhile if some requirements are met, including the availability of national population registers of sufficient quality and the possibility to uniquely identify people.

2.5.1 Illustration: Capture-recapture of linked administrative sources in the Netherlands

The Netherlands is the first country adopting the capture-recapture approach to produce national estimates about the homeless population. Moreover, since 2009 the figures are published by Statistics Netherlands on a yearly base as the official statistics on homelessness.

The focus is on roofless people (between 18 and 65 years old) in accordance with the ETHOS-typology, who are defined as individuals who had no permanent accommodation on the reference date. The following categories were distinguished by the researchers:

- People who sleep outdoors, either in the open air or in covered public spaces such as doorways, bicycle sheds, railway stations, shopping centres or cars;
- People who spend the night indoors in transient accommodation run for the homeless, including emergency shelters;
- People who sleep indoors in the homes of friends, acquaintances or relatives, without knowing where they can sleep the following night

In this study, the capture-recapture of linked administrative sources was used. For all reference dates, i.e. January 1 of 2009–2013 the estimations were based on the same three data sources, i.e.:

- 1) A list compiled especially for this study, consisting of individuals who, according to the official municipal administration system (GBA), are residing at an address where a low-threshold service (shelter) for the homeless is located.

- 2) A list of individuals between 18 and 65 years old who received income support (WWB), but did not have a permanent residence according to the official WWB-registration on the reference date of January 1
- 3) A list of individuals registered as being homeless in the National Alcohol and Drugs Information System (LADIS)

Each person on all three registers was assigned a unique identification number based on the same Dutch population registration, the GBA, which aims to register all inhabitants in the Netherlands. This number is assigned to every citizen at birth or in the case of permanent residence. Moreover, the researchers were also able to link for each homeless person the officially registered background characteristics according to the GBA. The capture-recapture technique which was used for estimating the size of a population was to select two or more registers of this population, link the individuals in the registers, and estimate the number of individuals that occur in neither register. For example, with two registers A and B, linkage gives a count of individuals in A but not in B, a count of individuals in B but not in A, and a count of individuals both in A and B. These counts form a contingency table denoted by $A \times B$ with the variable labeled A short for 'inclusion in register A', taking the levels 'yes' and 'no', and likewise for register B. In this table the cell 'no, no' has a zero count by definition, and the statistical problem is to estimate this value in the population. The population size estimate was obtained by adding this estimated count of missed individuals to the counts of individuals found in at least one of the registers. The frequency of the missing 'no, no' cell was obtained by fitting a log-linear model to the incomplete contingency table.

Capture-recapture of linked administrative sources assumes that the administrative sources are of high quality. If the number of sources to be linked is two, there is also the assumption that inclusion of a homeless person in one source is independent of him/her being registered in the other. However, if the number of sources to be linked is larger than two, this restrictive independence assumption is not necessary to find unbiased estimators, but is replaced by the less restrictive assumption that, in the case of k registers, the so-called k -factor interaction is absent. In this case, the researchers assumed that the three-factor interaction between the registers was absent. Another important assumption for the capture-recapture method is that the population is closed, i.e. that the population did not change during the period of observation. As the researchers used one reference date for each of the registers, this assumption was met. Another necessity is the possibility to link the individuals in the different registers to each other. For this purpose, each of the registers must contain the relevant information to do this, but also privacy regulations may not obstruct the linking of individuals from different registers. For the Netherlands, each of the registers used contains a key variable as well as detailed information on the homeless, which is derived from the same official source, the national population register. By law, Statistics Netherlands is entitled to link the registers used.

2.6. Trajectories

Recently, more and more attention goes to trajectories of homelessness: entries, duration and exits. Several methods are used to disentangle the trajectories of homeless persons and get a view on the dynamics of the lives of homeless persons and their service use. Large quantitative studies have been set up making use of administrative (service) data. Several examples can be found in the United States, for example the work of Kuhn and Culhane (1998) who documented three typologies of shelter use by grouping shelters users according to the duration and frequency of their shelter stay (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998). These kind of studies are mostly useful to identify where to the focus in preventing (recurrent) homelessness. Another type of studies are using a panel consisting of homeless people. They are interviewed regularly (for instance each 6 months or each years). International examples are the G4- CODA study in the Netherlands and the Journeys Home Study in Australia.

Trajectories can also be studied by means of qualitative research methods where homeless persons describe their trajectory and service use. An interesting recent example can be found in the Netherlands where a longitudinal multi-site cohort study Coda-G4 followed up 500 formerly homeless persons over 2.5 years. The start of the registration is the moment when homeless persons present themselves to the access point for social relief. Four face to face interviews were carried out providing information on housing and housing stability and quality of life (van Straaten, Van de Mheen, Van der Laan, Rodenburg, Boersma, & Wolf, 2016).

In Belgium, only small scale studies have been carried out on trajectories, for example one focusing on the trajectories of homeless people in Ostende (De Decker & Segers 2014).


2.6.1 Illustration: Zonder (t)huis

An interesting Belgian study is the qualitative study Zonder (t)huis. In this project, the focus is put the social biographies of (ex)homeless persons in Flanders. Through several interviews, the researchers identified what plays a role in the process of homelessness by listening to people's life stories and their experiences with homeless care. Resistance to homeless care. Is measured up against societal reality, offer of homeless organisations.

2.7. Inspiring European practices

This part is dedicated to the description of four inspiring practices. During the past decade, enormous progress has been made when it comes to homelessness strategies and measurement methodologies. So good practices and inspirational examples can be found in several countries worldwide. Yet, in order to enhance comparability with Belgium, decision was made to select European countries. We pick Denmark, Finland, Scotland and The Netherlands based on advice from several Belgian and European experts on this matter.

Denmark, Finland and Scotland have a national homelessness strategy. Every good practice overview is started with a short description of the country based on European statistics from EU SILC 2016. To enhance comparability with Belgium, we first present the statistics for Belgium:

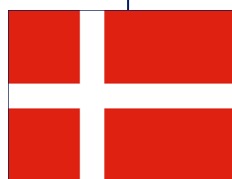
	✓	Social democratic welfare state
	✓	71.3 % lives in owner occupied home
	✓	Public Housing is 7 % of total housing stock
	✓	33.7 % of renters at market price spend more 40% of income on housing
	✓	21.1 % of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion
	✓	Severe housing deprivation for 1.9 % of population

This is followed by a view on their strategy against homelessness and the nature of their data collection. Special attention is dedicated to how they deal with the group of people leaving institutions, as this is a vulnerable group where preventive actions can possibly avoid homelessness. This is followed by an evaluation describing their strengths and weaknesses of the monitoring strategy, partially based on literature and peer reviews carried out by the European Observatory on Homelessness. For the evaluation we keep in mind the important elements for effective strategies as named by the Council of Europe (2010, p 10):

- Provide effective governance with strong co-operation between all involved
- Translate the strategy into concrete targets (e.g housing supply; prevention of homelessness; a reduction in its duration; target group; the improvement of the quality of services)
- Plan a thorough information and evaluation of the program
- Indicators on housing costs and deprivation
- Provide accurate and consistent data on homelessness

Next, the evaluation of the good practices is used to see how these methods can be applicable for Belgium.

2.7.1 Denmark



- ✓ Social democratic welfare state
- ✓ 62.0 % lives in owner occupied home
- ✓ Public Housing is 21% of total housing stock
- ✓ 31.9 % of renters at market price spend more 40% of income on housing
- ✓ 17.7 % of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion
- ✓ Severe housing deprivation for 1.7 % of population

DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

Homeless people do not have their own (owned or rented) dwelling or room, but have to stay in temporary accommodation or stay temporarily and without a contract [tenancy] with family or friends. People who report they do not have a place to stay the next night are also counted as homeless.”
(Busch-Geertsema et al, 2014, p. 16)

THE STRATEGY

The first national Danish homelessness strategy was adopted by the parliament in 2008 and set up for 2009-2013. The strategy was a result of the first Danish homeless count in 2007 reporting 5,290 people to be homeless. Of this total number, 500 people were sleeping rough; 2,000 staying in homeless shelters; over 1,000 people staying with family or friends; and a smaller number in short-term transitional housing or awaiting release from prison, hospital or other facilities, without a housing solution (Benjaminsen & Christensen, 2007).

The Danish National Strategy encompasses four operational goals:

1. Reduce rough sleeping
2. Provide alternatives to shelter stays for young homeless people
3. Reduce lengths of shelter stays to maximum 3-4 months
4. Reduce homelessness due to institutional release

In 2014, a follow-up programme to the National Danish Homelessness Strategy began. The target of this second strategy is to reduce the number of homeless by 25% by 2020; and to reduce to a maximum of 20% the number of people who return to a shelter after being rehoused following a shelter stay. Both targets are part of the ‘social 2020 goals’ set by the Danish Government. It is planned that 40 municipalities will be included and housing first is further implemented.

In order to reach these goals, more housing and supported accommodation was provided. Doing so, Housing First was used as an overall principle, making use of independent scattered housing. Funding was allocated to municipalities to provide more housing and construct new housing units. Which projects were to be carried out was negotiated between municipalities and government.

In this national strategy, 17 municipalities participated (out of a total of 98), 8 following the full program, 9 following the floating support program. In this, two thirds of Danish homeless were represented. The national program was allocated 65 million euros.

In order to reduce rough sleeping numbers, more housing for homeless was to be created. For this, municipalities made use of a priority access system for homeless people so that 25% of vacancies in public housing can be used for people in acute housing need. As rent must be paid out of general social benefit and housing benefit, only low rent flats can be used. In large cities this can still mean a shortage of supply. Another program part related to the reduction of rough sleeping, was the strengthening of street outreach work. Another key aim of the Danish program was to develop and test evidence based interventions (Benjaminsen, 2013). A variety of evidence based methods are used to strengthen floating support in housing such as. The following three floating support interventions were chosen: Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), Intensive Case Management (ICM) and Critical Time Intervention (CTI).

In order to reach the fourth goal, better procedures were developed for institutional release from prisons and hospitals.

Even though evictions were not a main goal of the Danish homelessness strategy, some preventive actions were introduced. This as a reaction to the rising eviction numbers in the beginning of the first decade of this century. Prevention of eviction concerns the following changes (Busch-Geertsema, 2015). A first measure is the change of rent payment day from the 3rd to the 1st day of each month. This measurement wants to ensure people to pay their rent as soon as possible. As a second measure, the respite period to cover rent arrear was extended. Now 14 days, instead of the former three days, are given in order to provide more time to cover the arrears and give (social) organizations more time to help people find a solution. A third prevention measure was giving municipalities the possibility to administer rent payment for citizens on a voluntary basis. This is a measure that municipalities have been reluctant to use as it requires extra administration and can be regarded in conflict with empowerment principles.

In their section 110 of law of social services, attention is also given to client participation. Every shelter operating under this act must establish a user democracy. This can be either by plenary meetings or the setup of a user council. As a result, the organisation Sand was set up, a user organisation of homeless and former homeless. In order to promote user involvement, Sand pays regular visits to shelters and assists in the organisation of user councils. They also organise project days and publish a monthly newsletter. Sand also tries to have influence on a political level, local implementation in the national action plan.

In order to monitor progress of the national plan, targets were set per city. For example a target for rough sleeping per city in 2012, young people in homeless shelters, and amount of people with a long term stay in a shelter (more than 120 days).

In a third round taking place in 2017, the ambition is to involve more municipalities in the program.

MONITORING STRATEGY

Denmark has two main data sources on homelessness. A first data source is the national point-in-time (one week) **biannual mapping** of homelessness. The methodology is similar to the Norwegian and Swedish counts. The first count was in February 2007 and was repeated in 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2015. The count is service-based including a wide range of local welfare services such as homeless shelters, street outreach teams, addiction treatment centres, psychiatric hospitals, municipal social centres, jobcentres, social drop-in cafés etc. Each unit fills out a two-page questionnaire for every homeless person they are in contact with or know about. This way a large group of homeless people can be included: rough sleepers, people in short-term transitional housing, and people staying with family or friends (when of course in contact with social services). These can be filled out by staff only or through interview with the homeless person. Double counts are controlled through individual information 'personal numbers', birthdays, initials or other information.

The second data source is a **data collection system** for homeless shelters. The collection of this data started in 1999 and is mandatory for organizations who fall under section 110 of the Danish Social Assistance Act. The reporting of Central Personal Register (CPR) number is mandatory for shelters. This allows to control for double counts and enables to link to general administrative databases such as: Central Psychiatric Register, the Register for Treatment of Substance Addiction, general health, income, and education. Data of the homeless shelters is to be reported to a national data base which is administered by the Social Appeals Board.

The following data are collected:

- Homelessness situation: rough sleeping, shelter, staying with family or friends
- Demographics: gender, age, children, nationality
- Income source
- Health: mental illness, substance abuse problems, physical illness
- Reasons for homelessness (eviction, financial problems, substance abuse)
- Data of stay
- Services/interventions received (addiction treatment, psychiatric treatment, social support, assigned for housing)
- Personal identifiers

The Social Appeals Board produces annual statistics on this shelter use.

An additional registration is the outcome monitoring data for individuals who have received interventions under the national homeless strategy.

RESULTS

When looking at Danish data, it should be kept in mind that their definition (as similar to other Nordic countries) is much broader than in many other EU member states (Busch-Geertsema, 2015). In the last Danish count of 2015 28 % of all homeless people (1,653 of 5,820) were staying temporarily and without a contract at family or friends. This is a category of homelessness often not defined as such in other European countries.

The measurement of 2009 was taken as a baseline. Over the years, we can see an increase in homelessness. In total Denmark, this means an increase of 16%. This increase is a lot smaller (4%) in municipalities with a full strategy programme, and a little smaller in those who followed the floating support programme. In the cities who didn't participate in the programme,

the increase in homeless numbers was remarkable. According to the evaluators of the programme, this can be explained by a combination of a strong political commitment to the Housing First principle, a relatively sufficient supply of affordable housing, and an intensive floating support programme (Benjaminsen, 2013). Figures show that particularly youth homelessness has increased. Lack of affordable housing has been named as a good reason for the increase in homelessness in the larger cities such as the suburban area of Copenhagen (Benjaminsen, 2013)

A part of the programme has been to provide new housing units and additional places in institutional accommodation. Of the 453 new units and places that were established:

- 125 in independent scattered public housing
- 26 independent flats in congregate housing
- 4 in independent private housing
- 55 in alternative housing (skæve huse)
- 3 in dormitory accommodation.

Besides these new housing units, a total of 199 additional places were provided in institutional accommodation. A part of these can be used for medium term (16), others for long term (91). 92 extra places were provided in homeless shelters. These are mainly intended for young people or women.

The retention rates of Housing First are very successful. Table VI presents the success of the support interventions.

Table VI Housing outcomes for CTI, ICM and ACT interventions (Benjaminsen, 2013)

Housing outcome	CTI (%)	ICM (%)	ACT (%)
Have been housed and maintained housing	95	76	94
Lost Housing	3	8	7
Lost housing but re-housed in other housing	(1)	(4)	(-)
Lost housing and not re-housed	(2)	(4)	(7)
Not been housed throughout period	2	16	0
N	n=316	n=717	62

Table VII Overall development in homelessness 2009-2013, Strategy and non-Strategy municipalities (Benjaminsen, 2013)

Municipality	Homeless Week 6, 2009	Homeless Week 6, 2011	Homeless Week 6, 2013	Change 2009-13, Percent
Albertslund*	46	46	52	13
Esbjerg	128	130	144	13
Frederiksberg*	233	203	178	-24
Høje-Taastrup*	45	63	63	40
København (Copenhagen)*	1494	1507	1581	6
Odense	208	178	110	-47
Randers	100	64	92	-8
Aarhus	466	588	617	32
8 strategy municipalities with full programme	2720	2779	2837	4
Guldborgssund	120	100	99	-18
Herning	149	167	149	0
Horsens	87	57	77	-11
Hvidovre*	67	130	145	116
Næstved	59	66	86	46
Svendborg	63	45	32	-49
Varde	27	28	28	4
Viborg	62	60	68	10
Aalborg	218	231	259	19
9 strategy municipalities with floating support programme	852	884	943	11
17 strategy municipalities total	3572	3663	3780	6
81 non-strategy municipalities total	1426	1627	2040	43
Denmark, total	4998	5290	5820	16

However, the targets set for the four goals of the national strategy overall are not met. As for the first target, reducing rough sleeping, numbers stay unchanged in some cities (e.g. Aarhus), others report a small reduction, whereas in the city of Odense the target number was even surpassed. None of the municipalities met the second target concerning the young homeless group. Numbers show a decrease in some cities but an increase in others. Even though targets are not met, the overall trend is a reduction in the number of young people in homeless care. When looking at the third target, the duration of the shelter stays, no large changes are reported and none of the cities met their target. Yet a decrease is reported when looking at the numbers of those awaiting release from prisons or discharge from hospitals within one month and without a housing solution. Even though the target was met in only two cities, an overall reduction was reported.

THE INCLUSIVE CITY OF ODENSE

A Habitact Peer Review took place in Odense in 2015, Denmark's third largest city, also the city that showed the best results in decreasing their number of homeless. Their success is explained by a combination of three factors: a strong political commitment to the Housing First principle, a relatively sufficient supply of affordable housing and an intensive floating support programme (Benjaminsen, 2013; Busch-Geertsema, 2015).

Odense is also a city where an inclusive approach is high on the policy agenda. In this, the city aims to reconcile the needs and preferences of socially marginalized groups. This in sharp contrast with a more common focus in city design where they attempt to limit the visibility and presence of socially vulnerable groups. One of the methods to study the needs of vulnerable people was a GPS tracking project where the location of 20 vulnerable people was followed for one week. The results provided the city with knowledge on popular locations for socially excluded people on each time of the day. Information that will be used by urban planners and social services to develop spaces and the location of services. It shows where to place shelters or benches and makes it easier for social workers to find the people.

The city of Odense also undertook action to tackle evictions, which are mainly a result of rent arrears. After having observed that most of these households are not in contact with municipal services, Odense housing associations developed a leaflet in Danish and English to inform those tenants about the preventative services of the municipality.

STRENGTHS

Strengths and weaknesses of the Danish approach have been formulated as part of the peer reviews that took place. See Benjaminsen (2013), Fitzpatrick (2013) and Busch-Geertsema (2015).

- Biannual measurement
- Comprehensive information
- Combination of point in time count and the use of administrative data
- Linkage of administrative databases
- Shelter statistics based on personal identifier
- Engagement of large amount of services
- Responsibility of local municipalities
- A broad definition of homelessness is used also including hidden homelessness.
- As the biannual mapping is a week-count this provides a more comprehensive view on homelessness than a night street count.
- Extensive monitoring with regard to support received and outcomes by the Danish National Center for Social Research (SFI)
- The use of the intervention methods is continuously monitored
- The program was evaluated extensively and was theme of an intergovernmental Peer Review supported by the European Commission in November 2013

WEAKNESSES

The Danish measurement system also entails a few weaknesses:

- Point-in-time counts can be a workload for local social services.
- The biannual mapping is not an extensive street count. It is likely that some people are not being counted.
- Double counts might still exist, despite the control procedures.
- Control procedures for double counting are partially done manually and is hence time consuming.

2.7.2 Scotland



- ✓ Liberal welfare state
- ✓ 65 % lives in owner occupied home
- ✓ Public Housing in Scotland is 23,5 % of total housing stock
- ✓ 37.3 % of renters at market price spend more 40% of income on housing
- ✓ 23.5 % of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion
- ✓ Severe housing deprivation for 2.2 % of population

DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

In Scotland, homelessness is defined by the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987

1. A person is homeless if they have no accommodation in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.
2. A person is to be treated as having no accommodation if there is no accommodation which they, together with any other person who normally resides with them are legally entitled to occupy. A person shall not be treated as having accommodation unless it is accommodation which it would be reasonable for them to continue to occupy, though regard may be had to the general housing circumstances prevailing in the local authority area.
3. A person is also homeless if
 - a. they have accommodation but cannot secure entry to it, or it is probable that occupation would lead to violence or threats of violence;
 - b. or the accommodation consists of a movable structure, vehicle or vessel for human habitation and there is no place where they are entitled or permitted to place and reside in it;
 - c. or the accommodation is legally overcrowded and may endanger the health of the occupants;
 - d. or it is not permanent accommodation and the local authority duty arose before occupation of the accommodation.
4. A person is threatened with homelessness if it is likely that they will become homeless within 2 months.

THE STRATEGY

Scotland is the most advanced part of the UK in terms of implementing a homelessness strategy and implementing a housing-led approach (Fitzpatrick, Pawson, Bramley, Wilcox, & Watts, 2015). Set up in their Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, Scotland holds a wide definition on homelessness, as presented above. In this they also include people who do have accommodation but for whom it is not reasonable to keep on occupying.

You don't have to be living on the street to be homeless. You may be sleeping on a friend's sofa, staying in a hostel, or living in overcrowded or unsuitable accommodation (Shelter Scotland, 2016).

Scotland's national strategic framework is contained in the Housing (Scotland) Act (2001) and The Homeless etc (Scotland) Act 2003. The main objective of the Scottish strategy was to eradicate all unintentionally homeless households by 2012. In order for this commitment to be

achievable, the legislative framework was based around a duty of local authorities to house all unintentionally homeless households in settled accommodation (Hermans, 2012).

In order to accomplish this goal, Scotland started a homelessness implementation group. This multi-agency implementation group is chaired by the Minister for Housing and brings together different bodies responsible for the implementation of the strategy. This includes several partners such as: local authorities, representatives of social landlords, and civil servants from the Scottish government.

At first, care was directed to certain groups identified as being in priority need, such as families with children. Gradually, this priority group was expanded, and eventually the term 'priority need' was phased out. As a result, from the end of December 2012 "all those assessed as unintentionally homeless by local authorities are entitled to settled accommodation as a legal right". If someone makes a homeless application to the council, it has the duty to provide temporary accommodation while they investigate the request and decide whether they have the duty to offer permanent accommodation.

For those deemed to be intentionally homeless, local authorities must provide a short tenancy in combination with support. There should be a perspective to convert the tenancy into a full tenancy at the end of a year.

HOUSING SUPPORT

Next was a focus on Housing support. The legal framework for this was set in the Housing Support Services (Homelessness) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 and came into force on June 1st 2013. These place a duty on Local Authorities to assess the housing support needs of homeless applicants for whom they are responsible to arrange accommodation. If Local Authorities believe a certain household can benefit from housing support, they must ensure these housing support services are provided. This can also be seen as a weakening of the duty of local authorities to provide housing (Hermans, 2012).

PREVENTING EVICTIONS

The Scottish plan also puts a great emphasis on homelessness prevention. Five regional Hubs were established in order to promote a housing options approach and homelessness prevention. When someone approaches a local authority with a housing problem, tailored housing advice is given. Hereby not only exploring possible tenure options but also working together with other social services (mental health, employability, etc) to avoid a housing crisis.

The Homeless etc (Scotland) Act of 2003 contains two provisions dealing with repossessions. A first one states that landlords must inform local authorities when raising proceedings for repossession. This enables the local authority to offer advice and assistance to the affected household in order to prevent an eviction. Second, the Act provides for a sheriff court when deciding on an eviction order, to take into account whether delays in housing benefit may have caused rent arrears. This relating both to the private and the public sector. Before the court speaks out an eviction, evidence must be provided that the affected household has been offered independent advice and that reasonable steps have been taken to avoid eviction.

Concerning prevention, an online tool¹⁸ was set up by Shelter Scotland, The housing and homelessness charity. Besides giving advice on homelessness and several topics such as eviction and renting rights, they developed a free online tool to help people work out what help they are entitled to. In case people are threatened by eviction, they offer a free housing advice helpline.

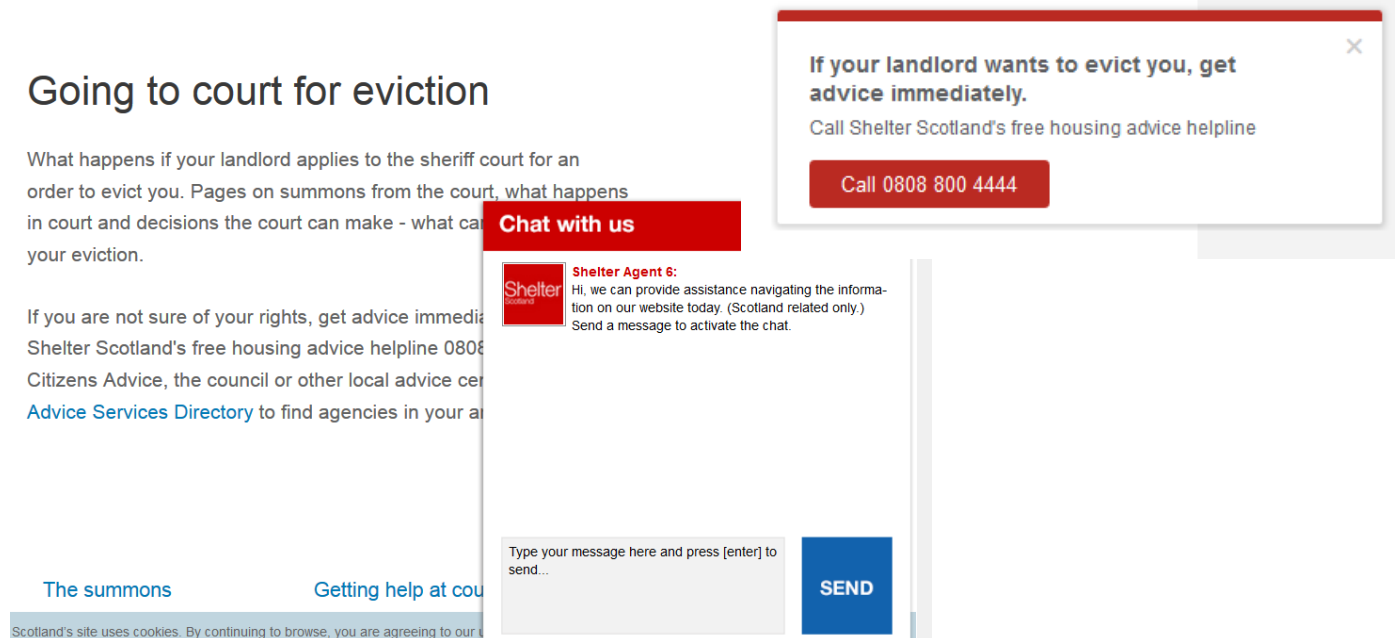


Figure 2.2 Note on website of http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/advice_topics/eviction

RENT TO BUY SCHEME

An inspirational Scottish example is the Rent to Buy Scheme, the finalist of the World Habitat Awards 2015. Rent to Buy Scheme is one of the many approaches used by the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT) to help small rural communities' promote the access to affordable housing. In the mountain area of the Scottish highlands, a large part of the housing stock is used for seasonal workers and the tourist industry. Designed by HSCHT, the model is being delivered in partnership with the Scottish Government and the Highlands Council. The set-up is simple: new houses are built and let to families at below market rents. Tenants hold the option to buy the property after five years. If they take this option they get a cash-back sum to help them with their mortgage deposit. The scheme is self-financing and does not require a government grant but is supported by development loans from the Scottish Government.

MONITORING STRATEGY

The Scottish government has been publishing biannual data on homelessness since 1992. Their reports hold the information on Scottish Local Authority homelessness applications, assessments and outcomes. It also contains data on the number of households in temporary accommodation.

¹⁸ <http://Scotland.shelter.org.uk>

PREVENT1

In contrast to England and Wales who tend to present above all headcount data, Scotland collects more developed data also depicting the characteristics of the households applying for homelessness assistance (Busch-Geertsema, et al., 2014). This is done in an additional data collection on Housing Options and prevention, called 'PREVENT1' which was introduced by the Scottish Government in April 2014.

The first data on Housing Options was released on June 30th 2015. It contains local data on the number of approaches, reasons for approaches, and activities offered. However, as Housing Options is to be developed locally, there is no single definition on Housing Options across local authorities. As a result there is no statutory framework to work with and alternative indicators of performance are established (Scottish Government, 2015). For example, local authorities decide for themselves what constitutes 'an approach', which leads to large differences in data reported.

THE HOMELESSNESS MONITOR

The Homelessness Monitor series is a five year project that studies the impacts of economic and policy developments on homelessness. Yearly reports are set of against a baseline measurement in 2012.

RESULTS

Following these first actions in Scotland, a marked decrease was seen in the number of homeless applications (The Shelter, 2015). A reduction that can be dedicated to the introduction of the housing options model and the preventive actions taken by local authorities. Figure X depicts these results.

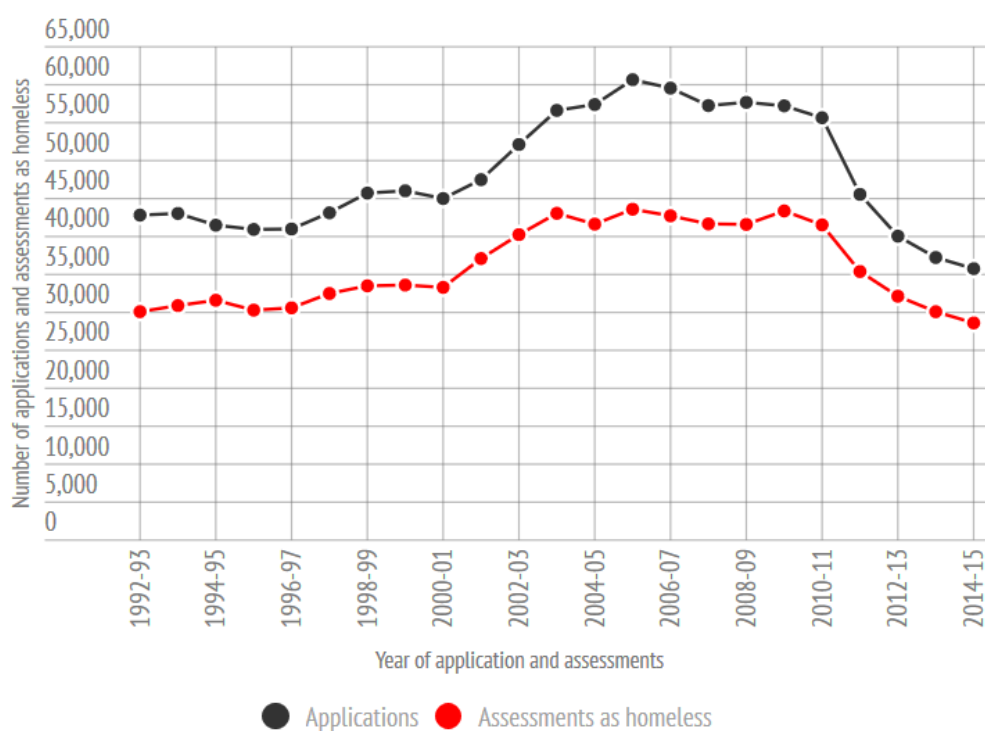


Figure 2.3 Number of applications and assessments as homeless in Scotland (Shelter Scotland, 2016)

Figure 2.4 depicts the main reason of the household for the homeless application. The most common reason for applying is having been asked to leave the property. A second cause for homelessness is relationship breakdown. At the time of application, people were living in their own (rented) house or were living with family or friends.

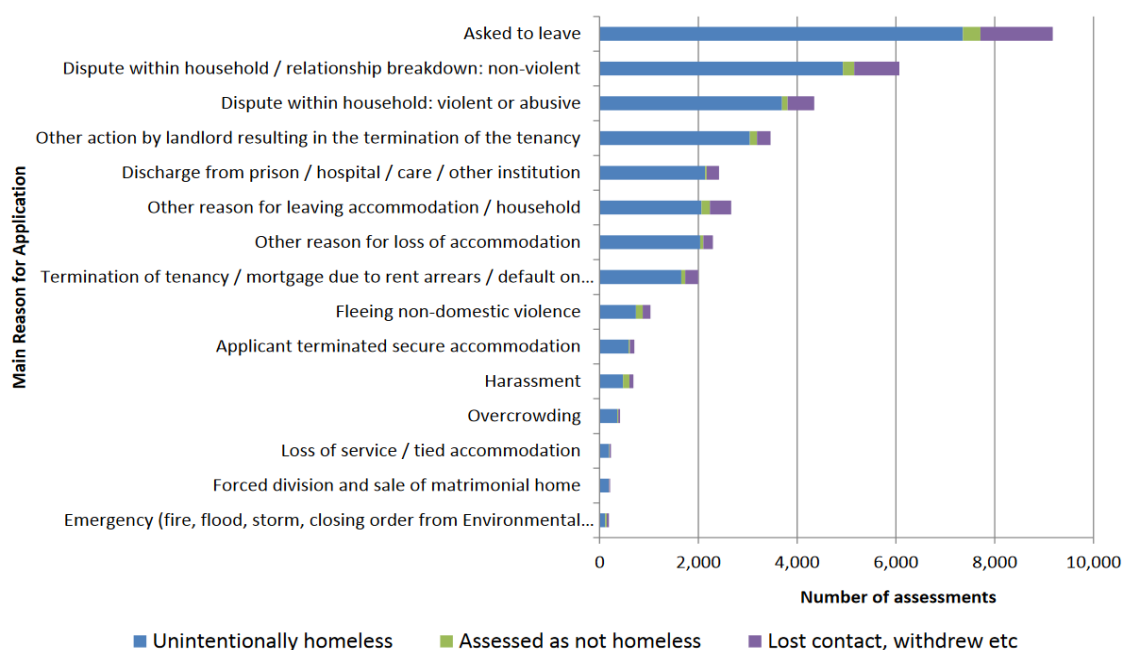


Figure 2.4 Applications assessed in 2014-2015 by main reason for application: Scotland (Scottish Government, 2015).

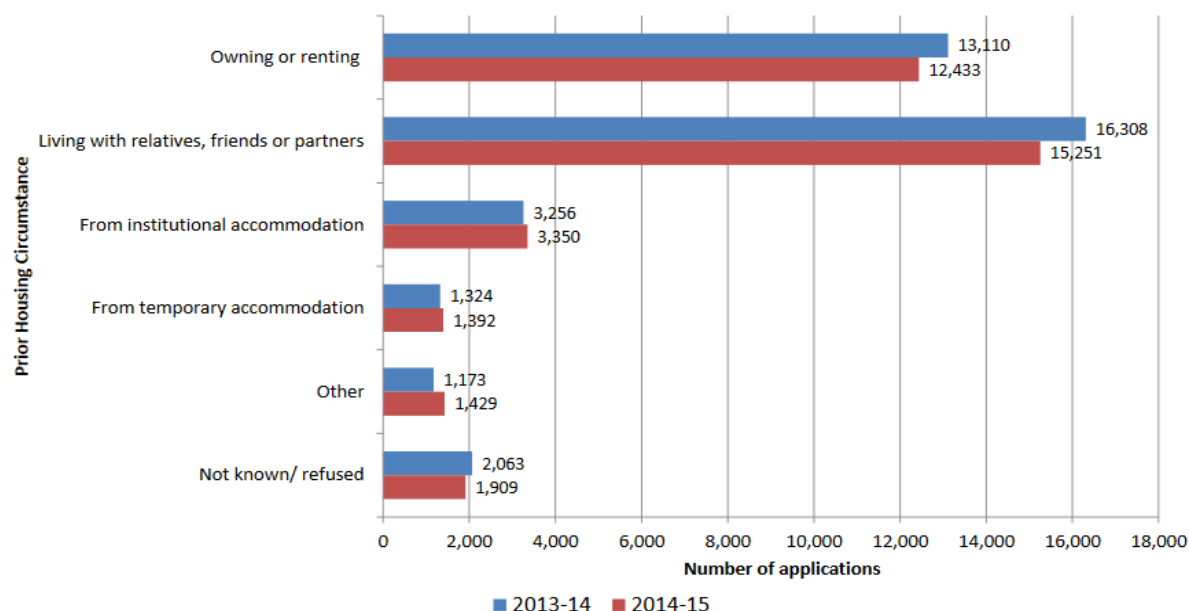


Figure 2.5 Prior housing circumstances of applicants in Scotland in 2013-14 and 2014-15 (Scottish Government, 2015).

In their 2015 report, the Scottish Government presents numbers of the offers of accommodation and outcomes for the 24,501 cases assessed as homeless, where contact was maintained until the closed application in 2014-15. A visual presentation can be seen in Figure 2.6.

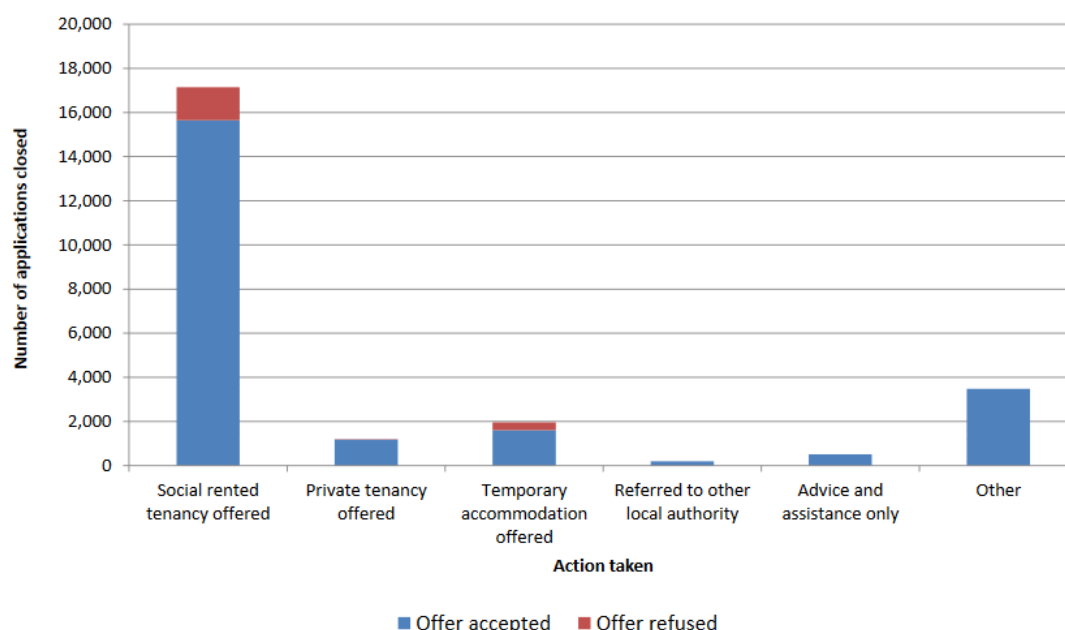


Figure 2.6 Action taken by local authority where applicant was assessed as homeless (Scottish Government, 2015)

Of those households who were offered temporary accommodation, the majority (62%) were housed in local authority or housing association accommodation, 17% in hostels and 10% in bed and breakfasts.

After a decline, repeat homelessness (when a previous application from the household had been closed less than 12 months before the current assessment) increased again in Scotland, from 5.6% in 2012-13 to 7.2% in 2014-15. In addition, the proportion of homeless assessments where the applicant had at least one support need has increased from 34% in 2013-14 to 38% in 2014-15 (Scottish Government, 2015).

STRENGTHS

- A common registration system for local authorities
- Information about previous housing, reason of homelessness, outcomes and relapse
- Strong commitment to the strategy, upheld by successive governments comprising different political parties
- A rights approach leads to empowerment. People are encouraged to contact Local Authorities and take up old problems.

WEAKNESSES

- Only prevalence data
- Only counting those who contact the local authorities

2.7.3 Finland



- ✓ Social- democratic welfare state
- ✓ 71.6 % lives in owner occupied home
- ✓ Public Housing is 16% of total housing stock
- ✓ 16.7 % of renters spend more than 40% of income on housing
- ✓ 16.8 % of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion
- ✓ Severe housing deprivation for 0.7 % of population

DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

In Finland, the definition of homelessness is based on the accommodation mode of the person. As such it encompasses following categories (Luomanen, 2010):

- People staying outdoors, staircases, night shelters etc.
- People living in other shelters or hostels or boarding houses for homeless people
- People living in care homes or other dwellings of social welfare authorities, rehabilitation homes or hospitals due to lack of housing
- Prisoners soon to be released who have no housing
- People living temporarily with relatives and acquaintances due to lack of housing
- Families and couples who have split up or are living in temporary housing due to lack of housing

THE STRATEGY

Finland has a very strong tradition of a housing-led approach to homelessness (Benjaminsen et al, 2009) and is the only European country that saw a decline in homelessness over the past years (Busch-Geertsema, et al., 2014). Policy makers in Finland put homelessness on the agenda as early as 1987-1991 (Tainio & Fredriksson, 2009). Results of this first policy attention was an enhanced cooperation between the housing sector, social welfare services and health authorities. The first Finnish programs to reduce homelessness were installed in 1990's and in 2001-2005. They were the basis for the set-up of the large national programs to reduce homelessness. A first and second national program were aimed at reducing long-term homelessness: PAAVO I and PAAVO II). The recent third national program for 2016-2019 will have a more preventive approach.

PAAVO I

A first national program to reduce long-term homelessness (PAAVO) was implemented in 2008-2011. The program is described in detail by Busch-Geertsema (2010) as part of the peer review organized by FEANTSA. PAAVO I was a large investment and cooperation project for the eradication of homelessness with the ambitious goal to halve homelessness by 2011 and develop more effective measures to prevent homelessness. This on the basis of a government resolution and with a budget of approximately 200 million euros. Of this part, state funding accounted for 170 million, Finnish Slot Machine Association (RAY) for 20.5 million and the municipalities for 10.3 million euros. The coordination and management of the programme was carried out by the Ministry of Environment, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Social

Affairs and health, the Ministry of Justice, the state Housing Finance and Development Centre (ARA) and the Finnish Slot Machine Association.

Focus of PAAVO I was on the ten cities with the most pressing homelessness problem: Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, Tampere, Turku, Kuopio, Oulu, Jyväskylä, Lahti and Joensuu. These ten cities signed letters of intent with the State Administration, entailing detailed agreements on the concrete plans and funding in each city. Responsibilities were defined both from the side of the government and municipalities.

In order to achieve their ambitious goal to halve homelessness by 2011, the plan was set up to gradually abandon shelters and replace these beds with permanent housing units. A strategy underpinned by Housing First. People with a long history of homelessness were to be housed in units with permanent tenancies. In order to achieve this 1,250 new dwellings were provided in the form of housing units, supported housing units or places in care. The housing were communal Housing First projects as well as scattered-site housing. A part of the communal Housing First projects existed in converting existing buildings, for example homeless shelters. An example of this can be found in Helsinki where a former emergency shelter that once consisted of shared dormitories with 500 beds was converted into 80 apartments.

Another aspect of the Finnish policy shift is the growing emphasis on prevention. Target groups include: young people, people released from prison and people at imminent risk of eviction. Measures taken in PAAVO I for these target groups include: a young people's subsidized housing project, the procurement of subsidized housing for people recently released from prison and the development of better services to prevent homelessness after release from prison, the development of national guidelines and local services for the prevention of evictions. Housing advisory services are set up in order to prevent evictions by responding rapidly to arising tenancy problems (Tainio & Fredriksson, 2009).

PAAVO II

PAAVO I was prolonged to PAAVO II and a new objective was set to eliminate long-term homelessness by 2015. Other focus points in this second program were the design of creative effective measures to prevent homelessness and to provide housing advice services. A number of scattered housing projects with a strong social integration dimension were developed and there was attention for the participation of experts by experience.

To accomplish all the above mentioned, a budget of 0.6 million of annual subsidy was provided for the housing advisory services. This should represent 20% of total costs. For 2014, 0.9 million euros was added to this as part of the parliamentary budget. By the end of PAAVO II approximately 2.500 new dwellings were constructed and a 350 extra social workers were hired to assist the newly housed. The aim of the program is to have permanent services by 2015-2017.

In contrast to PAAVO I where the Housing First approach was started as a communal/congregate model, In PAAVO II more scattered housing was used. For this, social rental housing and lower intensity support was provided by social and health care professionals.

Specifically for young people, the Finnish Youth Housing Association (NAL) developed housing services. In addition to general housing advice, courses are organized more customized for the young tenants and for those who recently lost a dwelling due to eviction.

Recently, a third national program was set up for the time period 2016-2019 (see Finnish Government, 2016). This new program has the objective to strengthen the prevention of homelessness and prevent the recurrence of homelessness. To reach this goal, 78 million euros will be allocated to the program, of which 54 million euros will be used for housing and 24 million euros for service development and coordination. The funding comes from several sources and budgets from ministries and others. By 2019, another 2,500 new dwellings will be constructed. Special attention will be dedicated to the integration of asylum seekers who received a residence permit. Helping them in the transition to housing and provide housing guidance to those who might benefit from it to ensure a successful independent living. Next to this, interested cities will be allowed to test 5-10 'pienet tuvat'. These are small dwellings for people who had no success in the other housing forms.

INTERESTING PROJECTS

Established in 1985, Finland constructed an interesting tool for ensuring access to housing for single homeless people: the Y-Foundation. This nationwide organization started with the buying of small apartments in owner occupied housing which they subsequently sublet to municipalities or other social or healthcare providers. They on their turn manage the resident selection process and re-let them to people in need of accommodation. Only since the past few years the Y-Foundation has also been involved in managing and building larger apartment blocks. In 2016 their property encompasses 16.300 apartment spread over 55 Finnish cities and municipalities¹⁹. The organisation won the World Habitat Award 2014.



Picture from: www.bshf.com

Ex-offenders were a target group of Paavo I and II. A lot of action towards this target groups was carried out by two NOG's: Krits and Silta-foundation. The work of these organisations exists in building networks with prisons and social and health care services. Silta-foundation sublets private rental flats to their clients. After a period of a year they move to social housing. Set up of the VAT network of 11 NGPO's to support people when released from prison. Kritz coordinates the network.

MONITORING STRATEGY

As early as 1987, Finland introduced an annual survey on homelessness as part of a housing market survey. Municipalities report the extent of homelessness in their city at the 15th of November of each year. As these estimates are municipal, some variation in counting methods exists. The number is usually made up by several sources such as the register for municipal rental housing applications, the register of social services customers and from homeless

¹⁹ <http://www.ysaatio.fi>

housing services providers (Busch-Geertsema et al, 2014). ARA has the responsibility to compile the data and to produce a yearly report.

The 11 cities that participated in PAAVO II are studied in more detail (ARA, 2015).

Several other surveys such as postal surveys and register based surveys have been carried out over the past few years, mainly in Helsinki.

No data is collected on the sustainability of the housing in Housing First.

RESULTS

The core objective of the Finnish national program was successful: long-term homelessness was reduced substantially. However, the ambitious goal of PAAVO II to end long-term homelessness by 2015 has not been met. As can be seen in figure 2.7, there were almost 20.000 homeless people in Finland at the end of the 1980's. By mid-1990 this number had fallen to 10.000 and went further down to 8.000 in the middle of 2000's (Luomanen, 2010). At the last ARA measurement in November 2014, the total number of long-term homeless people in Finland was 2.443 persons. Compared to 2013, this means a fall of 4%. This fall was a lot higher in Helsinki with 25% or 195 less long term homeless people. At that date, the greater region of Helsinki still had 1.650 long-term homeless people or 67% of the total for whole Finland.

By the end of PAAVO II approximately 2.500 new dwellings were constructed and a 350 extra social workers had been hired to assist the newly housed. Still there is a lack of affordable housing in metropolitan areas, above all in Helsinki.

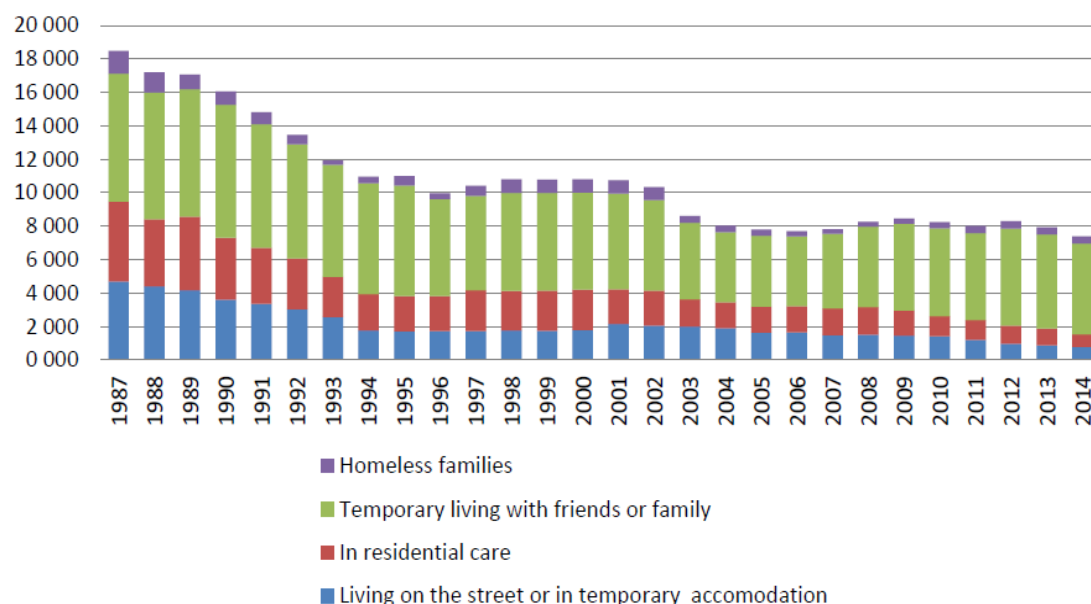


Figure 2.7 The number of homeless people in Finland from 1987-2014 (Source: ARA, 2015)

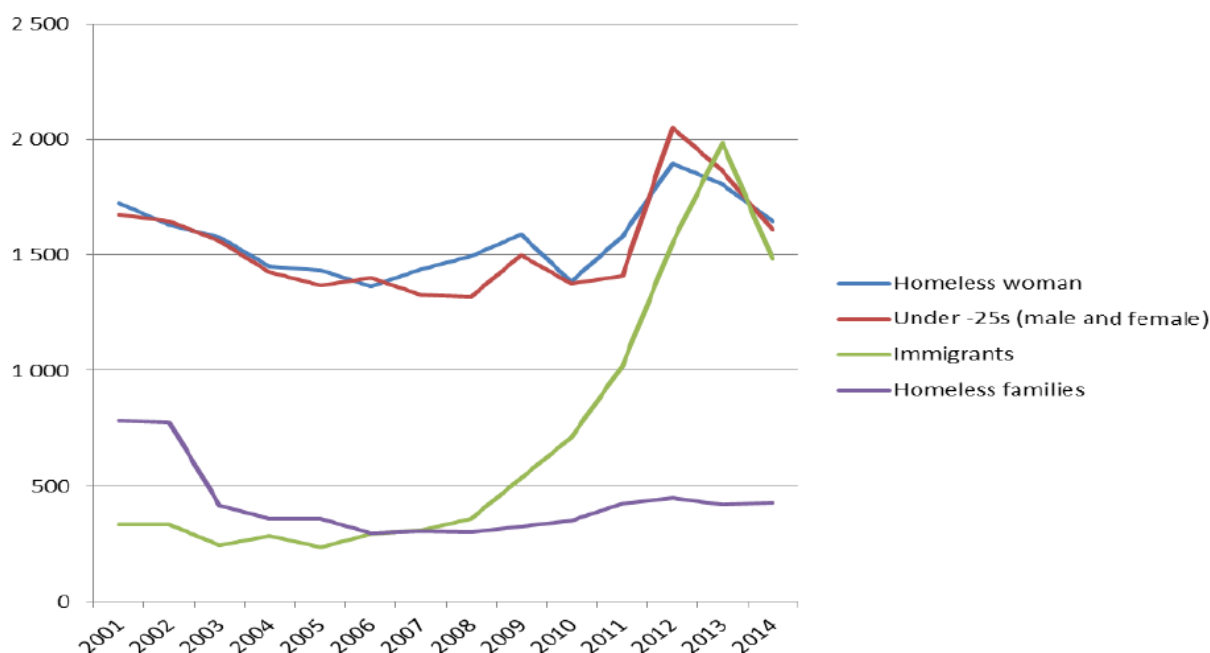


Figure 2.8 Homelessness in Finland by demographics (Source: ARA, 2015)

Demographic statistics of homeless people in Finland shows the following trends (see Figure 2.8). The numbers for homeless women, youngsters and immigrants that were on the rise since 2010, have again dropped since PAAVO II. Compared to 2013, there were 31% less long-term homeless young people in 2014 (ARA, 2015). Still, a high prevalence of homelessness is observed for some groups. One of the largest growing homeless groups in Finland are immigrants. In 2013, they made up for 23% of the homeless population, and 60% of homeless families had an immigrant background. This group will be targeted in the new third national program.

The number of evictions was reduced significantly due to the actions of the housing advice teams. In Helsinki, eviction rates dropped with 32% in the period 2001-2008. Evictions are one of the priorities of the Finnish program for the next years.

STRENGTHS

An evaluation and critical reflection on the whole PAAVO program (2008-2015) was carried out in 2014 as part of an international research review (Pleace, Culhane, Granfelt, & Knutagård, 2015). We look at their study and the country profile of Busch-Geertsema and colleagues (2014) to sum up following strengths and weaknesses of the Finnish national program.

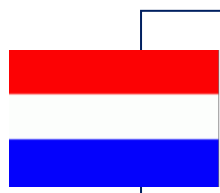
- A truly coordinated National homelessness strategy, based on a clear political will and parliamentary decisions
- Clear responsibilities at national level
- Clear and concrete mechanisms of local delivery, noted down in the letters of intent
- Coordinated approach among different sectors
- Objective and clear quantitative targets (e.g. amount of new houses to be created)
- National strategy is well-sourced

- Evaluation/critical reflection, willingness to explore, examine and criticise Evaluation on the whole PAAVO program (2008-2015) was carried out in 2014 as an international research review
- Evidence based strategy. ARA supports research and development of the programme.
- Long tradition of measuring homelessness
- Quantitative targets are set and succeeded
- Strong cooperation between ARA and local authorities
- Measurement of different types of homeless (link with Ethos Light)

WEAKNESSES

- ARA Statistics are aggregated data from municipalities, not on individual level. Not all municipalities use the same techniques when answering the questions on homelessness and not all will use multiple data sources.
- The Housing Survey is a snapshot of the situation of November 15th of each year. It is an underestimation of the actual number as it does not bring into light those who were in and out of homelessness during that past year
- Little data is available on the effects of the national strategy. Numbers are available on the number of houses that were constructed. Yet little is known about the effect Housing First has had on the lives of people. Interesting measures would give a view on the social integration of newly housed people, improvements in health and wellbeing, economic integration. In addition, explore the need for alternative approaches. Assessing cost effectiveness.
- Housing supply is limited, definitely in some areas (e.g. Helsinki)
- Communal/congregated Finnish Housing First model has been criticized
- More robust research might still be needed to evaluate the effects of the measures that were taken

2.7.4 The Netherlands

	✓	Social democratic welfare state
	✓	69 % lives in owner occupied home
	✓	Public Housing is 33 % of total housing stock
	✓	25 % of renters at market price spend more 40% of income on housing
	✓	16.4 % of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion
	✓	Severe housing deprivation for 1.4 % of population

DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

In the Netherlands a (legal) distinction is made between actual and residential homelessness (Wolf et al, 2002).

Actual homeless refers to:

- Persons living on the street or in public spaces without fixed residence
- Persons who make short term use of night shelters
- Persons who stay with family or friends, on non-structural basis, without fixed residence

Whereas residential homeless are people who are staying in residential services for homeless.

THE STRATEGY

Starting in 2006, homelessness received policy attention in the Netherlands with their first Strategic Plan for Social Relief. The first plan was set up for the time period 2006-2010 and the next one for 2011-2014. The initial focus of the plan was on the G4 or the four major cities Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht. As the plan became a national strategy in 2008, the strategic plan was expanded to the 39 other central municipalities and their regions (for a review see Hermans, 2012).

The main objectives of the strategic plan were the following:

1. Ensure that every homeless person has a regular income, a stable accommodation suited to their needs, a non-optional care programme and a daily occupation;
2. End homelessness following detention;
3. End homelessness following a stay in residential care;
4. Reduce anti-social behaviour associated with homelessness;
5. Reduce evictions

The strategic plan consists of two central pillars: a person oriented approach and an individual care plan with a 100% seamless cooperation between all parties involved (Tuynman et al., 2011). The execution of the plan is monitored by an individual field coordinator for every homeless person.

Next to the more common goals to provide persons with an income, accommodation and support, the strategic plan for social relief also was set up to reduce the level of public nuisance caused by homeless persons.

Special attention was devoted to the prevention of evictions. In Amsterdam for example, 11 housing corporations set up an agreement with service providers to inform them as early as

two months' rent arrears are observed. Next social workers cooperate with financial experts and pay a house visit to explore the financial situation of the household.

To ensure nationwide access to shelters, and as a result of the local connection discussion, the Toolkit nationwide access and local connection was developed. This toolkit contains policy rules to determine who is responsible to provide which type of help in the care plan.

The Social Support Act assigns the 43 central municipalities government funding to arrange emergency shelter in their regions (Planije, & Tuynman, 2013). In 2014, this annual budget was €297,528,000. In addition to central government funding, there is an extra €350,000,000 available through the health insurance system for homeless people with psychiatric or somatic illnesses or learning disabilities. Another €135,000,000 is available from the justice system, from donations and from contributions from service users.

MONITORING STRATEGY

Different methods are used in the Netherlands to measure homelessness. A first type is the data collected to monitor the realisation of the strategy's objectives. To measure the follow-up of these aims, five indicators were developed:

1. The stability index: number of homeless people with stable accommodation, a regular income, a solid contract with support services and some kind of daily occupation)
2. Number of evictions per year and number of evictions leading to homelessness per year
3. Number of cases of homelessness after detention
4. Number of cases of homelessness after leaving residential care
5. Number of convictions and number of reports of harassment

The independent research institute Trimbos publishes a yearly report on these five indicators. Individual results are presented to challenge major cities to ameliorate their numbers. A point that has received criticism (e.g by Hermans, 2012) is the time period of one month set for the last 4 indicators. As a consequence, persons who apply for homeless care and left detention or where evicted longer than a month before, are not counted.

A second source of data collection is the monitoring information provided by Federatie Opvang. They collect data registers used by the different services for homeless (maatschappelijke opvang). In their registration, housing with floating support and day care are also included.

A third strategy is a method that combines the registration data of the 43 central municipalities, a system that is similar to the one used in the G4. This numbers include residential care, roofless and young homeless people. Yet there appears to be no strict guideline on how this count is to be executed by municipalities leading to very different measurement approaches.

A fourth method used is an estimation of the number of homeless based on a statistical model. This measurement of homelessness is done by CBS, the Statistics Bureau (Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek). They present profiles of homeless people based on following administrative databases:

- Personal registration data: persons who are registered at the address of one of the Federatie Opvang care centers (for example day center of night shelter)
- Welfare benefits: a list available at CBS of people who receive welfare benefits and have no fixed address

- Homeless persons as such registered by LADIS the Dutch alcohol and drugs information system.

Taking these three databases as a starting point, a statistical model is used based on the capture-recapture model to make assumptions on the whole homeless population in the Netherlands. Results are presented annually (see Coumans, Cruyff, Van der Heijden, Wolf, & Schmeets, 2015). This method and the usability for Belgium will be discussed further in chapter X of this report.

Recently, results were published of Coda-G4, a longitudinal multi-site cohort study which followed up 500 formerly homeless persons over 2.5 years. The start of the registration is the moment when homeless persons present themselves to the access point for social relief. Four face to face interviews were carried out providing information on housing and housing stability and quality of life (van Straaten, Van de Mheen, Van der Laan, Rodenburg, Boersma, & Wolf, 2016).

RESULTS

Different definitions of 'social care' (maatschappelijke opvang) and diverse counting methods lead to diverging numbers for the amount of homeless in the Netherlands ranging from 25,000 to 60,000. Federatie Opvang counted 57,800 clients in care in 2012. In their recent data, CBS presents an increase in the number of homeless in the Netherlands. Taking 2009 as a reference year, they report an increase of 74% in 2015. This means that a 13,000 extra inhabitants had no fixed residence, stayed in care for homeless, on the street or in public buildings or with families or friends (CBS, 2016).

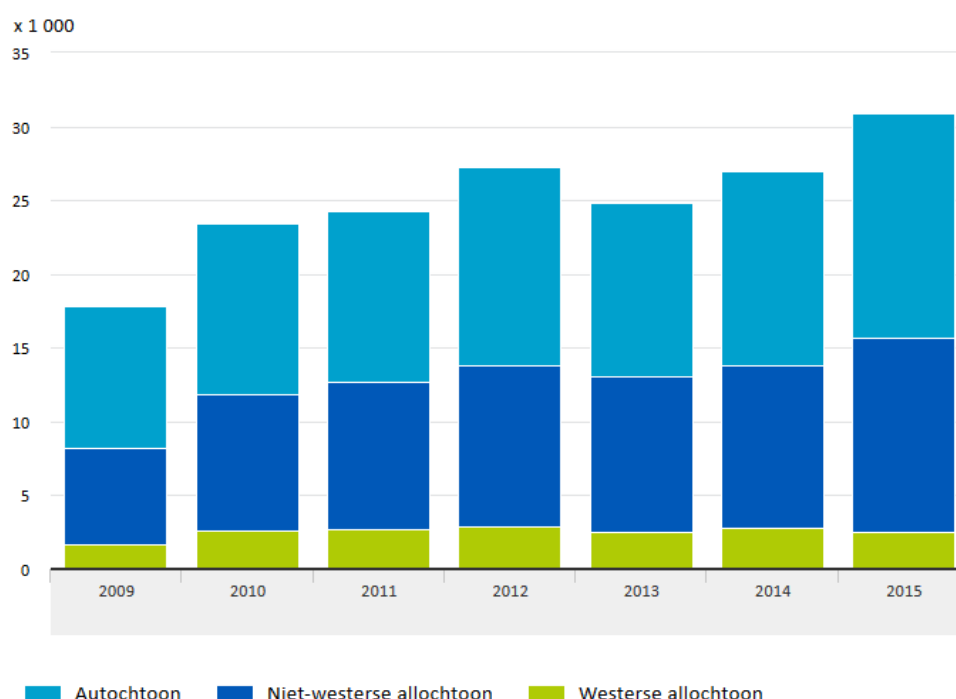


Figure 2.9 Estimation of the amount of homeless in The Netherlands divided by origin (CBS 2016)

Figure 2.9 depicts how above all the part of non-western immigrants is increasing from 36% of the homeless population in 2009 to 43% in 2015. And as CBS data only include those who

appear in registration databases, this number will be an underestimation as it does not include those who are homeless and residing illegally in the country.

Experts in the Netherlands point to the increase of homeless people with mental health problems. This can be a result of the phasing out of intramural mental health care. In 2013, 71% of Dutch centre cities reported an increase of 'new homeless', a group of people who are homeless as a result of the crisis. They have debts, are unemployed or live with the burden of a mortgage they can't repay, yet they don't suffer from severe mental illnesses or addiction. As a result, they are often not accepted in homeless care as they are considered being capable to care for themselves (Trimbos, 2015). Another group that saw an increase are homeless families (Planije & Tuynman, 2013).

In the eight years of the Strategic Plan for social relief (2006-2014), 11,000 persons received housing, income and care (Tuynman, & Planije, 2014).

Substantial attention has been devoted to the prevention of evictions. With success, evictions by social housing companies have decreased from 5,900 in 2009 to 5,550 in 2015. In 2015, 25% of the eviction verdicts in social housing led to an actual eviction (Aedes, 2016).

STRENGTHS

- Monitoring progress through monitoring reports by independent research institute Trimbos
- Focus on outcomes
- Indicators linked to specific target groups
- Monitoring from G4 to all centre cities
- Innovative panel research
- Capture-recapture method
- Financial impulse

WEAKNESSES

- Commitment and monitoring stopped with the ending of the plan in 2014
- No national monitoring report on effectiveness of approach
- No attention for hidden homelessness

3. EXPLORATORY STUDY IN BELGIUM: METHODOLOGY

Next to and inspired by the systematic literature review, an exploratory study was carried out in Belgium to assess if and how the different existing methods in Europe are applicable in Belgium. In this chapter we present the methods used to formulate an answer to this question.

3.1. A hybrid methodological approach to address a complex phenomenon

To reach the project goals and gather data on the specific points of interest, many data gathering methods were applied and many relevant stakeholders were involved. Applied methods are:

- Analysis of administrative databases and documents
- Interviews
- Expert panel
- Focus groups
- Group discussion
- Online questionnaire
- Statistical testing of existing databases

Stakeholders that were involved in these data gathering methods are:

- Scientists
- Policy executives
- Administration officers
- Executives of umbrella organisations
- Executives of local social and health organisations
- (Street level) social workers
- Homeless people
- Representatives of homeless people

A hybrid methodological approach was used in which some of the methods (e.g. interviews) were used in regard to several research topics and/or stakeholders (i.c. homeless people, social workers and administration officers), whereas some types of stakeholders (e.g. social workers) were involved in several data gathering methods (i.c. focus groups and interviews). Still other data gathering methods (e.g. the online questionnaire) were used in regard to only one research topic (i.c. the presence of homeless people in youth hostels) and one particular stakeholder (i.c. staff of youth hostels). In the Brussels region 2 point-in-time counts were organised in the winter of 2016/2017 to collect data on 8 of the 13 ETHOS categories including a street count, non-conventional housing and a consultation of users of low threshold services. Finally, it becomes clear that some of the specific points of interest (e.g. hidden homelessness) are tackled through the use of partial data of several data sources (i.c. literature, administrative documents, oral accounts of the organisations present in the focus group with social workers and interviews with executives and social workers in the organisations in the (more) rural context).

This hybrid methodological approach stems from two basic scientific imperatives. The first being that the applied method should always fit the concrete question(s) and the concrete stakeholder(s) involved (and never the other way around), the second that method- and data-triangulation are powerful techniques that facilitate validation of data through cross verification from two or more sources. In the next paragraphs we discuss each of the applied data collection methods.

3.2. Interviews and contacts with data experts

As a first step in this study, data experts were contacted to gain a first view on the data collection methods used at federal and at regional level. These data experts belonged either to organizations working with homeless or to government administrations holding possibly relevant databases.

For the organizations working with homeless a fiche was made by the researchers in order to take standardized notes regarding the registration system and content in place. In Flanders, visits were made to two large (Ghent, Antwerp), four mid-size (Ostend, Hasselt, Genk, Kortrijk) and one small (Schilde) PCSW. For the CAW registration, Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk was contacted, for street work registration this was Vlastrov. In addition, interviews were carried out with Netwerk tegen armoede, VVSG and SVK (social rental agency in Flanders).

In Wallonia, preliminary interviews were carried out with data collection experts in three Relais Sociaux, among the oldest, who had experience of building up data collection and processing already before the IWEPS harmonization. The interviews focused on the rationale of their initial data collection system, the challenges with convincing the services, the use of data, and the reaction to the harmonization. A further initial interview was done with the researcher in charge of the harmonization project at IWEPS, who unfortunately was not yet in charge when the project started. Beyond the Relais Sociaux, an interview was done with the Arlon night shelter, which is not represented among the Relais Sociaux structures, nor has its own data shared at the Regional level. This provided a first view into rural homelessness since the Arlon service is quite often contacted by rural institutions (police, CPAS, psychiatric hospitals,...) when they have to handle homeless cases.

Next to the city counts (since 2008) la Strada has eight years of experience related to a central regional registration system to collect and harmonize data from the Brussels residential services. The challenges in data collection in Brussels are therefore situated on another level: how to fine-tune the existing instruments and to prepare for the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) before May 25th 2019. The experiences of the data expert of la Strada and the working group 'central data collection' were documented. The Brussels instruments were presented at the focus groups to discuss and inspire data collection in Flanders and Wallonia.

In addition to the registration in organizations working with homeless, it was studied to what extent regional and federal governments hold databases where information on homelessness is readily available. The selection of organizations was based on the advice of data experts from homeless organizations and suggestions by the guidance committee.

For some data bases, a data expert was interviewed, this was the case for the Crossroads bank for Social Security, the federal Public Planning Service Social Integration (PPS SI) regarding NovaPrima, a residential drug treatment center and the Scientific Institute for Public Health (TDI, treatment demand indicator). For other databases, the expert was contacted through (repeated) email contact. Organizations contacted in this way are: the National Register, DG Health care (Minimal Psychiatric Data), DG EPI (Sidis Suite), Federal Police (ANG database), FPS Justice.

3.3. Focus groups with data collectors

In all three regions, a focus group was organized with data collectors from homeless organizations and experts from local, regional and federal governments involved with data collection.

In Flanders and Wallonia, this focus groups lasted one full day. In Brussels two consecutive meetings were held with data collectors and street level workers (see next paragraph) together.

Main topics discussed in these focus groups were:

- Current registration systems: systems used, variables registered, identification of homeless in the registration systems.
- Conditions for registration/data collection, data needed for effective policy.
- Thresholds and motives for registration.
- Reflections on (other) monitoring methods, especially a point in time count / survey
- Measuring hidden homelessness: can they be found in registration systems?

3.4. Focus groups with street level workers in an urban context

In all three regions, a focus group was organized with street level workers in a big city. Next to Brussels, this concerns Ghent for Flanders and Liège for Wallonia. Invitations were sent not only to workers of general services that have a specific offer for homeless persons such as PCSW, CAW and Relais Sociaux, but also to other (low-threshold) organizations and persons that presumably reach homeless, such as medico-SOCIAL relief centres for illicit drug users (MSOC/MASS), community health centers (WGC), the social referent of the railway station, etc.

Topics discussed in these focus groups were:

- Experience with and attitude towards data collection
- Conditions for registration/ data collection
- Reflections on other monitoring methods, especially a point in time count / survey
- Hidden homelessness

3.5. Interviews with street level workers in a more rural context

In addition to the focus groups that took place in an urban context, it was decided to do some additional interviews with social workers in a more rural context: the community of Diest in Flemish Brabant. Interviews were held with staff and/or employees of the following organizations: PCSW Diest, CAW day center, MSOC, local police, St. Annendael psychiatric facility, Hospital Diest, and CAW youth advice center. Additionally an interview was held with an expert by experience now living in Scherpenheuvel-Zichem.

Topics discussed were the same as in the urban context namely:

- Experience and attitude towards data collection
- Conditions for registration/ data collection
- Reflections on other monitoring methods, especially a point in time count / survey
- Hidden homelessness

In Wallonia, additional interviews with social workers in rural context were also carried out. Two small rural CPAS were visited, where social workers were interviewed about the (possible) homeless persons among their clients. Identification of homeless according to ETHOS Light

was the first exercise, which raised some awareness. Since the number of applicants is quite low in such CPAS, a retrospective browse of their files tried to identify homeless among former clients, either with reference address (mostly by privateers), indebted persons, etc. The policy of the CPAS toward such cases was investigated. The information systems were also reviewed. One more interview was done with the President and the social worker-in-chief in a middle size, rural CPAS, mostly focused on their Reference address policy and on their attitude toward extended monitoring and registration.

3.6. Exploration of the prevalence of homelessness in a (more) rural context

In a small explorative study in PCSW Diest, Scherpenheuvel-Zichem, Glabbeek, Tienen and Bekkevoort, every social worker present on a given day was interviewed and asked to go through his/her active client files (integration income and debt counselling clients) and name the housing situation of their clients. For those whose living situation corresponded to ETHOS Light, some additional variables were recorded. In addition, for all the participants who correspond to ETHOS Light, it was marked whether or not these clients had a reference address.

3.7. Meeting with target group representatives

One common meeting was organized in Brussels with representatives of the target group. A representative from the PPS SI and a researcher from IWEPS joined the meeting.

The topic of this meeting was to clarify the scope of the project and take away misunderstandings and uneasiness about (the conceptual framework of) the MEHOBEL project.

3.8. Interviews with hidden homelessness

Very little is known about the living situation and the extent of the group of people who are hidden homeless in Belgium. To explore this, seven hidden homeless persons were interviewed.

This part of the project was carried out in Flanders. For practical reasons, it was decided to focus on Leuven and Diest. To get into contact with the hidden homeless, low-threshold organizations were contacted: the outreach worker of CAW Oost-Brabant, CAW day centers De Meander and De Zonnebloem.

The topic of the study was explained to the social workers. In some cases, the interviewee was contacted by the social worker and asked if he/she was interested in participating in the study. In other cases, the researchers visited the day centers and searched for participants. Being aware that quite some hidden homeless will not be in contact with welfare organizations, attempts were made to find more interviewees through snowball sampling.

In the interviews, three main topics were discussed:

- Living situation
- Contact with welfare organizations
- Experience with and attitude towards registration

Participants were briefed about the study and informed consent forms were signed. Per topic, a visual presentation of the questions was presented so that participants could participate. They were invited to make notes and write down remarks on the forms.

After the first interviews were conducted, the content was analysed by the two researchers involved and minor adaptations were made to the questions. An answering scheme was made up. The analysis was done by the same two researchers who conducted the interviews.

3.9. Interviews with youth hostel employees

Apart from helping us to get into touch with homeless people, the outreach worker of CAW Oost Brabant mentioned that homeless people in Leuven regularly stay in one of the three (youth) hostels in Leuven: City hostel, De Blauwput and The Cube Hostel. We therefore contacted each of these hostels and arranged for an interview with someone of their staff. These interviews were completely open and sought to explore the experience of these hostels with homeless as customers.

3.10. Online questionnaire with Flemish youth hostels

The information gathered in the interviews with the three hostels in Leuven was interesting enough to try and get a bigger picture of the (hidden) presence of homeless in hostels. We decided to compose an online questionnaire with the online tool Survey Monkey. With help of the general secretary of the organization, the online questionnaire was sent to all 23 youth hostels associated with the Flemish Youth Hostels.

3.11. Online questionnaire in Brussels

In Flanders and Wallonia the PCSW play an important role in the accommodation of homeless persons and migrants (ILA/LOI). To collect this type of information for the Brussels Region the city counts organized November 2016 and March 2017 were extended with an e-mailed questionnaire to PCSW and Fedasil and other NGO's competent for the reception of (recognized) asylum seekers. To learn more about the living situation of hidden homeless persons the method to interview users of low threshold services was elaborated with the support of students and (ex) homeless persons.

3.12. Expert panels

Based on the analysis of existing data bases, interviews with the data experts, field workers and experts by experience the researchers constructed building blocks to measure homelessness in Belgium. These building blocks were first presented to the guidance committee of the MEHOBEL project on September 28th 2017. In this meeting, pros and cons of the different methods were discussed.

Next, a broader group of stakeholders were invited on a seminar that took place on December 7th 2017. Amongst the invitees were members of Federal government, regional governments, and a variety of local stakeholders who work in the homeless sector. A list of participants can be found in Annex X. Similar to the meeting with the guidance committee, participants were presented the building blocks and the feasibility of was discussed.

4. POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES TO MEASURE HOMELESSNES IN BELGIUM

4.1. At federal level

4.1.1 National register: reference address

The National Register (Rijksregister/Registre National) is a central database that ensures the registration, storage and communication of identification information in Belgium. Following groups are registered:

- all Belgians
- all Belgians residing abroad
- all foreigners who were granted the permission to settle and reside in Belgium
- all foreigners who declare to be refugee or ask to be recognized as such

Registration is provided by municipalities and the Immigration Office. Useful in scope of this project is the registration of the reference address as a separate information type. This means that it is possible to draw a list of all the persons who hold a reference address in Belgium. FPS Interior (FOD Binnenlandse Zaken/SPF Intérieur) appoint following groups to be eligible for a reference address²⁰:

1. persons who live in a mobile home (eg fair workers)
2. persons who are absent for study and business reasons for less than a year
3. members of the civilian and military personnel of the Armed Forces
4. members of diplomatic and consular staff and their families
5. development workers who have been sent for a cooperation assignment and their families
6. persons who no longer have a residence due to insufficient means
7. detainees who don't fulfil the conditions for temporary absence

The legal framework of the reference address is laid down in the law of July 19th 1991 with the objective to improve the situation of homeless persons. According to this law, a reference address can be taken with different stakeholders. It is possible to have a reference address with a **natural person**. The natural person needs to give written consent to accept this reference address at the location of his own residential address and agree to receive post and other administrative documents for the person who applied.

For homeless persons it is also possible to have a reference address at a **PCSW**. The circular letter of March 21st 1997, describes the conditions: have no residence due to insufficient means and 'to apply for social service'. The applicant has the duty to sign up at the PCSW once every three months. In a next Circular Letter of July 27th 1998 is further specified that applying for the reference address itself is sufficient.

For persons living in a mobile home, the circular letter of May 2nd 2006, added the possibility to have a reference address at a **non-profit organization**. More specific, an organizations that deals with the statutory representation of the interests of this group. An example is the Antwerp Integration centre De8 where 104 itinerant Roma families have their reference address²¹.

²⁰ <http://www.ibz.rrn.fgov.be/nl/bevolking/faq/de-inschrijving-in-de-bevolkingsregisters/>

²¹ <http://www.de8.be/actuele-werkingen/referentieadres.html>

Evaluation

The reason for applying for a reference address (the distinctions between the above named 7 groups) is not marked in the National Register. Nor is the modality (natural person, PCSW, non-profit organization) of the reference address mentioned.

The amount of reference addresses inevitably reflects local policy. Interviews with PCSW workers make clear that policy guidelines are ambiguous and willingness to grant a reference address differs (and notably declined in recent years), as was also stated during the inter-federal centre to combat poverty and social exclusion and in the most recent Brussels report on poverty (2016:41). In the PCSW that were involved in exploring homelessness in a more rural context, social workers and staff reported scepticism in the willingness to grant a reference address under the instigation of the local governments involved.

It is possible to select homeless persons from the National Register who have their reference address at PCSW. This can be done by providing a list with PCSW addresses (provided by PPS SI) and place this list next to the list with reference addresses provided by the National Register. This exercise has been carried out several times by the PPS SI. Their experience learns that special attention should be devoted to make sure PCSW addresses are up to date and all PCSW addresses used for this purpose are included (e.g. including smaller social branches)¹.

Adding the reason for applying for a reference address (cf legislation) allows selecting the persons who are homeless. This number will include homeless persons with a PCSW reference address and those with reference address with a private person.

4.1.2 PCWS registration

The PCSW present in each of the 589 Belgian municipalities, are responsible for the granting of social assistance benefits and provide general social support as well as a variety of financial support measures specifically for homeless such as housing benefit, installation premium and housing guaranty.

PCSW IT systems fulfil multiple purposes. They hold the client files, allowing social workers to follow up on a personal file. They also provide several connections to other databases. A first one is the connection with NovaPrima, the PPS SI system for reimbursements (see further on in this chapter). A second connection it the one with the Crossroads Bank for Social Security (CBSS), allowing the social worker to check if someone is entitled to specific social benefits. A third possible connection is the one with a specific bank, as some IT systems are simultaneously used for accounting, for reimbursements.

PCSW do not have a uniform registration system as they are free to select their own IT provider. For Flemish PCSW, the main IT providers are Cevi/Logins, Cipal and Schaubroeck²².

The approach differs per supplier. Some rent out a complete IT package, with or without a maintenance contract included. Others sell their IT-services per module or even by piece of information (eg. a link between records and the CBSS). The rent of the IT system is dependent

²² <https://www.v-ict-or.be/nieuws/2015/11/24/welke-leverancier-kiest-u-voor-uw-boekhoudpakket>

on the number of modules and the number of licenses. A smaller PCSW will pay less for the same package.

In Wallonia, the situation across PCSW is very variable. Most small PCSWs have no specific tool beyond NovaPrima and use mainly paper files. In larger cities, homemade systems have been developed, which range from comprehensive systems (such as in Charleroi) to custom, limited tools used only for specific jobs. For instance in Liege, each main department had its own system, not connected to the others, so that transmission of information from one branch to another is performed via paper files.

In the Brussels Region the 19 PCSW work with 8 different IT-systems for registration. Brulocalis²³ and the Federation of Brussels PCSW are cooperating for a uniform registration system for May 2019.

Evaluation

Homelessness as such is seldom registered even though the housing situation will often be described in social reports, this information is not visible in 'countable' registration. Even in the same PCSW, different registration practices of homelessness can be observed. One social worker will do this by typing 'homeless' in the address box, other will type 'here and there' or leave the address box open.

A uniform registration of the housing situation of PCSW clients can bring into light the situation of a broad client group. Even though this is a minor adaptation, it is one that has to be carried out in many different IT systems.

Many PCSW provide emergency housing for homeless clients, an offer that can be classified as ETHOS Light 3 'People living in accommodation for the homeless'. In some PCSW, clients living in their emergency housing will be registered in the general IT system. Other PCSW keep this registration in a separate record for example in an Excel or Word file. Some PCSW don't keep track of this information.

PCSW have a view on ETHOS category 9 'People living under threat of eviction' as they have a specific task in the prevention of judicial evictions. A common reaction to the notice by the family court is to send an invitation letter to the person threatened by an eviction. Known PCSW clients are often contacted in another manner. These actions and their effect is information that is not often registered by PCSW. Even though several PCSW workers interviewed state this is information that can easily be kept/counted.

²³ Brulocalis: Vereniging van Stad & Gemeenten van Brussel

4.1.3 PPS SI: Novaprima

PCSW are funded by the federal Public Planning Service Social Integration (PPS SI/POD MI/SPP IS) through submitting online forms in the online tool NovaPrima. Currently, there is no information concerning the housing situation in NovaPrima.

Since constructing a new variable in NovaPrima is costly and time consuming, adding one or multiple codes to an existing variable such as housing situation can be a feasible solution.

One solution is the adaption of Form 2b used for the refunding of the integration income by redefining more precisely the living situation of the three categories single, cohabitant and head of household (that is: according to the definition of this category in the law).

To determine attribution and size of the integration income, PCSW workers have to fill out the NovaPrima forms. Variables useful for this study are presented in Figure 4.1.

11. Category beneficiary A = cohabitant B = single E = head of household	<input type="checkbox"/>	12. Actual living situation 32 possibilities (1-44)	<input type="checkbox"/>
		14. Homeless 0= Not ex-homeless with ISIP 1= Ex- homeless with ISIP	<input type="checkbox"/>
42a. Livelihood cohabitant(s)	<input type="text"/>	42b. Number of cohabitants When taking livelihood into account	<input type="text"/>

Figure 4.1 Detail selection Novaprima Form B. Source: <https://primabook.mi-is.be/nl/home>

This means further subdividing the answer codes into:

- ... with place of residence
- ... without place of residence (ETHOS Light 1-2)
- ... and staying temporarily in a residential setting (ETHOS Light 3-4)
- ... and staying temporarily with family/friends (ETHOS Light 6)

A potential added value of this adaptation is that it could stimulate PCSW workers to grant correct integration income for single homeless persons (recent research shows this still doesn't happen in a significant part of the PCSW). However, the benefits of this adaption for monitoring homelessness should not be overestimated: previous research (for example the baseline measurement in Flanders) and our own empirical data from the interviews in a more rural context show that only a small proportion of homeless persons receives a (completing) integration income. Yet, in turn, this doesn't mean that the PCSW do not reach or at least come into contact with a larger part of the homeless and hence, could provide data on far more homeless persons.

- By interviewing social workers in 4 rural PCSW and gathering data on the living situation of their clients according to ETHOS Light+, it becomes clear that more clients than expected by the social workers, fit into one of the categories of homelessness as

defined by ETHOS light+²⁴. On average 1 out of 11 (51 out of 569) of their 'active clients'²⁵ fits one of the ETHOS Light+ categories or is threatened by eviction. Half of these cases concern hidden homeless (ETHOS Light 5 and 6), i.e. people living in non-conventional dwellings (4/51) and –especially- people living with family/friends because of lack of housing (20/51).

- However, only in 1 out of 3 cases (16/51) these homeless clients receive the (completing) integration income, the majority is in budget or debt counselling and receives a different type of social benefit (health benefits and/or unemployment) or has an income from work. They are nonetheless PCSW clients and their housing situation data could be gathered by using ETHOS light.
- Furthermore an even larger group of homeless persons contact PCSW with a concrete housing problem. They recently became homeless and are searching for a solution. But the people only (urgently) asking for housing often do not always get help and are (at best) referred to social housing companies, the CAW, youth hostels, B&B's, family or friends. As a consequence, their request and situation remaining unregistered. More general, it remains unclear if every question is registered at the PCSW.
- In small and medium PCSWs, while the first answer is that there's no homeless on their territory (because only rooflessness is considered at first), digging further about situations known by the social workers reveals that there are indeed quite some people qualifying for ETHOS categories who are actually not directly helped by the PCSW. People with reference addresses by private persons or living in holiday centres may, for instance, receive help for managing their debts, and are known to the PCSW only through that procedure. In other cases, reports by private citizens that people are hanging around in some area of the municipality may reach the PCSW's ears, but either, as described above, urgent requests are referred toward larger cities facilities, or the applicant retracts any request when he rates the PCSW answer inadequate to his sense of urgency, or even no request at all is done. In all those cases, no registration is kept.
- Last but not least many PCSW have emergency housing and Individual reception initiatives ('LOI) for asylum seekers. Concerning emergency housing, no common registration procedure exists and even at the local level this information is not easily available. Only the 'baseline measurement' by Meys & Hermans (2014) gives an overview of the users of these emergency houses in Flanders, but this is based on a point-in-time count. Concerning LOI, information on individual reception initiatives is available at Fedasil yet not accessible.

NovaPrima is also the platform for PCSW to apply for the refunding of the **installation premiums**. The juridical ground for the installation premium is based on two laws, depending on the type of income of the ex-homeless person²⁶. The installation premium is a financial support of 1,153 euros to help ex-homeless to get installed in their new home. Can be applied for once in a lifetime. According to data provided by PPS SI, 12,290 installation premiums (of which 7,173 according to the Law of Right to Social Integration and 5,117 according to the Organic law) were delivered in 2016.

²⁴ ETHOS Light+ = ETHOS Light with an additional seventh category 'living under threat of eviction'.

²⁵ Limited to the clients with an (completing) integration income and/or budget counselling and with an active, running file.

²⁶ Law of May 26th 2002 concerning the Right to social Integration (for homeless with integration income) Organic law of July 8th 1976 concerning PCSW (for homeless without integration income)

Since 2007, PPS SI record the ex-homeless who receive an **ISIP**. For this specific group, PPS SI will refund the integration income 100% to PCSW for a period of 2 years. This is mentioned twice in Form B, one through marking '44' as actual living situation 'Homeless person with ISIP to receive Integration Income of single person' and the additional question 14 in Form B measuring this same aspect. According to data provided by FPS SI, the integration income of 7,322 ex-homeless persons was a 100% refunded by PPS SI in the course of 2016.

In order to decide the size of the integration income, PCSW workers also need to mark additional information about the cohabitants of the beneficiary. The royal decree of July 11th 2002 decides in which situation the income of the cohabitant should be taken into account:

1. Beneficiary and cohabitant are an actual family, defined as a couple (article 34, § 1)
Rule: PCSW **has to** take income cohabitant into account
2. Beneficiary lives together with one or more adult ascendants (e.g. father, grandfather) or one or more descendant in first degree (e.g. son, daughter) (article 34, § 2)
Rule: PCSW **can** take income cohabitant(s) into account
3. Beneficiary is living together with others than named in § 1 and 2 who not depend on an income decided by the social integration law (article 34, § 3)
Rule: PCSW **does not** take income cohabitant into account

Next to this, the PPS SI holds some general information on homelessness:

- **Wintershelter subsidies** they provide to the 5 largest Belgian cities
- Number of quota granted and spent on **housing guaranties** per municipality
FPS SI grants 25 euro administrative support to PCSW per housing guaranty provided, for a maximum quota per municipality.

Evaluation

Likely to provide useful information when necessary adaptations are made.

Since every municipality in Belgium has a PCSW and PCSW come –at least- into contact with a significant part of homeless persons, their registration data could provide vital information for monitoring homelessness in Belgium. Adapting codes of the NovaPrima forms (for instance 2b) can be a good first step. However, based on the interviews with social workers in PCSW, they are not fully aware of the housing difficulties of their clients. Using ETHOS Light as a registration instrument for *all* clients of their social service department is a promising solution. But even with the above mentioned adaptations, an important group is still not covered, namely those who go the PCSW and ask for help with regard to their housing situation, but don't get any help. A number of people (undocumented migrants, Europeans, ...) have no access to social rights in Belgium.

4.1.4 Crossroads bank for social Security

The Crossroads Bank for Social Security (Kruispuntbank Sociale Zekerheid/ Banque Carrefour de la Sécurité Sociale) does not hold data but manages a reference repertory. In CBSS is shown (CBSS, 2009):

- which persons/companies have personal files in which social security offices for which periods of time, and in which capacity they are registered
- which information/services are available at any social security office depending on the capacity in which a person/company is registered at each social security office
- which kind of information/service can be accessed, in what situation and for what period of time depending on in which capacity the person/company is registered with the social security office that accesses the information/service
- which users/applications want to automatically receive what services in what situations for which persons/companies in which capacity. It is indicated in which social security institutions he is known, in which quality and for which period.

CBSS provides the ICT infrastructure to enable both the collection of social security contributions, as well as the delivery of a range of social security benefits such as integration income; child benefits; unemployment benefits; benefits in case of incapacity to work; benefits for the disabled; reimbursement of health care costs; holiday pay and pensions.

Besides this, CBSS keeps two own data bases: the Bis-register and the Rad-register. In the Bis-register persons can be found who are known at social security but who are not registered in a Belgian municipality, for example people who work in Belgium but live across the border. The Rad-register holds persons who have been withdrawn from registration. When a person is deleted from the National Register, after a decision from the aldermen or a decision from the immigration office or left abroad without notice, his file is copied from the National Register to the Rad-register. CBSS is then responsible to keep the file of that person up to date.

Evaluation

Selection of homeless persons is impossible in CBSS. One register that will include a group of persons who are homeless is the Rad-register. However, this database will be broader than the target group also including persons who moved abroad without notice.

CBSS can be very useful for homelessness studies when a list of homeless persons is identified in a different database, for example persons with a reference address at PCSW in the National Register. Thereafter, CBSS can provide the socio economic profile of the persons on the list, making use of the National Number. As CBSS data is continuous, it also allows to study evolutions over time. For example to study the socioeconomic profile (such as income, household structure) 5 years before and 5 years after a person had a reference address at PCSW.

4.1.5 Mental health: Minimal Psychiatric Data

Minimal Psychiatric Data (MPD-Minimale psychiatrische gegevens MPG /Résumé psychiatrique minimum RPM) is a common registration tool for psychiatric hospitals, psychiatric wards in general hospitals, psychiatric nursing homes (psychiatrische verzorgingstehuizen PVT/les maisons de soins psychiatriques MSP) and initiatives for sheltered living (initiatieven beschut wonen IBW/initiatives d'habitations protégées). They have recorded psychiatric data since 1996 and 1998 respectively. MPD data are commissioned and gathered by the FPS Public Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment DG Healthcare and are collected as a tool to determine the needs of psychiatric facilities, standards required for accreditation, and evaluation of the effectiveness and quality of hospital care (RD of October 1st 2002; RD of September 20th 1998).

The MPD contain socio economic characteristics of the patient, diagnosis and pre-admission problems, treatment data, and diagnosis and residual problems at discharge.

Interesting for homelessness registration is the compulsory registration of living environment before (block 2 Medical psychiatric admission in MPD) and after admission (block 10 Medical psychiatric release in MPD) with the following answer categories:

Environment before/after admission (tick one box)

- ☐ Lives alone
- Family (or substitute) environment*
- ☐ Own family
- ☐ Living with or living together
- ☐ other (substituted) family constitution
- Collective living*
- ☐ Elderly care
- ☐ Care homes for disabled persons
- ☐ Residential homeless care
- ☐ Community living
- ☐ Institution dependent on justice
- ☐ Other collective living
- Therapeutic environment*
- ☐ Psychiatric facility
- ☐ Psychiatric ward in general hospitals,
- ☐ Psychiatric nursing homes
- ☐ Initiatives for sheltered living
- ☐ Home nursing
- ☐ Alternative psychiatric care
- ☐ Other therapeutic environment
- Other*
- ☐ Other not specified environment
- ☐ No fixed place of residence
- ☐ Unknown

Source: <https://www.health.belgium.be/nl/gezondheid/organisatie-van-de-gezondheidszorg/ziekenhuizen/registratiesystemen/mpg/richtlijnen-mpg>

A 2012 report by the DG Healthcare mentions 2.6% of the 117.370 admitted patients (= 1,807 persons) left psychiatry without fixed residence.

Also interesting for this project is the MPD inquiry of block 3 (Medical Social admission) about Psycho social and environment problems. One of the problems that can be ticked are 'living problems'.

Evaluation

The compulsory MPD registration of living situation after care can be a useful indicator for ETHOS Light 4 'people due to be released from institutions'. However, personnel interviewed at psychiatric facilities warn for the correctness of the available data on living situation. Even though block 2 and 10 are compulsory, they are often filled out by the intaker (and not social services) who not always has sufficient time and information to do this correctly.

Another disadvantage of MPD is the lack of a unique client identifier as every psychiatric center uses an own identification key. Consequently, linking the MPD to other databases is (currently) not possible.

4.1.6 Drug addiction care: Treatment Demand Indicator

Since 1991, drug centres have been working on a common European methodology in data collection. The Treatment Demand Indicator TDI is one of the key five indicators yearly reported to the EMCDDA European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction by 29 European countries.

In Belgium, TDI registration started at national level in 2011 and an increasing number of facilities are taking part. Data is collected for every drug user reporting for treatment in the drug facilities recognized by the Federal Institute for Illness and Disability Insurance (RIZIV/INAMI): drug treatment centres, centres for mental health (CGG), hospitals (WIV, 2016).

Besides the information on drug usage and treatment, the TDI also includes questions on housing situation. Interesting for homelessness registration are the following two questions:

During the last month in what kind of accommodation did you live most of the time?

- ☐ Stable accommodation
- ☐ Different places
- ☐ In the street (new since 2015)
- ☐ In an institution
- ☐ In prison
- ☐ In another type of place:
- ☐ Unknown

During this last month, with whom did you live most of the time?

- ☐ Alone
- ☐ In couple
- ☐ With one/my parent(s)
- ☐ With other members of my family
- ☐ With friends or other persons (with no family relation)
- ☐ Other:
- ☐ Unkown

Source: https://workspaces.wiv-isp.be/tdi/SitePages/Form_NL.aspx

The Scientific Institute for Public Health (WIV/ISP) has been appointed as coordinator of the TDI registration. A secured methodology was developed for data gathering, covering two methods. A first method to deliver data is the registration module consisting of an online form with restricted access for treatment centres in order to encode and manage their data record by record. The second method is the repository module, a secured mailbox through which treatment centres can send structured files containing a complete dataset for a given registration year. To manage this information in a secured way, coding is provided by eHealth (WIV, 2016). TDI is filled in based on national number, not only allowing to avoid double counting at national level but also giving the data gathering a longitudinal objective as it allows to identify multiple episodes followed by the same person. It also allows linkage with other databases, recently a study was commissioned to link TDI data with health insurance databases (WIV, 2016).

In 2015, 9% of patients in drug addiction care had housing problems (on the street or in different places). These numbers are the highest in MSOC (15%) and residential crisis centers (24%) (WIV, 2016). the

Evaluation

TDI can be a useful additional indicator as it gives insight into the living situation of persons prior to drug treatment. It can give a view on ETHOS Light 1 (People living rough), ETHOS Light 6 (People living temporarily with family and friends) and useful for quantitative and qualitative studies. Interviews with social workers for example show that MSOC have a good view on the group of youngsters staying with family/friends (ETHOS Light 6).

As registration is based on national number, TDI data can be used for linkage to other databases such as measuring trajectories or estimating homelessness (capture-recapture technique).

Only information available on the inflow of persons, not the outflow. As such, TDI registration cannot be used as an indicator to cover persons leaving an institution without a stable housing situation (ETHOS 6 and ETHOS Light 4).

4.1.7 Prison: Sidis-Suite

Since 2015, Belgian prisons make use of the IT information system Sidis-Suite. This new system provides electronic files for every prisoner, and allows for information exchange with partners such as local police, Immigration Service (DVZ/Office des étrangers), and courthouses.

Useful for the measurement of homelessness is the registration of housing situation prior to and following detention. Especially the housing situation following detention can provide useful information on ETHOS Light 4 people leaving an institution.

Unfortunately, information on housing situation before and after detention is not easily available in Sidis-Suite. At prison entry, an update is made from the National Register and the official address or withdrawal of registration is copied into Sidis-Suite. The system allows the possibility to add an actual residential address (verblijfsadres/...) next to the official domiciliary address but this is an option that is rarely used.

Sidis-Suite holds the possibility to register where people will be staying after release. The usefulness of registering this, in the eye of measuring homelessness, is debatable for several reasons. A first reason can be prisoners fear to be caught leading them to provide incorrect information. Additionally, fearing their release will be withdrawn when having no fixed address to go to can make people give up an incorrect address. A second reason for a bad registration of release address is more technical. At the moment, the 'release page' in Sidis-suite is no longer accessible at the actual time of release. The time the release page is filled out, an official address is often not known.

Psychosocial services in prisons possibly hold more information on the housing situation of (a selection of) prisoners. Their registration is in separate systems. No standardized/common registration of housing situation. Next, welfare workers can be present in prisons. In Flanders for example, case work is done by justice welfare workers from CAW.

Evaluation

Registration in Sidis-Suite is at the moment no added value to information available in the National Register. In the future however, a better registration of housing situation at release can be useful to bring into light ETHOS Light 4.

4.1.8 Police: ANG data base

Local police register in ISLP (Integrated System for the Local Police). Every local police zone has an overview of amount of persons in their zone that have been withdrawn from registration. These persons appear on a watched list but are not actively searched for.

Local police also provides support for bailiff actions. In ISLP registration no distinction is made between the type of bailiff action provided (confiscation, expulsion).

Local police also holds data on the amount of police reports filed for cases of domestic violence. The term domestic violence is defined widely including physical violence, psychological violence and economical violence (e.g. not respecting visitation rights, not paying alimony). In the registration in ISLP following subdivisions are made:

- Domestic violence between partners
- Domestic violence against descendants
- Domestic violence against other members

A daily update is done from the local ISLP to the federal ANG database. In this, only a selection of information is transferred to the ANG database. Certain information such as amount of bailiff support actions, is only available in ISLP.

Evaluation

Useful information: persons withdrawn from registration (in ISLP and ANG), support to bailiffs (in ISLP).

Little is known of the persons who have been withdrawn from registration. Further research is needed to make clear if this can be a potential indicator of hidden homelessness.

Data on domestic violence can give an idea of ETHOS cat 10. However caution is needed with the interpretation of this data. It is known that police is involved in only a very small fraction of domestic violence cases. In addition, police involvement does not automatically lead to homelessness and split ups are not seldom temporary.

4.1.9 District court: evictions

Judicial evictions are court orders by the family court (Vredegerecht/Justice de paix). Until today no data is available on the amount of evictions in Belgium. Data published so far are estimations/extrapolations of data collected from PCSW, municipalities and social housing companies²⁷.

Recently, the 'Steundienst van het College van hoven en rechtbanken' / 'Le service d'appui du Collège des cours et tribunaux' developed a national code listing 'nature of the case' to be used in all of the 189 family courts. This list includes following codes:

- Rent: with eviction (art 591, 1° Ger. W)
- Commercial rent: with eviction of a natural person (art 591, 1° Ger. W)

At the moment, the roll out of the new national code list is in process. Data is already available of 15 cantons. As training has to be provided for the implementation of the new registration procedure, the extension to the other cantons is a gradual process.

Evaluation

Number of judicial eviction cases (ETHOS 9.1) at the family court will be available in the near future.

²⁷ [Verstraete J., De Decker P. \(2015\). Discriminatie van financieel kwetsbare huishoudens op de private huurmarkt in België. In: De Decker P., Meeus B. \(Eds.\), Woonnood in Vlaanderen. Feiten/Myten/Voorstellen, \(pp. 281-296\). Antwerpen: Garant.](#)

4.1.10 EU SILC Housing affordability and Housing Quality

EU SILC dataset has been used as the main instrument to monitor the development in income, poverty, social exclusion and living conditions in the EU. The survey and hence the dataset has been updated annually since 2003. Regular EU SILC waves cover main concepts related to housing affordability and housing quality.

Affordability

The most common approach to define housing (un)affordability is to consider the percentage of income that a household is spending on housing costs, which can also be described as the 'at-risk-of' unaffordability. EU SILC considers a household "**overburdened**" when the total housing costs ('net' of housing allowances) represent more than 40 % of disposable income ('net' of housing allowances), where housing costs include mortgage interest payments (net of any tax relief) for owners and rent payments, gross of housing benefits for renters, housing benefits for rent free households. They also include structural insurance, mandatory services and charges (sewage removal, refuse removal, etc.), regular maintenance and repairs, taxes and the cost of utilities (water, electricity, gas and heating). They do not include capital repayment for mortgage holders. Housing allowances include rent benefits (a current means-tested transfer granted by public authorities to tenants, temporarily or on a long-term basis, to help them with rent costs) and benefits to owner-occupiers (a means-tested transfer by public authority to owner occupiers to alleviate their current housing costs; in practice, often help with mortgage reimbursements).

People's perception of their financial burden due to housing costs is registered through the question 'Is total housing cost a financial burden to your household?'. Respondents are asked to choose between;

- a heavy burden
- somewhat a burden
- not a burden at all.

One other aspect regarding the housing affordability is the ability of households to pay back their mortgages, housing loans or pay their utility bills. EU SILC measures this ability by arrears on their utility bills, and arrears on mortgage or rent payments. Inability to keep home adequately warm and the share of young adults aged 18-34 living with their parents are also included in housing affordability context.

Quality

One of the key dimensions in assessing the quality of housing is the availability of sufficient space in a dwelling. The overcrowding rate describes the proportion of people living in an overcrowded dwelling, as defined by the number of rooms available to the household, the household's size, as well as its members' ages and their family situation. The person is considered as living in an overcrowded household if the household does not have at its disposal at least:

- one room for the household
- one room for each couple
- one room for each single person 18+
- one room for two single people of the same sex between 12-17 years of age
- one room for each single person of different sex between 12 and 17 years of age
- one room for two people under 12 years of age.

Another dimension is the housing deprivation which is the share of the population lacking at least one of the following housing deprivation items:

- Leaking roof
- Damp walls/floors/foundations, or rot in window frames or floors
- No bath or shower in the dwelling
- No indoor flushing toilet for the sole use of the household
- Problems with the dwelling: too dark, not enough light

Ad-hoc modules

The ad-hoc module on housing conditions was carried out in 2007 by the EU-27 countries plus Iceland and Norway. This ad hoc module had the following variables related to housing conditions:

- MH010: Shortage of space in dwelling
- MH020: Adequate electrical installations
 - o Wiring, contacts, sockets and other permanent electrical installations in the dwelling
- MH030: Adequate plumbing/water installations
 - o Pipes, taps, drainage and outlets
- MH040: Dwelling equipped with heating facilities
 - o Central heating or similar: a housing unit is considered as centrally heated if heating is provided either from a community heating centre or from an installation built in the building or in the housing unit, established for heating purposes, without regard to the source of energy. Fixed electrical radiators, fixed gas heaters and similar are included. The heating shall be available in most rooms.
 - o Other fixed heating: a housing unit is considered heated by 'other fixed heating' when the heating is not considered as 'central heating/or similar'. It includes stoves, heaters, fireplaces and similar.
 - o No fixed heating: no fixed heating system or heating device. Portable heating.
- MH050: Dwelling comfortably warm during winter time
- MH060: Dwelling equipped with air conditioning facilities
 - o Air conditioning facilities: systems for controlling, especially lowering, the temperature and humidity of an enclosed space; systems that keep air cool and dry. Simple fans are not considered as air conditioning.
- MH070: Dwelling comfortably cool during summer time
- MH080: Overall satisfaction with dwelling
- MH090: Accessibility of grocery services
 - o Services which can provide most of the daily needs.
- MH100: Accessibility of banking services
 - o Withdraw cash, transfer money and pay bills
- MH110: Accessibility of postal services
 - o Send and receive ordinary and parcel post
- MH120: Accessibility of public transport
 - o Bus, metro, tram and similar
- MH130: Accessibility of primary health care services
 - o General practitioner, primary health centre or similar
- MH140: Accessibility of compulsory school
 - o If more than one child in the household is in compulsory school the respondent should refer to the one with the most difficulty.
- MH150: Change of dwelling

- MH160: Main reason for change of dwelling
 - o Family-related reasons: change in marital/partnership status. To establish own household. To follow partner/ parents. To obtain better school or care facilities for children or other dependents.
 - o Employment-related reasons: start new job or transfer of existing job. Looking for work or made redundant. To be closer to work/easier to commute. Retirement.
 - o Housing-related reasons: desire to change accommodation or tenure status. Wanting new or better house/ apartment. Seeking better neighbourhood/less crime.
 - o Eviction/distrait: forced to move for legal reasons.
 - o Landlord did not prolong the contract: non-renewal of contract, short-term contract.
 - o Financial reasons: problems paying rent/mortgage.
 - o Other reasons: to attend or leave college/university, health and other reasons.

Based on the Commission Regulation (EU) 2017/310 of 22 February 2017 there will be a new ad hoc EU SILC Survey in 2018. The list of target variables and identifier for the 2018 module on material deprivation, well-being and housing difficulties, part of the cross-sectional component of EU-SILC are listed below:

- PHD01T Past experience of housing difficulties
 - o Yes, staying with friends or relatives temporarily
 - o Yes, staying in emergency or other temporary accommodation
 - o Yes, staying in a place not intended as a permanent home
 - o Yes, 'sleeping rough' or sleeping in a public space
 - o No
- PHD02T Duration of the most recent experience of housing difficulties
- PHD03T Main reason for past housing difficulties
 - o Relationship or family problems
 - o Health problems
 - o Unemployment
 - o End of rental contract
 - o Uninhabitable accommodation
 - o Leaving an institution after a long stay and no home to go to
 - o Financial problems/Insufficient income
 - o Other
- PHD04T Other reason for past housing difficulties
 - o Relationship or family problems
 - o Health problems
 - o Unemployment
 - o End of rental contract
 - o Uninhabitable accommodation
 - o Leaving an institution after a long stay and no home to go to
 - o Financial problems/Insufficient income
 - o Other
 - o No other reason
- PHD05T Exit from housing difficulties
 - o Existing, new or renewed relationship with family or partner
 - o Addressed health problems
 - o Gained employment
 - o Moved into social or subsidised private housing
 - o Other
 - o Still experiencing housing difficulties

Evaluation

Taking into account the underrepresentation of certain vulnerable groups in EU SILC and hereby the potential underestimation of poverty, EU SILC can be a

- Useful source to gain insight into lifetime prevalence of (hidden) homelessness, but for the moment, this information will only be gathered once.
- Useful source to measure housing affordability
- Useful source to measure housing quality

4.1.11. Capture-recapture in Belgium: exploration of (future) possibilities

Compared with other estimation methods, the capture-recapture approach based on linked datasets has the advantage that it is cost-effective for estimating the size of the homeless population. Moreover, the method can deal with incomplete lists, which is often an evident problem using registers of this population (cf. section 2.4). The exploration of available national administration registers resulted in the selection of the following data sources with the highest potential for applying the capture-recapture approach in Belgium:

- (1) Persons with a *reference address at PCSW* of the National Register: Reference addresses at PCSW are reserved for homeless people.
- (2) The *NovaPrima* database of the PPS SI: The database primarily contains information about ex-homeless who received an installation premium (a one-off grant to cover the costs of moving into a new accommodation) and/or followed an individualised social integration contract (ISIP).
- (3) The European *Treatment Demand Indicator (TDI)* dataset, collected by the Scientific Institute for Public Health (WIV/ISP): The TDI data are collected for every drug user reporting for treatment in the rehabilitation facilities recognized by the Federal Institute for Illness and Disability Insurance. Besides information on drug usage and treatment, the TDI also includes information on the housing situation. Although obviously only a fraction of the homeless population has an addiction problem, this information can be useful provided it can be combined with other datasets.

A successful capture-recapture of linked administrative sources assumes that the used registers are of high quality. In this sense, the reliability of the estimates depends on underlying assumptions.

ASSUMPTION 1: THE IDENTICAL DEFINITION OF TARGET GROUPS

The identical target groups condition implies that the registers include the same categories of homeless people. In the context of the MEHOBEL-research, this means that at least one (hopefully more) ETHOS light category can be matched across the different datasets. Therefore, a clear definition and delimitation of the population are necessary for each register.

Whereas the designation of homeless people with *reference addresses at PCSW* and ex-homeless in the *NovaPrima database* are based on definitions in legislative documents (royal decrees), the delimitation in the *TDI-questionnaire* is based on a self-assessment of the individual's living status in the past 30 days. Moreover, the relevant categories in the TDI-questionnaire are rather vague ('street' and 'varying residence'). Ambiguity in defining who is homeless inevitably leads to inaccuracies which jeopardize the estimation.

ASSUMPTION 2: A CLOSED POPULATION

A vital assumption for the capture-recapture method to be successfully used is that the population remains stable over the observation period, i.e. that there will not be any new members or departures of old ones. This is obviously problematic given the high turnover in homelessness. One way of complying with the 'closed population' assumption is to keep the period of observation as short as possible by using the same reference date for each of the used registers.

The list of individuals in the *National Register* can be consulted on a specific date. Taking into account that the individuals with a reference address are included in the register, a specific reference date can be easily selected. Consequently, the list of individuals in the National Register can be perceived as stock data (a number of persons at a given point in time).

The *NovaPrima* database includes a specific date which indicates from when the personal information on each individual's form is valid. Consequently, it is possible to compile a list based on NovaPrima on a specific date. However, as was mentioned before (6.1), this list consists of individuals who were homeless in the past. Moreover, it is not possible to verify at which moment these individuals were homeless. In this sense, the NovaPrima database only contains (out)flow data of ex-homeless. In other words, people who were homeless in the period of measurement but who did not exit homelessness are *not* registered at all.

The use of a specific reference date is particularly problematic for the *TDI-database* since it only registers the start of each treatment. Concretely, each patient is registered every time he/she starts a treatment episode. If the patient moves to another treatment centre to start another episode, he/she is registered again. However, the end of each treatment is not registered. This implies that the TDI-register over-estimates the number of homeless patients on a specific date, because it includes a 'redundant' number of patients who had left homelessness by that time. In other words, the TDI registers the incidence (a number of new cases encountered in a given time period) and not the prevalence (the number of cases at a particular time). Consequently, it is not possible to select a sample for a single reference date. In this sense, the TDI-database can be considered as a flow sample including people who became homeless over a certain period (inflow).

ASSUMPTION 3: A UNIQUE CLIENT IDENTIFIER

It is assumed that individuals are uniquely identifiable and can be perfectly matched across all different data sources (so that there are no false negatives/positives in matching individuals).

The *National Register* includes the registration of the reference addresses as a separate information type. Consequently, it is possible to draw a list of all the persons who hold a reference address in Belgium. Given that the persons with a reference address at PCSWs are part of the National Register central database, their national register number could be easily found.

The *NovaPrima forms* also include the national register number. A form without this number will not be accepted by the PPS SI. This implies that the national register number of all individuals²⁸ in the NovaPrima database is known.

²⁸ For individuals that do not have a national register number, the Bis-number is required (cf. section 4.4.4).

The *TDI database* only registers the national register number with consent of the individual. If an individual refuses, the initials and birth date are used as identifier. Over the period 2011-2016, the national register number was available for approximately 75% of the individuals in the TDI-register. As the first digits of a person's national register number coincide with the date of birth, it should be possible to match most of the other individuals in the TDI-register with the national register by comparing their date of birth and initials with the numbers and names of a limited set of observations in the national register.

OVERALL FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT

The assessment of the registers' compliance with the assumptions clearly shows that the registration in the discussed databases will have to be thoroughly modified for a successful application of the capture-recapture method:

- The modality of the *reference address* holders (private person/PCSW/organization) is not specified, making it impossible to select the homeless individuals from the entire group. Moreover, not all homeless persons applying for social assistance take their reference address at their PCSW. Different practices result in (a) systematic under-counting of the homeless population through reference addresses and (b) potential bias in its geographical distribution (cf. section 4.1.1).
- The section of the *NovaPrima* database referred to above deals with ex-homeless and does not contain information about the period when the relevant individuals were still homeless. Consequently, the used form should be extended with supplementary variables in order to be considered for the capture-recapture approach (cf. section 4.1.3). In addition, the complete NovaPrima database only contains information on homeless clients who received an installation premium from PCSWs after rehousing and/or followed an ISIP. Although other homeless people who apply for support (other than the installation premium) are also included in NovaPrima, they are not registered as homeless because there is no information about their housing situation. This implies that a large proportion of the homeless population (those who remain homeless or who for some reason are not granted the installation premium) are not 'visible' in the database. In order to fill this information gap, it would be appropriate to focus on a comprehensive and uniform registration of the housing situation of *all* clients among the PCSWs.
- Moreover, a list based on the *Treatment Demand Indicator* does not comply with any of the aforementioned assumptions that are necessary for a successful capture-recapture. Even though the reconstruction of stock data based on the current indicator might be possible in the future, the vague definition and incomplete linking issues remain to be tackled.

It can be concluded that the application of the capture-recapture method on federal registers is not yet possible. Further research needs to verify whether the method could be used on the regional level. In this respect, the registration tool of the Flemish Agency for Social Housing (cf. 4.2.3) seems to be promising for Flanders.

4.2. Registration and attitudes towards registration: Flanders

In Flanders, apart from the PCSW registration, the registration of the Centres for General Welfare (CAW), street work supported by the Flemish organization 'Vlastrov', and the social rental agencies SVK could provide relevant information at the regional level. Following we give a brief description of these registration methods. This is followed by an overview of registration challenges perceived by experts and social workers of organizations involved in care for or coming into contact with the homeless in Flanders. In the last two paragraphs we discuss the point in time 'baseline measurement' that took place in Flanders in 2014 and the challenges perceived by the experts and social workers on this method to measure homelessness.

4.2.1 Registration of the Centra Algemeen Welzijnswerk (CAW)

In Flanders, the 10 CAW (General Welfare Centres) that cover the region of Flanders are financed with a budget for staff and working costs by the Flemish Community. They are autonomous in deciding how they fulfil their tasks. They exploit almost every night shelter (mainly financed by the municipalities), and organize accommodation for homeless, day centres and provide ambulant and floating social support. Together with the CAW located in Brussels, they make use of a common registration system. Up to 2013, the 'Tellus' registration system was used throughout the CAWs for registering client information. Since 2014, this was replaced by an individual electronic client file called We-dossier. We-dossier is not meant to be a registration instrument but a tool to be used in worker-client interactions.

For some types of homeless care, We-dossier is not commonly used. Street workers employed by CAW sometimes prefer the systems by VLASTROV (see further on). For night shelters the registration method used differs. Some will make use of We-dossier, others use their own Excel or Access file to record information of their visitors.

Until now, registration in We-dossier is name based. By the end of 2016, this will be based on national number. This will be compulsory for the guidance modules and optional for the admission modules.

Since the start of the We-dossier, Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk did not publish their yearly general welfare data, something they used to do with Tellus. According to Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk this is partly due to the overload of variables in the system. The presence of quite some non-compulsory variables leads to large numbers of missing values, making the data hard to interpret. Since 2015, CAW need to hand over 67 variables to the Flemish Welfare administration of which 80% can be taken directly out of the We-dossier.

4.2.2 The Vlastrov registration tool

In 2009, the Flemish organization supporting street workers 'Vlastrov' developed a registration tool that is free to use by street workers, independent of the organization those street workers work for (Public or General Welfare).

The screenshot displays the 'Gastgegevens' (Guest Information) tab in the VLASTROV software. The interface includes a navigation bar at the top with tabs for 'Contactname', 'Gastgegevens', 'Contacten', and 'Historiek'. The main form contains the following fields:

- Geslacht :** Vrouw (dropdown)
- Leeftijd :** 55 (text input) **Geboortedatum :** 1955 (text input)
- Scholingsgraad :** Onbekend (dropdown)
- Gezinsverband :** Alleen (dropdown)
- Aantal kinderen :** 2 (text input)
- Domicilie :** 2140 (dropdown) **Borgerhout** (text input)
- Feitelijke verblijfplaats :** Andere (dropdown)
- Officieel inkomen :** Geen officieel inkomen (dropdown)
- Aanvullend inkomen (1) :** Onbekend (dropdown)
- Aanvullend inkomen (2) :** Geen (dropdown)
- Informeel inkomen :** Geen (dropdown)
- Bestaanszekerheid :** Onder de Europese armoedegrens (dropdown)
- Nationaliteit :** België (dropdown)
- Origine :** (dropdown)
- Verblijfsstatuut :** Permanent verblijfsrecht (dropdown)

On the right side, there is a checkbox for 'Referentieadres ?' which is unchecked. Below it is a small icon of a document with a lightning bolt. At the bottom right, there is a button labeled 'LIJST ORIGINE'.

Figure 4.2 Guest information in VLASTROV

Next to variables related to guest information (see Figure 4.2), street workers can indicate how many contacts they had. The content of these talks can be described per life domain that came up in the conversation. The different life domains are: administration, education, work, finances, housing, emotional wellbeing, relational wellbeing, leisure time, physical health, mental health, juridical, substance use, minority, residence and prostitution. Next to the registration, street workers write street stories to be used in work discussions and for policy reporting.

Privacy is crucial for street workers. In the VLASTROV Access file, each guest is known only by a number. Numbers and corresponding names are kept by each social worker separately in a booklet that is taken home and definitely not left unattended on a desk. As not seldom street workers are contacted by the police, this way of working provides extra protection for the privacy of the persons they work with.

4.2.3 Registration of social rental agencies SVK

In 2016, the 48 Flemish social rental agencies manage 9.143 houses²⁹. To allocate housing to the most vulnerable households, SVK make use of a registration system as postulated in a Decree of the Flemish Government of 12/10/2007³⁰.

Two indicators are used to rank candidates: housing need and income. The higher the scores (both max 20 points), the higher the ranking on the waiting list. The registration of housing need is to a large extent linkable to ETHOS and ETHOS Light. For ETHOS Light following housing needs are registered:

²⁹ <https://www.vmsw.be/Home/Footer/Over-sociale-huisvesting/Statistieken>

³⁰ Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering tot reglementering van het sociale huurstelsel ter uitvoering van titel VII van de Vlaamse Wooncode

- No housing/ night shelter (20 points - ETHOS Light 1-2)
- In residential homeless care, emergency housing, hotel (17 points - ETHOS Light 3)
- Youngsters leaving youth care (points – ETHOS Light 4)
- Due to be released from institution (17 points - ETHOS Light 4)
- Living on a camping (ETHOS Light 5)
- Non conform housing (ETHOS Light 5)
- Staying with family/friends (17 points - ETHOS Light 6)

Additionally other housing situations related to ETHOS can be distinguished such as several types of eviction, situations of insecure and inadequate housing as well as affordability of the current housing situation.

For their registration, 45 out of 48 SVK make use of a common registration tool, owned and managed by the Flemish Company for Social Housing (VMSW). With data on the profile of SVK applications, SVK data can provide an additional view on homelessness alongside the data from homeless organisations. On 31/12/2017, 45.060 Flemish households were on the SVK waiting list, including 1.859 persons staying temporarily with family/friends. Although housing situation tends to be a variable that is prone to be outdated. The housing need will be correct at the time of application as well as at the time of allocation. In between applications are updated biannually, yet- even though often done so-housing need it not a compulsory variable.

4.2.4 The many challenges of relying on registration data as perceived by experts and social workers

Our findings on the challenges of relying on registration as perceived by experts and social workers stem from the combined use of three data sources.

First and in order to get an idea of the (use of) region wide registration systems of homelessness in Flanders, experts were interviewed from the following organizations: VVSG (the umbrella organization of the Flemish municipalities), PCSW Hasselt, PCSW Genk, PCSW Kortrijk, PCSW Oostende, PCSW Schilde, PCSW Gent, Vlastov, Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk (the umbrella organization of the General Welfare Centres), Netwerk waar armen het woord voeren (the umbrella organization of the associations where the poor take the floor). During these interviews notes about the (use of the) registration system in place were systematically taken. In turn, these notes served as a starting point for further discussion on registration possibilities and challenges.

Second, an expert panel was held with experts of data collection and analyses in Flanders. As some of the organizations mentioned above do not only register but also collect and analyze these data, there is some overlap between these organizations and the ones involved in this focus group: CAW Oost-Vlaanderen, the city of Ghent, Street work East and Western Flanders, CAW Antwerp, PCSW Ghent, VVSG, Departement WVG, Steunpunt armoedebestrijding, CAW Oost-Vlaanderen, Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk. Discussion topics were among others: available data on homelessness, thresholds and driving forces for registration and possibilities and challenges of point in time measurement.

Third, a focus group was held with social workers of a wide range of (subdivisions of) organisations in the city of Ghent that have the homeless as or among their target group: two CAW day centers, CAW night shelter, CAW crisis team, CAW adult admission, CAW Brugteam, PCSW Ghent housing service (De Baai, Housing First), PCSW Ghent homeless

service, night shelter Huize Triest, Outreach city of Ghent, day center Villa Voortman, MSOC Ghent, community health center (WGC) De Sleep, Krasdienst work group refugees, NMBS/SNCB (social referent). Discussion topics were among others: categories of homeless people (cf. ETHOS Light) reached, available data on homelessness, thresholds and driving forces for registration and possibilities and challenges of point in time measurement.

In the following paragraphs we present our findings based on these three data sources.

FOURFOLD CHALLENGES

In the interviews and focus groups an almost discouragingly amount of challenges of relying on registration data to measure homelessness was brought to the table. Upon closer examination it becomes clear that these challenges can be grouped according to four major, consecutive questions.

1. Is there any registration (system) in place?
2. If so, what is registered?
3. How is this registered?
4. What is the use of (this) registration?

We describe our findings according to these four major challenges.

TO REGISTER OR NOT TO REGISTER IS A MEANINGFUL QUESTION

In the focus group with social workers of a wide variety of organisations in Ghent it became clear that **there is a huge, yet meaningful difference in the amount of (identifiable) registration between organizations that reach the homeless**. As the below scheme makes clear, it ranges from ‘virtually nothing’ to ‘virtually everything’.

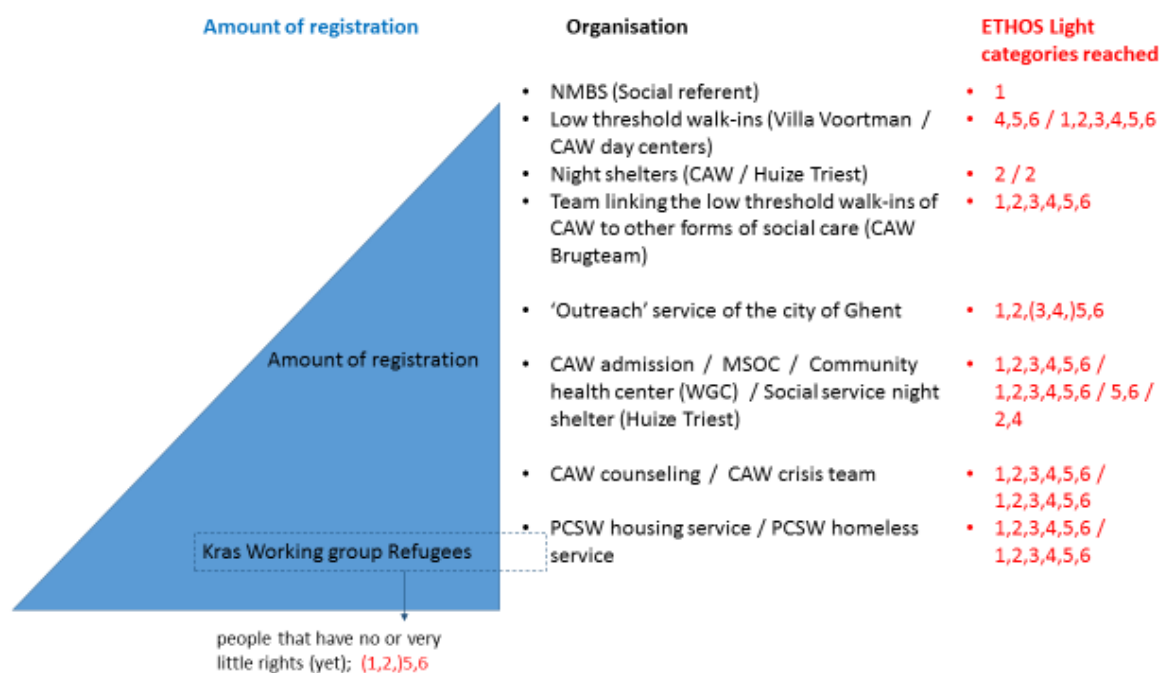


Figure 4.3 Differences in the amount of registration between organizations that reach the homeless in Ghent

Analyzing what the organizations tell about (the absence of) their registration and their attitude towards registration vis-a-vis their mission, it becomes clear that the amount of registration is a result of the interplay of several factors, such as: the type of care offered (e.g. low threshold walk-in vs. granting an integration income), the target group (e.g. those people that fell overboard in every other care related organization vs. those people that are still in contact with (some of) them), obligations from a (subsidizing) government. Hence, as a low threshold walk-in for psychiatric patients that fell overboard in every other care related organization, Villa Voortman explains its virtual absence of registration and the meaning of unconditional acceptance this encompasses by saying:

“It was a very conscious choice. How much and what you ask affects the relationship one can build, the trust that can be created. If we do so, we lose our target group and for them there is nowhere else to go.”

At the other end of the spectrum sits, for example, the PCSW homeless service, explaining its comprehensive registration by pointing towards the directives of the federal government and the offer that can be made:

“We give an integration income!”

In relation to these findings, the Kras Working Group Refugees, that reaches out to people that judicially do not belong to our society (yet) and hence have no or very little rights (yet), sheds a light on what, apart from conditional acceptance, could be another essential meaning of registration for the applicant: the promise or at least expectation of help.

“The people that arrive at our doorstep, they want to be registered, because they have high expectations, they hope we can help them on all fronts. So, we register everything and they expect help. Now I often doubt this practice, because it raises their expectations.”

Other organizations, such as the medical-social care centers, confirm this ‘give-and-take’ meaning that seems to be inherent in the act of registration.

“In exchange for giving up anonymity there is hope for something in return. And sometimes this is the reason to remain anonymous: the idea that it isn’t going to work out anyway.”

GAPS, TRAPS AND ADDS IN THE REGISTRATION SYSTEMS

The above mentioned finding about the meanings of registration may help explain two other challenges for relying on registration data. First, some experts point towards the rise in number of the so called ‘worrisome care avoiders’ or ‘city nomads’. This **growing group of people is hard to capture because they do not (any longer) make use of the regular support systems**, often because they want to avoid the increasing conditionality of care. Some of these people do ‘pop up’ at low threshold initiatives such as walk-ins or food distributions, but these initiatives –with reason (cf supra)- seldomly register anything. Second on the flip side coin, it is found that **applications for help are not always registered**. This gap in registration systems arises in two ways. First, a large group of homeless persons contact PCSW with a concrete housing problem. They recently became homeless and are searching for a solution. But the people only (urgently) asking for housing often do not make it behind the reception desk of the PCSW because then and there they are already told that the PCSW has no housing to offer. As a consequence, their request and situation remains unregistered. Second, stakeholders also mention that many organizations will register the help they deliver but not the help people ask for. For example, a PCSW will be able to tell from their data how many people were granted a reference address. Yet they won’t be able to tell how many people

applied for a reference address, how many applied but were refused, and how many people applied and were granted one.³¹

Another gap in registration systems is that **the housing / homeless situation of a client is not always registered**. This is often the case in organizations that are not specifically targeted towards homeless persons. They will sometimes know if a person has a reference address at the PCSW. Yet, if someone is couchsurfing or sleeping in a tent or his car, there is often no way to register this. Exceptions do exist, **for** example in the Treatment Demand Indicator (TDI) used by MSOC (cf. supra), but then again the categories used differ between registration systems and do not (fully) coincide with the ETHOS Light categories.

In view of measuring homelessness through the use of registration data, **the lack of a common unique client identifier** is almost as big an obstacle as the lack of information on the housing / homeless situation of a client because it creates a huge risk on double counts. An obvious common unique client identifier would be the person's national number. However, as became already clear several organizations have meaningful reasons not to register at all and other organizations, such as the Flemish organisation supporting street workers, Vlastov, mask the identity of guests in order to protect their privacy. Still other organizations have the possibility to register the national number, but it is not a compulsory given, it is up to the client to provide it or not. For example, in the winter shelter in Ostend, new clients receive an intake form. Filling in this form is not compulsory and a nickname can be used. To be able to sleep in the night or winter shelter in Antwerp, all persons need to sign up at the City Dispatch (Stedelijke Dispatching). Name and other personal information is recorded there.

The latter example illustrates that **the lack of a clear, common logic in registration systems even exists among those initiatives that specifically target 1 category of the homeless**, such as night and winter shelters. In Flanders, night shelters are a responsibility of local governments. They provide the funding and most often CAW executes the action. As the example illustrates, cities differ in how they register night shelter use. Experts state that for winter and night shelters there has been very little support when it comes to registration. Many developed their own system. From the interviews it is clear that guidelines on what and how to register or even a common registration system would be helpful.

Experts supplement the above challenges by acknowledging the need not only for measuring numbers of (categories of) homeless people but also for collecting **data on profiles and trajectories**. In view of the many challenges of relying on registration data already mentioned, they are highly **suspicious this will ever be attainable and** they also point towards the fact that this **brings along ethical and privacy issues**. Many social workers find it a 'dirty thought' that people can be monitored over time. They too state that ethical and privacy procedures will have to be developed and implemented to guarantee the privacy of the client.

Finally, not only gaps and traps exist in and between registration systems. Social organizations and their reality change, for example with the introduction of new laws. Many experts comment how they have been making a lot of adaptations over the past decades and quite some work has been done to add extra pieces to the original structure. As a result, **registration systems are at the risk of losing transparency and a clear overview over time. Furthermore new**

³¹ A common reason for not granting a first request for help at PCSW can be that the specific PCSW has no jurisdiction. This is a reality for quite some homeless persons. If a person still has an official address in another municipality that is the PCSW to go to for help.

projects are not always easy to integrate in the existing data registration system. Sometimes this is because in the project several organisations are involved and a common system is needed. In South Western Flanders, for example, ‘Huis Inclusief’ was set up, a partnership of several PCSW, CAW and other organizations. The partnership aims at avoiding evictions and help people to affordable, qualitative housing. To apply for one of the 12 housing units for a client, social workers need to fill in a form on Google Drive. This form is then sent anonymously to the commission that meets every two months and allocates the available housing. For the creation of new registration tools to store client information is often looked at free and easily available tools such as Google Drive, Access and Excel files. For the design of these new registration systems, stakeholders get inspiration from their own registration systems, or look at more scientific sources such as the Baseline measurement (Meys & Hermans, 2004) and FEANTSA guidelines.

APPLYING REGISTRATION SYSTEMS: DRAINING MANOEUVRES IN THE SHADE

An often heard complaint among social workers is that **too much time is spent on registration**, time they would rather spend with their clients. In some organisations, policy makers meet this demand by reducing the amount of registration variables or adapting the time period of registration. In the night shelters in Ghent, for example, the new registration system was asking too much time of the social workers. To make up for this flaw, it was decided to register thoroughly in October and February and less in the remaining months.

Partly associated with the complaint of too much time being spend on registration, several stakeholders find their **registration system too elaborate**. In large registration systems, such as the We-Dossier by CAW, the decision is made to have some compulsory and some optional variables. As a consequence, interpretation of the results can be difficult. In the new We-dossier by CAW, for example, level of education is a not compulsory variable. As a result, 70% of this variable has missing values. This makes it difficult to interpret the results of the remaining 30%. A contradiction here is mentioned in the process of designing a new registration system. In general, social workers are not keen on registering. Yet when new instruments are designed, people seem to have the urge to keep on adding new variables and new categories. Stakeholders’ state there is a need to delimit this process.

But even in these cases where the (compulsory parts of) registration systems are limited, **the correct application of these systems remains questionable for several reasons**. In the CAW, for example, from 1/1/18, the national number will be registered for clients in ‘guidance’ (allowing linkage of systems). However, focus group members warn this new rule might lead to distorted registration as practitioners can decide to register a certain client as ‘in admission’ instead of ‘in guidance’. Reasons can be **to avoid additional registration as well as not wanting to scare off vulnerable clients**. Respondents in the interviews and the focus group also note that often **(clear) registration guidelines are lacking**. At PCSW Kortrijk, for example, social workers have different ways of recording homelessness. When no address is available some will note down ‘homeless’, others will write ‘here and there’. Social workers in the focus group add to this challenge that even when guidelines are in place, registration of the housing / homelessness situation according to the Ethos Light categories will always be of little accuracy since **many of the homeless belong to several categories at once or quickly change from one category to another**. Experts too point out that registration of housing situation is only a snap-shot (situation can vary from day to day) and is seldom a variable that is updated.

Ensuring the privacy of the clients **is regarded as an important challenge** by all stakeholders. Often there is a struggle to find a balance between possibilities to share information and ensuring confidentiality. Large organizations such as the PCSW have their own safety consultant. That person is responsible not only to check the security of the system itself but also to examine how employees handle it. As social workers at PCSW have access to the extensive CBSS, this is not a redundant task. PCSW employees are only allowed to request data for active files. Street workers as well keep firmly on the privacy of their clients. Those who use the Vlastov registration system register anonymously. Every person is given a number to protect the privacy of their clients. In Kortrijk, for example, every street worker has his own booklet where they write down their clients' name and corresponding registration number. Street workers have to make sure not to leave their booklet in the office and always takes it home with them. At all times they have to avoid the risk that others can break into their registration.

Finally, **decisions can be made to not (keep on) record certain 'sensitive' information**. Homelessness can be a political topic, especially in cold winter days. Some characteristics of homelessness care can be of interest for policy makers. Sometimes the decision is made not to record information that can be too sensitive and might have adverse policy effects. In Ghent, for example, homelessness workers regarded residence status as too politically sensitive information. They therefore decided to remove that variable from the registration.

REGISTRATION : WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

Overall, experts and persons responsible for data collection are often wondering themselves how the information they collect could be made of use in a broader context than the organization they work for. There seems to be **little relevant application possibilities**. Some are as honest as to say :

We collect a lot of data but are not sure what we can do with them.

A specific challenge here is that, although (social workers of) local organisations are most interested in the relevance of data at municipality level, **some data remain meaningless at the local level**. On the local level, for example, the number of places in shelters and accommodation for the homeless is limited, even in the larger cities. As a result, numbers and data are often quite stable. An outlier in the data can have a simple reason and does not necessarily say anything about a changing reality or policy. For example : in a shelter the amount of children suddenly doubled. The reason turned out to be the admittance of a Bulgarian family with 5 children.

Finally and despite the registration systems in place, **the information gathered is sometimes insufficient to answer government's questions**. For example, since 2015 CAW have to hand over 67 indicators to the administration of the Flemish Welfare Department. Only 80% of these indicators come straight out of the We-dossier. Experts on the one hand point towards the strategic aims of the Flemish Homelessness Action Plan to know what data the Flemish government will need in the future to monitor and evaluate this plan. On the other hand they point towards the possibilities of data collection to bring to the attention new tendencies and problems.

4.2.5 PIT count: the baseline measurement

There is no comparable data for Flanders region as a whole. As PCSW never coordinated their local data gathering, available data and reports on homelessness in Flanders is often limited to the data from CAW who use a uniform registration system.

A first project aimed at collecting comprehensive data was commissioned by the Flemish minister of Welfare and carried out by Meys and Hermans in 2014. A survey was carried out between 15th of January until the 15th of February 2014 including:

- Users of winter and night shelters (ETHOS 1-2)
- Users of residential CAW centers (ETHOS 3-4-7)
- Users staying temporary in PCSW housing
- Court eviction orders received by PCSW (ETHOS 9)

For the **(winter) shelters**, separate questionnaires were filled out for the persons staying in the shelter from 15-31st of January 2014. This was done by the social worker, alone or together with the homeless person.

For residential **CAW centers and temporary PCSW housing**, questionnaires were available. For CAW it was also possible to fill out the registration in their own We-Dossier. PCSW included their temporary dwellers from January 15th until February 15th 2014.

In the same time period, PCSW were asked to fill out a questionnaire on the **eviction orders** they received from the District Court from January 15th until January 31st 2014 (ETHOS 9).

This first measurement shows following global results:

- 711 adults and 53 children were roofless (those staying in winter and night shelters)
- 3019 adults and 1675 children were homeless (staying in CAW residential centers or PCSW emergency housing)
- 599 claims for evictions in 179 PCSW

4.2.6 Challenges towards a PIT count as perceived by experts and social workers

A popular method to measure homelessness in Europe as well as the United States and Australia is by carrying out a point-in-time (PIT) count. The design of these counts can differ on several points:

1. Duration

One day (e.g the street count in Brussels), a week (e.g Denmark), two weeks (e.g the baseline measurement in Flanders).

2. Recurrence

One single survey (e.g. Italy, Portugal), annually (e.g. Finland), bi-annual basis (e.g. Denmark).

3. Focus

On population size (e.g. Brussels) or also on profile (e.g. Denmark).

4. Geographical size

National level (e.g Finland), regional level, local level.

5. Inclusion

- of communities involved (all or a representative sample)
 - of hard to reach groups
- Which groups will be included in the count (for example hidden homeless) and the methods used to cover this.

In Flanders, attitudes towards a PIT count are rather positive among data experts. They consider this method as an **important tool to capture evolutions and tendencies**. This is partly due to the satisfaction with the baseline measurement of 2014. Field workers acknowledge the importance of solid data on a national level, but at the same time are above all interested in local data. When it comes to a street count, Flemish data experts are in favour of limiting this undertaking to the major and middle range cities in Belgium in a short but intensive time span.

Conditions named to make a PIT survey work by both experts and social workers are:

- as part of an appealing story, a 'War on homelessness'.
- resources should be provided.
- a good manual.
- preparedness to action, follow-up.
- easy, short online 'click' tool.
- feedback.
- data should (also) have local relevance.
- privacy has to be guaranteed (e.g. through the use of an encrypted identifier).
- keep it going over time.
- without changing or adding variables.

Next to the design of the PIT count, it has to be decided **who will organize the count**. The cooperation agreement on homelessness states local data have to be put at the disposal of the Interfederal Combat poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service but does not specify who will lead data collection. In Flanders, overarching organizations exist such as the Steunpunt SAW. Experts also point to the supralocal networks (bovenlokale netwerken) that currently are being set up as a part of the Flemish Action plan against homelessness.

Flemish street level workers suggest to **additionally collect striking cases**, to document the more 'dry' data. Having cases available on national level can be a way to focus on pressing homelessness problems. Writing down these additional cases can be a potential action under the **conditions** that it remains optional and that cases are used/analysed.

4.3. Registration and attitudes towards registration: Brussels

4.3.1 Role of a regional support center for the homeless sector

In comparison with Flanders and Wallonia, the Brussels Region has a long time experience in measuring homelessness starting with the creation of la Strada, Support Center for the homeless sector in the Brussels Region in 2008³². A regional reference center on homelessness was one of the recommendations of the first research on homelessness in Brussels, published in January 2001³³. This situation report gives an overview of the different services and living situations based on yearly activity reports (with no common template) and interviews with experts, social workers, and homeless persons.

Almost seven years later the Brussels governments agree on a regional organisation to support the homeless sector and policy makers. La Strada is lanced with an urgent mission to present a report on the number of homeless persons at the end of the year. The sector regards this political agreement as a genuine interest and will to fight homelessness which creates a positive dynamic. The general objective to develop a monitoring strategy to improve the quality of services for the homeless in the Brussels Region is shared by all.

From the start la Strada works closely with all the relevant stakeholders to develop tools for measuring homelessness based on the ETHOS-typology. The stakeholders consider their involvement crucial and a shared responsibility and guarantees the feasibility of the tools. The validation of collected data and the analysis by experts, field workers and (ex)homeless persons is important as a quality guarantee.

The increase of homeless persons and the absence of affordable housing and efficient strategies to fight against poverty and homelessness has a negative effect on the motivation. This complicates the organisation of the city count which is based on a voluntary participation of the stakeholders. Each edition la Strada needs more volunteers to count in the streets and public places in the Brussels Region.

Evaluation

The clear statement by policy makers to create a regional support center to support the homeless sector motivated all the stakeholders to collaborate with quick results as a positive effect. To maintain a positive dynamic and a shared responsibility it is important that policy makers are committed to follow up recommendations and take the necessary measures.

4.3.2 Differentiated network of service providers for the homeless

A positive result of the complex institutional context of Brussels is the variety of homeless services funded by one of the Brussels or the Flemish government. Next to these specialised services a significant number of public and private general welfare organisations³⁴ provide a wide range of support to homeless persons as defined in ETHOS Light+. Other private funded or volunteer organisations and NGO's offer a specific assistance (medical care, food distribution, legal advice, day care, shelters and hostels) or focus on a certain target group (drug users, undocumented migrants, rough sleepers, people in poverty). Each year, la Strada

³² Referentie verordening toevoegen

³³ Referentie toevoegen

³⁴ Public service of social welfare (PCSW) and private social service: CAW (Flemish), CAP (Cocof), CASG (GGC-Cocom).

distributes freely 30.000 maps with the location and offer of all the above mentioned services in the Brussels region.

The first challenge to coordinate data gathering on the Brussels regional level was defining the scope for the monitoring strategy. La Strada and the stakeholders decided on two different approaches:

- the Central Client Record System (CCRS) to learn more about the profile and trajectories of users of residential services for homelessness (anonymous night shelters not included) and supported accommodation (Ethos cat. 3, 4, 7)
- the biannual city count to measure the extent and make the different precarious living situations of homeless persons visible (Ethos cat. 1,2,3,4,7, 11,12). To obtain that goal voluntary participation and transfer from (anonymous) data from all services and other stakeholders is needed.

Evaluation

Due to the presence of numerous and a variety of services in a large city, the focus on central registration is prior on the services for homeless persons. Data gathering on homelessness from more general services is not (yet) included. Some examples for the Brussels Region are:

- data on users of PCSW services is only included when these services are organised according the legislation and funded as a homeless service by one of the Brussels governments. This is not the case in Flanders and Wallonia
- data on the housing situation of users of private social services CAP and CASQ (comparable with the social service part of the CAW in Flanders)
- data on users of the associations 'Integration trough housing' funded by the Brussels-Capital Region³⁵
- data from citizens' initiatives as the BXL Refugees/Plateforme Citoyenne de Soutien au Réfugies³⁶.
- data on users of the night and emergency shelters of the Samusocial (for the CCRS)

It has to be point out that there is a thin line between poverty and homelessness, especially in large cities. The Brussels Observatory of Health and Welfare notes that between 34% and 41% of Brussels population is 'at risk of poverty and social exclusion' (AROPE)³⁷.

³⁵ Regeringsbesluit van 16 juli 1992 betreffende de toekenning van subsidies aan verenigingen die zich inzetten voor de integratie via de huisvesting. Certain of these associations focus on homeless persons. These are often also funded as services for the homeless. Other associations support refugees, undocumented migrants, drug addicts, disabled persons, persons psychiatric problems to find and obtain adequate housing.

³⁶ The plateforme mediates between refugees who seek a place for the night and citizens who have spare bed.

³⁷ Observatorium voor Gezondheid en Welzijn van Brussel-Hoofdstad (2017), *Welzijnsbarometer 2017*, Brussel, Gemeenschappelijke Gemeenschapscommissie
http://www.ccc-ggc.brussels/sites/default/files/documents/graphics/rapport-pauvrete/barometre-welzijnsbarometer/welzijnsbarometer_2017_nl.pdf

4.3.3 Access to social housing

Social housing is crucial for housing led and housing first initiatives to support 'formerly' homeless persons in independent dwellings.

From January 2018, the 39.000 public social houses in the Brussels Region are managed by 6 local public real estate agencies. The more than 43.000 households inscribed on the common waiting list³⁸ are a good indicator for the housing need in the Brussels Region. There is some limited priority for homeless persons and women victims of domestic violence. There is also a possibility for services to negotiate covenants' for priority allocation for housing first and led or occupation of vacant social houses waiting to be renovated³⁹.

In 2017, 23 Brussels private social rental agencies manage 4.500 affordable and adequate houses for the most vulnerable households⁴⁰. These SVK's work closely with the homelessness sector. 7 SVK's only accept households if they're accompanied by one of the partner organisations. Residents can be registered by the SVK and the housing led or housing first organisation. Each SVK has its own waiting list so double counts are possible.

4.3.4 CCRS: central registration of users of residential centers on a regional level

As stated in the previous chapters, CCRS is a statistical tool with data for common variables of three register systems AMASTAT, We-dossier and BRuReG. Each of these register systems centralises data on client level of their members. The objectives of the CCRS are:

- objectify the profile of users of residential centers for the homeless
- gain insight on the characteristics of the users at entry, during the stay and when leaving the residential center
- more elaborate (quantitative and qualitative) research into certain aspects as for example the situation of homeless women or the impact of domestic violence
- inform policy makers to determine the needs and set priorities to evaluate and optimise current policy on homeless.

In the participative cooperation with the stakeholders la Strada was responsible for the preparatory work in particular making an inventory of the different systems and their common variables; developing BruReg, as a common register system for the residential centers funded by the GGC-COCOM; produce a document with general outlines; centralising and harmonising the variables and analysing the data. La Strada, AMA, Bico-Federation and CAW Brussels signed an engagement with a detailed description of the procedure of data exchange, the use of data and statistical research. It is important that an ongoing work group evaluates and monitors the tool.

A standing working group with experts from the register systems, data collectors of the residential centers and representatives of the federations AMA and BICO-Federation decided on the common variables:

³⁸ waiting time up till 3 years for a single person and 10 years for a big family

³⁹ <http://be.brussels/over-het-gewest/gewestelijke-instellingen/brusselse-gewestelijke-huisvestingsmaatschappij-bghm>

⁴⁰ http://fedais.be/nl/wp-content/themes/fedais2013/pdf/candiloc_nl.pdf
http://fedais.be/wp-content/themes/fedais2013/pdf/candiloc_fr.pdf

- socio-demographic characteristics:
 - o gender
 - o civil and family status
 - o age
- region of last declared domicile
- origin of orientation
- number of supported families
- economic situation (before and after)
- education level
- nationality and residence permit
- type of residence (before and after)
- period of stay

La Strada publishes a (multi-)annual statistical report based on the collected data. Via an anonymous client identification code (name, surname and date of birth of the client) created by the 3 registration systems la Strada centralises and monitors the quality of the data. The collected data and the first analysis are presented at the members of the working group (including social workers) for discussing and validation to be published in a yearly report. The same working group is designated to evaluate the number and quality of the variables and registration guidelines and the user-friendliness of the registration system.

Evaluation

What is positive is that all centers participate on a voluntary base at this statistical tool. They are involved in the discussions on potential and problems of the register process (variables data, answer categories, software, ...). This participative approach was very time consuming for la Strada.

The overview on the profiles and trajectories of users of the residential centers is seen as an added value. It helps to overcome subjective impressions and to put stereotypes aside. The collected data is limited to the offer of the services because there is no systematic registration of refusals. A small experiment last year, in one of the residential center shows that only one out of 15 applications in accepted.

There are big differences in the way of register between the centers, despite clear agreements and guidelines: one or more persons responsible for the registration; continuous registration or once a year. Social workers complain about the extra workload it takes to register in three different systems. One error in the name of a person can lead to different ID's for one person.

4.3.5 City count: how to count homeless persons and where to find them?

The general objectives of the Brussels city count is to provide realistic data and be able to monitor evolutions and tendencies on the extent of homelessness of the ETHOS-typology. The city count is an important means to raise awareness for the diversity of precarious living situations and needs of homeless persons. Important is that also the homeless persons who are at the same time too little and too prominently visible in the Brussels Region are taken into count. Not the total number counted homeless persons but their repartition over the different ETHOS-categories.

November 19th 2008 between 23 pm and midnight the first Belgian city count was organised in the Brussels Region. The successive city counts in 2008, 2010, 2014 and 2016 make it possible to observe evolutions. March 6th 2017 the first city count in the winter period was

organised. These results can only be compared with the count of November 7th to study the impact of the winter plan on the number of homeless persons in the different ETHOS-categories.

The city count is a combination of three methods to collect three types of data:

- **Street count:** number of rough sleepers between 23 pm and 24 pm (ETHOS 1, 11.2, 11.3)
- **Limited survey (online questionnaire):**
 - o Number of men, women and children staying in night and emergency shelters and residential centers (ETHOS 2, 3, 4)
 - o Number of men, women and children receiving long-term support in independent housing (housing led and housing first ETHOS 7.2)
 - Number of men, women and children staying in alternative illegal shelters/accommodations or alternative housing solutions as squats (ETHOS 11, 12)
- **Interviews** with users of low threshold day care centers to collect qualitative information (profile) and an insight in the different living situations of homeless people (all categories), including hidden homelessness

The organisation of the city count is a joint project of stakeholders, volunteers, (ex-)homeless persons and are involved in all stages of the project:

- Notify and inform the homeless people
- Identify the hotspots (at night) for rough sleepers in public and semi-public places, squats, Based on these hotspots the Brussels Region is divided in zones, possible to traverse for counting in one hour
- Participate at the street count (200 volunteers from the homeless sector)
- Transfer the number of men, women and children staying that night in the residential centers, emergency and night shelters, temporary accommodations for homeless people, non-conventional structures and people living in unfit housing as squats
- Interviews in low-threshold day centers as a control of the hotspots, the collected data and some qualitative information on hidden homelessness and the living situations of homeless people who avoid care.
- Validation of the results and analysis

STREET COUNT

The city count is a snapshot. To observe evolutions, it is important to reproduce, as far as possible, the same circumstances: between 23h and midnight, Monday, the first week of November before the start of the winter plan. Weather conditions, demonstrations, strikes and terrorist attacks have had an impact on previous city counts.

The chosen period of time is important to count only the rough sleepers and exclude (homeless) persons who only spend the day on the street. Income and thus the possibilities to pay for shelter can differ according to the day in the week and the week in the month. The duration of the street count is limited to one hour to avoid double counts.

The results of a city count before the start of the winter plan can be an indicator for the homelessness situation for the whole year. The winter period with a political commitment to provide a free and unconditional bed in night shelters to avoid people have to die on the street

creates exceptional circumstances. During the winter months there are up till 1.350 extra beds available in night shelters in the Brussels Region. A city count during the winter period with a significant winter plan as in the Brussels Region highlights users of night shelters. Table VIII shows that in comparison with the count 4 months prior, the number of counted persons in winter increased with 708 (21%). Just before the start of winter, only 39,2% of the counted homeless persons is staying in one of the night or residential centers. This number increases to slightly more than half of the homeless persons (56,5%) during the winter plan. Before the winter and contradictory to common believe, only 148 out of 474 persons in Brussels night shelters are men. During the winter plan, more places for men are created in (winter) shelters and 943 men are counted.

Table VIII Results from the Brussels city count of November 2016 and March 2017. Source: La Strada

		7/8 2016	November	6/7 March 2017	
Roofless	Public space	707	20,90%	511	12,50%
	Night shelters	474	14%	439	10,70%
	Winter plan (+ 1.350 free and unconditional beds)	0	0%	1013	24,70%
Houseless	Residential centers/women's shelters	845	25,20%	864	21,10%
Inadequate Housing	Illegal shelters	288	8,50%	287	7%
	Religious communities	189	5,60%	189	4,60%
	Occupied dwellings with owner's permission	275	8,10%	395	9,60%
	Squats	587	17,30%	385	9,40%
	Hospital - Urgencies	12	0,40%	11	0,30%
Total		3386	100%	4094	100%

LIMITED SURVEY

Unlike the exhaustive data on users of the residential centers and night shelters, the numbers of counted persons in the other living situations is an underestimation. Despite the joint efforts it is impossible to visit every street and park, to know every squat and hidden places such as cars, cellars and other dwelling unfit for housing. It requires a continuous investment in collaboration and trust to include alternative illegal shelters/accommodations or alternative housing solutions as occupied dwellings unfit for habitation into the limited survey. The quality of the data depends on the go-betweens as is limited to the big and known squats.

The number of persons receiving long-term support in independent housing are considered as ex-homeless persons. The results of the survey are presented in an extra chapter of the report and are not included in the above figure (November 2016: 1.144 persons in housing led, 60 in housing first; March 2017: 1.190 persons in housing led, 68 in housing first). To compare data with Flanders and Wallonia these numbers have to be added.

In Flanders and Wallonia, the PSCW is one of the organisers of shelters and transitional accommodation and temporary accommodation for immigrants. The city counts of 2016 and 2017 were enlarged to collect data on numbers of men, women and children in emergency centers of the PSCW and the public (FEDASIL) and private accommodation for immigrants. Only 9 out of 19 PCSW and certain mostly private organisations to support immigrants replied to the questionnaire. These partial results are presented in an extra chapter of the report.

INTERVIEWS

The focus of the city count is on the extent of homelessness. Interviews with users of low-threshold centers and social restaurants can be interesting to learn more about the profile and especially of services avoiders. The interviews are conducted 2 weeks before the city count and the day after. Although the questionnaires are similar to collect illustrative data on living situations of (hidden) homeless persons, the objectives are different.

- Prior interviews: to identify hotspots for the street count
 - questionnaire: whereabouts for the 7 previous nights (service or public space + situation in the region), stability of the living situation, alone or in company, gender, age, income, citizenship, residence permit, reasons do not make use of homeless services
 - 24/10/2016 (172 interviews, 74% men), 20/02/2017 (152 interviews, 85% men)
- Interview the day after: a control of the data of the street count
 - Questionnaire: same questions but whereabouts only for the night before
 - 8/11/2016 (123 interviews, 78% men), 7/03/2017 (109 interviews, 94% men)

The anonymous interviews were conducted by mixed teams of students and ex-homeless persons in 13 low-threshold centers for people in poverty situations or specific target groups as homeless and undocumented persons, drug users. These centers are often understaffed and work with volunteers. They only accept to participate if they don't have to do the interviews themselves. The social workers insist that the users are not obliged to respond to the questionnaire.

Although the results of the interviews are only illustrative some general observations can be made. All respondents are homeless according ETHOS-typology and the living situations or survival strategies change constantly. Couch surfing with friends or family is limited to one or a few nights/week or month or with extreme weather. The interviews confirm the underestimation since certain respondents stay hidden in small squats with 2 or 3 persons or find a place to sleep in cellars or attics, garages... The number of persons with a legal tenancy is limited as is the quality of the dwellings.

If we focus on income we can observe that more than half of the respondents (undocumented migrants, EU-citizens, Belgian) have no income. Belgian citizenship and access to social benefits is no protection from homelessness. There is an important increase of undocumented persons (and stay in night shelter) during the winter plan.

More and more homeless persons avoid (emergency) shelters. The most important reasons not to make use of a shelter are aggression, stealing, lack of security, lack of privacy, too much noise, too much people, food quality and opening hours.

Evaluation

The city count is a mixed method to cover 7 ETHOS-categories but remains a snapshot of the homelessness even though the results and analysis are confirmed by the broad network as a reliable image but underestimation of the situation. The added value of the tool is in the repetition of the city count to observe evolutions and trends. The experience of each edition helps to improve the methods and practical organisation of the next city count.

Organising a city count is a time consuming task for the coordinator and is only possible with the voluntary participation of all the stakeholders in every stage of the city count. It is important not to limit the stakeholders to the homelessness sector but implicate connected organisations and sectors, private and public services (PCSW and municipalities), public transport and the homeless persons.

To motivate volunteers to participate it is important that the city count is more than registering homeless persons but a part of a larger plan to fight homelessness.

4.3.6 Concept of the focus group with experts and social workers

For the focus group we decided to invite not only the representatives of the working group (CCRS) but to include experts and social workers of the low-threshold services and street work next to private funded organisations. Their registration systems and data collection are not (yet) part of the central registration. Two meetings were organised with the same participants. (see list in annexes)

To get an overview of the current registration systems all participants were asked to prepare a short presentation on the objectives, characteristics, positive and negative aspects, unique client identifier, desirable adjustments and date of entry of their registration systems. Two organisations were not present but sent their information by email. Samusocial, night shelter and coordinator of the winter plan didn't respond at the invitations. The information presented here was obtained at a prior meeting to explain their registration system at researchers of la Strada. In the second meeting we discussed which anonymous data the organisations are able and willing to transfer to la Strada for statistical and scientific research. What about the current central system (CCRS) and city counts for the Brussels Region, could they be extended to this purpose? What are the attitudes towards registration on a national level? How to adapt the Brussels central registration system and city count in order to be part of a Belgian monitoring and measuring strategy?

4.3.7 Overview of the current registration systems

Each service developed its own system to register data in a personnel client file to improve the assistance of users/clients. Data is collected on a need to know base and variables depend on the type of assistance (shelter, psychosocial and administrative assistance or medical care) and the financial resources of the organisation. Day care center have limited information on users. Services who offer medical support have extensive information on profile and sometimes trajectories.

Registration is often an obligation for the annual report required to be funded but is also considered as a means to quantify the work of the organisation.

As already explained the data for twenty variables from the Brussels **residential services** is centralised and rendered anonymous in the CCRS. A unique client identifier (not the national number) makes it possible to have a statistical overview of the extent, profiles and trajectories of the users of one or more of these services. These CCRS variables are only a part of the common variables of the AMASTAT registration system (16 residential centers funded by the COCOF), the BRUreg system (6 residential centers and 8 housing led organisations funded by the GGC-COCOM) and the We-dossier (CAW in Brussels and Flanders).

Only the We-dossier is developed as a tool to be used in worker-client interaction with an individual electronic client file. The registration in AMASTAT and BruReg is additional but is

considered as an important common tool to have an overview of the offer of the member organisations. The extra workload for social workers is significant. This means that social workers have to register in different systems, at different moments and according to specific guidelines..

Day care centers only ask for personal information when the user requests psychosocial and administrative assistance, not to have access to meals, clothes, showers... To participate at sports or cultural activities a name or alias is sufficient. Several day care centers take part at the project 86.400⁴¹, a winter plan offering shelter during the day. To validate the work of the service and raise awareness for the common project, each participating service registers the number of meals, showers, siesta's etc and the number of users. Access is anonymous so to avoid double counts the services agreed to count their users at the same moment and this four times a day (10am, 1pm, 4pm, 6pm). This data is centralised by AMA (Fédération des maison d'accueil et des services d'aide aux sans-abri).

The **street workers** of Diogenes created almost ten years ago two registration systems that can be crossed: an individual client file (anonymous, unique client identifier by description or alias) as a support to the follow up. The second system lists the actions of the street worker to make contact, to gain trust, to inform, to accompany ... The outreach team of Samusocial tries to convince rough sleepers to go with them to the night shelter. All relevant personnel information is registered in a detailed individual client system developed by Samusocial Paris.

Services for medical care collect detailed personal information on the medical situation and history, treatments of their patients even if they are rough sleepers or users of night shelters and often undocumented migrants who have limited legal access to health care. Their data contains extensive information on profile and sometimes trajectories with the patient code as a unique identifier. Doctors of the World have teams in Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia with a common registration system. The street nurses 'Infirmiers de rue' have a recent system that allows to register in real time data on medical situation and well being, living situation, treatments, contact with the patient, other professionals and institutions. The data is register in an electronic personal patient file online. The use of geolocation makes it possible to follow in real time the trajectories of the patients and the street nurses. Each member of the team has access to all patient files. It is possible share mask variables or anonymised data.

Transit is a **service for addicts** funded by the federal government as a day care center, emergency shelter and supported accommodation. 80% of their public are rough sleepers. The registration system (exists 20 years) links the data of the 3 activities in one data base. Registration is time consuming but is seen as a support to field workers and the assistance of the users. The system is developed for Transit and with input of the social workers.

4.3.8 Discussion in the focus group

The central question is what do we want to monitor: extent, profile and/or trajectories? A lot of participants are not in favour of data collection for monitoring trajectories. They consider it as a means to control the services. For health services data on trajectories are important for the follow-up of the health situation of their patients. But also for street workers data on trajectories can be useful to offer adequate assistance when asked.

⁴¹ Winter plan from November 15th till March 31: 9 services funded by the COCOF or COCOM-GGC

Another important question is when to monitor. Do we register the situation of the user at the start of the support or the intake in a residential center or at the end?

There is a growing awareness of the need and the importance to register for statistical surveys. For social workers the first objective of registration is the personal client file to increase the quality and efficiency of the assistance and the follow up of their users/clients. The workload for social workers for (additional) registration has to be limited. The participants appreciate the clear rule of Diogenes: the street workers have to spend at least 70% of their time on the street (and 30% for registration and meetings).

For organisations the objective to register is to prove the quality of the service to get funded (annual report). Data collectors of the central register systems AMASTAT, BruReg and We-dossier) note the added value of common statistical data to inform and influence policy makers and raise public awareness. But the overview of the offer of services has to be completed with data on the refusals after telephone contact or intake. To avoid double counts all services have to agree on a common registration.

Each service attributes a unique identifier at the client files but the structure is different for each system (name, name + date of birth, patient code, alias, description). The participants agree that a common system with a unique client identifier (as the CCRS) could be interesting for statistical research of profiles and trajectories of homeless persons. The number and the variety of services with different register systems in the Brussels Region make it impossible to develop a common register system and to harmonise the different unique client identifiers.

The federal refugee policy has an impact on the number of homeless persons in the Brussels Region. There is an ongoing discussion between the federal government and the Brussels ministers on the political responsibility to organise shelter for these vulnerable persons. In the meantime undocumented migrants have only access to anonymous day care centers and night shelters. The participants agree that registration may not lead to exclusion or raising thresholds. Double counts of users of anonymous day care centers and homeless persons who are in contact with street workers are difficult to avoid. Interesting to note is that an anonymous support is not an obstacle for registration in function of concrete help (for example Diogenes).

An important point of discussion was the privacy issue. Who has access to which data of the individual client files? Some services have strict rules other are more practical. And what about transferring data to other services? How long personal files have to be retained? As one participant formulated: What about the right to be forgotten? The participants agreed that caution is required: personal information can only be shared with the permission of the concerned person. An important observation is that not all services are in accordance with the actual rules of the law provisions regarding data protection. The EU data protection reform into application from May 2019 provides for even more strict measures. It will be very difficult for services to apply this rules. Not every service has the financial means to recruit the necessary IT-personnel.

4.3.9 Conclusions of the focus group

It is particularly important to invest in tools to collect data on vulnerable persons in homeless situations who have no access to or avoid services. This is crucial to learn more about the needs of these 'new' target groups and to offer adequate assistance.

The problem is not a lack of data collection on service users. What is missing is data on the number and reasons for refusals and exclusion of homeless persons. Qualitative data and expertise of field workers is more important than numbers.

The participants propose to use different approaches to achieve different objectives (extent, profile, trajectories) and to choose one option.

1. Trajectories

The study of trajectories can be a resource to understand the gap between the offer and needs. One registration system with one unique identifier to cover the data of all services is impossible. It is better to focus on samples to learn more about trajectories of specific target groups.

2. Profile

Centralising client information is possible and interesting for a specific type of service as proven by current systems as CCRS, AMASTAT, WE-dossier and BruReg. There is a lot of data available on service users in the current registration system of organisations but is difficult to harmonise variables and data of services with different objectives and missions. Without a unique identifier double count can't be avoided. As stated repeatedly, registration may not have an impact on the offer and the threshold of the organisation. Extra workload for field workers has to be limited. Despite guidelines there will always be mistakes. The focus is on service users.

3. Extent

More realistic is to build on the Brussels city count. This is a good combined method to collect data on extent but can be improved. New ways have to be explored to collect more comprehensive data on people who stay in squats, stay with friends or family or are released from institutions. The possibility to match this data with a snapshot of the active files of the street workers and other (low threshold) centers could be examined.

4.4. Registration and attitudes towards registration: Wallonia

4.4.1 Service registrations harmonized by the Relais Sociaux

As stated in previous chapters⁴², the “Relais Sociaux” are the organisations in charge of taking care of homelessness in Wallonia. While the decree provided the possibility to create such Relais Sociaux anywhere on the territory, only seven were actually founded in the seven main Walloon towns⁴³. The attempt to build up a statistical tool monitoring homelessness in Wallonia was initiated by the Walloon Institute of statistics (IWEPS), who worked together with the Relais Sociaux in order to harmonize data gathering and processing.

This initiative is almost the only source of quite wide-ranging registration available in Walloon region, and it includes, for the territories covered by a Relais Social, the data available at the PSCW. Since the Relais Sociaux are partnerships between public actors (PSCW as main one) and associations, and typically the “Social emergency” sector is organized by the local PSCW, de facto the most relevant registration of homeless are into the harmonization project.

It has also been stated in Chapter 1 that the definition of the public of the Relais Sociaux is not referred to homelessness, but to “persons in severe precariousness”, which is broader and includes deprived people or households in housing. This means that data about homeless persons, according to any ETHOS or ETHOS Light categories, needs to be identified and extracted from the overall registration data through the existing identification variables. The basic registration in the Relais Sociaux’ services was primarily aimed at filling harmonized activity reports (according to a 2009 common template), and only later was modified as to provide sensible data at the regional level. The “activity report” primary nature means that the wider definition of the public remains an inescapable reference for the registration.

In the current form of the harmonized data, the variable useful to extract registration matching ETHOS categories is called “housing situation”, and is the same across the four domains of actions (Night accommodation; Day care centres; DUS (social emergency); Street work - each of which has its own data template). Only the **number of different persons** in each category of the variables is recorded in the database processed by IWEPS.

The defined categories are:

In private housing
In social housing
In emergency or transit accommodation
In night shelter, hotel,...
In accommodation for homeless
In institution – other
Sleeping rough, in car or caravan, in non conventional housing (“squat”)
Living with family or friends
Other housing situation, not in institution
Unknown situation

⁴² See section 2.2.2

⁴³ Liège and Charleroi were the first, then came Namur, Mons, La Louvière, Verviers and Tournai

The detail of the categories shows interestingly some matches with ETHOS Light categories, but those matches are not comprehensive. Couch surfing (ETHOS Light 6) is a single category, and ETHOS Light 2 is also covered, even if it is not 100% clear whether the “emergency or transit accommodation” fits completely ETHOS Light 3 or overlaps with ETHOS Light 2. However, ETHOS Light 1 and 5 are merged.

The two main problems with this registration variable are that it is (roughly) recorded only at the first entrance of the person in the network (or service) and rarely updated, and is thus not reliable for a monitoring of mid- or long term homeless. The second problem is the amount of unknown situations. While housing situation is quite well registered in DUS and Accommodation sectors, day care centres and especially street work have a large part of unknown. In the 2016 report ⁴⁴(based on 2012 data), the unknown situations are recorded in the four branches as per the following table.

Table IX Activity of the Walloon Relais Sociaux (IWEPS, 2016)

Activity Branch	Number of Relais sociaux providing registration	Number of structures providing registration	Total number of registered users (2012 data)	% of users fitting an ETHOS category	% of “unknown” housing situation
Emergency Accommodation	6	11	3586	63.1	15,8
Day centres (low- threshold ¹)	4	7	2195	65.9	15.5
Social Urgencies	6	8	4956	62.4	27.5
Street work	6	8	1180 ¹	69.9	16.6

It is important also to remind that, whatever the usefulness of the registration data harmonized by IWEPS and Relais Sociaux, it is far from covering the whole Walloon territory. The table above shows that for the 2016 report, some Relais Sociaux were not yet able to deliver the data as planned. That situation is said to have improved for the following years. Anyway, the territory covered by the existing Relais Sociaux is limited to the seven cities where they are located, plus the area (administrative “arrondissement”) around them. On the field, that means that in some cases, services from suburban municipalities are included (such as Seraing near Liège), or the nature of the arrondissement includes several small towns where services are coordinated (Verviers also includes services in Dison and Spa). In other cases, the territory is structured in such a way that the central town is pretty small, but its suburbs or surrounding areas (either separate municipalities or peripheral parts of the town itself) are covered by the services. By no way this extension can be considered as comprehensive of the whole “arrondissement” territory.

⁴⁴ DEPRez Anne, SIMON Claire, *La prise en charge de la grande précarité et du sans-abrisme dans six grandes villes wallonnes Premier exercice (2012) de collecte harmonisée des données auprès des services partenaires des Relais sociaux de Wallonie*, Rapport de recherche de l'IWEPS N°15, Avril 2016.

Evaluation

The data collected and harmonized by the Relais Sociaux gives beyond doubt useful hints about the evolution of homeless population in the main Walloon cities, especially about the profiles and their evolution. However, the lack of territorial coverage, and the difficulty to effectively avoid double counting in services other than emergency accommodation make the data structurally unfit to estimate the overall Walloon homeless population.

4.4.2 Registration of applicants to Social housing

It has been stated in the chapter dealing with definitions that the 2008 updated guidelines for the priority rules in the Walloon social housing companies interestingly fits some ETHOS categories. Since applicants are granted high priority (but not absolute: other conditions also do, such as having disabled children, etc.) if they qualify as “homeless” according to that definition, they are likely to request the “homelessness” certificate from the PCSW – at least as long as they have any hope of getting a social house, since the waiting lists are quite long in certain areas.

According to the report analyzing the social housing candidates⁴⁵, on Jan 1st 2017, 2.993 applicant households had such a certificate. This snapshot shows the limit of the “priority” concept, since those have NOT yet been housed in a Social Housing as per 1/1/2017. The same report analyses the duration of waiting time for each subcategory among the households who were granted a social house in 2016. The 1458 “homeless” certified households who did waited an average of 382 days between application and housing, that is over one year. Among other groups, the victims of domestic violence are those with the shortest waiting time.

Theoretically, there should not be double counts among those figures, since an applicant, even if he requests a social house in several municipalities, should have a “reference housing company” who processes his application for all the places, and the figures from the report come from those “centralized” files.

Evaluation

The data from social housing companies are interesting for the definition they are based upon, but the waiting time recorded for those homeless who got a social house show that it is unlikely that a comprehensive part of the Walloon homeless fill the application. The data on house allocation over the elapsed year may represent a number of re-housed former homeless, but nothing is available on whether they keep their new house over time or not.

4.4.3 Attitudes toward registration in Wallonia

As in the other two regions, the state-of-the-art of registration in Wallonia, as well as assessments of current practices and attitudes toward an enhanced method of monitoring has been researched through individual interviews at various levels (people in charge of data processing, CPAS in small, medium and large municipalities, non-subsidized municipal shelter social worker,...) and through focus groups with homelessness data experts and with service workers.

⁴⁵ Anfré M.-N. (coord.) & Gobert O. (2017), Les ménages candidats à un logement public en Wallonie au 1er janvier 2017, Rapport du Centre d'Études en Habitat Durable, Charleroi

Information gathered with those interviews has been inserted in the relevant chapters above, and in this paragraph, we will summarize the assessment of current practices, and the attitude toward further monitoring practices, especially a point-in-time approach.

PREAMBLE

The overarching issue about registration and strategy, across most of the interviews and group discussions, is related to building trust about the use that will be done of the collected data. There's a prejudicial distrust toward politicians, and external requests of data collection is immediately associated with political power and intentions. Specific publics of homeless care services are seen as at risk if data is collected and "misused" that is used in other ways than improving the care to those publics. Typical example is any kind of registration of migrants, especially the undocumented, whose proportion in the services might lead to changes in policies or subsidization if the policy is to reserve the services to documented users. To a certain extent, fears also include the danger that some users might see their benefits reduced if more of their living situation is registered.

The danger with data collection is that it may target subgroups which will eventually be excluded⁴⁶

This attitude is rooted into a deep distrust toward the policies: they rate the political support to homelessness sector institutions (Relais Sociaux, Housing First) as very limited, and are afraid that monitoring data could be used against existing services and care instead as in favor of better care. An example has been repeated several times: since the obligation of Individualized Plans (PIIS) for getting benefits from the PCSW, homeless users are either excluded from those benefits, or refrain themselves from applying.

There's a pressure from the PCSW to control what's being done with the homeless. The policy of the PCSW to force the "activation" of users through the individual contracts drives the most fragile users out of the network. We had counted 109 people living with relatives or friends. The PCSW registered those situations. Now we have only 30 left. I doubt that all the others have found a viable solution, they just hide under the radar. We knew better the existing squats in our city before the PCSW started pressurizing users.

⁴⁷

A further fear about the use that can be done of the data is on the public management side. Since the services are faced with limited subsidization already for years now, they are afraid that the demand for more data collection might be used for compelling them to do more with less resources.

4.4.3.1. ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT REGISTRATION IN WALLONIA

Experience of collecting harmonized data

The registration interviewees refer to is mostly what is harmonized by IWEPS, as explained above. Early participants insist that the process of harmonizing registration across the Relais Sociaux (and thus their services) was quite long and difficult. Where local registration systems had already been developed, there was a strong resistance to the new requirements. They didn't see the rationale for the workload of changing an existing, quite satisfactory system? On

⁴⁶ Quote from the focus group with service workers

⁴⁷ Quote from the focus group with data collection experts

the other hand, the exportation of a system already in use somewhere else was also felt as some kind of “imperialism”, so quite much diplomacy and negotiations were needed.

Some attitudes during that process could be identified as “resistance to change”, but the mistrust described in the preamble above was already present among services who didn’t see any added value to new requirements for registration.

On the other hand, it is reckoned that quite a lot of data is available at service levels, only a part of which is processed into the harmonized data exchange with IWEPS. Each service has its own record system, which is aimed at documenting the issues they consider as relevant for their activity. For instance, day centers working with drug addicts are more interested into trajectories data. Mental health-related services are also among the highest demanders of data on their users.

The harmonization process led to changes to the existing registrations at the service level, and the difficulty was the reluctance to change them. But in the end, with those quite limited changes (that led to different sets of variables across the four domains of activities⁴⁸), the shared data is a limited extraction from the information available in the services. They send to their Relais Social aggregated data (thus avoiding any privacy issue), that is the number of users they have taken care of split into the categories defined by the harmonized variables⁴⁹. Each Relais Social recodes the data received from its partner services and processes the information into the IWEPS templates.

With this procedure, the issues with IDs are avoided mostly, since only aggregated data is shared. Quite some services are concerned with privacy if asked to share any kind of ID, for the protection of their users. Those are mainly services dedicated to drug users, prostitution or those who have undocumented migrants among their users.

Cooperation from the services

Despite the resistances, difficulties and the time it needed to implement the harmonization, the assessment is that services actually cooperate better than expected and better than they had announced themselves. Even non-subsidized services happen to send their data, albeit there’s no mean of pressure on them if they would not.

The dynamics of the data collection is now quite well implemented among the services⁵⁰

The PCSW representatives in the group state that on one hand, the PCSW are more prone to registering because, as a public institution they are culturally used to such “obligations”. But on the other hand, the administrative workload is already excessive for their staff. As an example, in a large town, the management of the reference addresses at the PCSW (registering, follow-up, sorting post,... - about 700 in that case) is the work of a full time clerk.

IDs and privacy issues

The experience of networking at the city level within the Relais Sociaux has helped a lot in building the necessary trust, and the Relais Social is seen by services as guarantor of the use

⁴⁸ Already listed above: emergency accommodation; day care ; social urgencies; street work.

⁴⁹ And according to a common glossary in order to make use of the same definitions of the variable categories

⁵⁰ Quote from a Relais Social coordinator

of the data. Locally, some Relais Sociaux have an extended use of the data they have, including the use of some kind of IDs which can for instance serve to trajectory studies for follow up of some persons. This means that ID registration do exist in some services, and the problem is not always privacy of the user (toward the service) but lack of trust for sharing such info.

The importance of trust within the Relais Sociaux, and the existence of it, is evidenced by the fact that elimination of double counts among users of emergency accommodation is done by hand on base of a list of names forwarded from the shelters to the person in charge of data collection at the Relais Social. However, as already written above, even with the names, elimination of double counts remains sensitive to the accuracy of the spelling.

Service workers also note that, among users, a majority spontaneously gives information to social workers about their situation, without concerns about privacy, as long as the questions make sense for responding their demands. However, the precondition is that trust has built up between user and social worker, otherwise profile data is likely to be false. If too much data is being collected, resistance is likely because it is felt that *“too many questionnaires are already used”*. Even at the service level, the reluctance to using IDs can be overcome if the process of anonymization is properly explained.

As explained above, the elimination of double counts is performed only within each Relais Social and only for the emergency accommodation sector (most of whose services collect IDs). The Relais Social of Liege is experimenting ways of eliminating double counts from day centers data, but that's challenging and they are not sure to manage it. They expect it to be impossible with low-threshold services.

Assessment of some contents of the existing data

As for the content of the data collected by IWEPS from the Relais Sociaux, the assessment of the experts (in charge of processing and delivering the data) is that it is already too heavy a collection for some services. Quality of data is questionable for those, and the missing in some variables is a symptom. Service workers stress, about reliability, that many of the recorded variables are subject to change within short time, and the registration at best gives a correct state of the situation (for our ETHOS-based monitoring, critically the variable “housing situation”), and is rarely updated. This may even lead to double counts when no ID is used, and the same person registers at a later moment in another service, and is supposed to be another user because some aspects of his situation have changed in the meanwhile. Only if ID is used, can this change be used as a very partial element of trajectory.

As it is conceived, the IWEPS data is of no use for any analysis of trajectories, which would be a key information for assessing the outcome of the care provided. No information can be extracted from the data which would tell, for instance, whether persons who are no longer in the record have gone out of homelessness or have just moved to another place. The variable “issue” (*“problématique”*) is rated as useless because it's a complex assessment, and the way it is registered leaves it as a mere subjective opinion of the social worker who fills out the form. Their assessment of the reliability of the counting (of persons making use of the services) is quite better, but at the same time they stress that counting is mostly a political issue, while the evaluation of the efficiency of the services (and therefore the need for change or improvement) would come only from trajectories, at the moment unavailable.

4.4.3.2. ATTITUDES TOWARD FURTHER MONITORING IN WALLONIA

As exposed here above, the experts and the service workers are well aware of the time and resources it needed to achieve the current harmonized data collection, and of the limitations of the use it allows.

What kind of data?

Beyond the trust toward the (political) use issues discussed in the preamble, the interviewees tend to oppose the needs for data at the service level to the kind of data useful to policymakers. Typically, counts, or numbers, are seen as relevant only to the political level.

Again and again we face the question: how many homeless are there in Liege? We always have to answer that it is not that simple. The answers to that question are always subject to a political use⁵¹.

Beyond just counting, the participants stress the need for trajectories data, which can be used for, a.o.:

- evaluation of the efficiency of the services
- know where the users come from (including persons sent from the rural areas in the large cities)
- Mental health-related services for better care
- Assessing the effects of closure of psychiatric hospital beds
- Show the consequences of broader poverty problems

Who manages the data collection and processing

At the intersection between trust toward the use which will be done and type of data relevant for the services, the assessment of needs for profile data is expressed among the service workers as a need for better profiling subgroups of users in order to better meet their needs. This can be interpreted both as an indication of the type of profile data they want (although it has not been specified), but also and mainly as a request for some research backing of the data collection. This research work would be needed both for identifying up-to-date trends in the groups compositions (to be monitored) and also at the processing level, for clustering in a meaningful way the profiles registered.

Key conditions for a probable enlistment of services into a further data collection (possibly PIT operation)

At the starting point, the participants to the two focus groups express a negative evaluation toward the possibility to implement successfully a point in time data collection with the participation of their services. The first reactions stress the difficulty of what has been done with IWEPS, and the excessive workload they already assess for existing data registration. *It is improbable, in my view, that services are willing to participate to a dedicated survey. They already come out of the winter strained by the effort...⁵².*

⁵¹ Quote from a service coordinator. Other participants have expressed similar experiences with politicians or journalists asking about numbers.

⁵² Quote from a person in charge of collecting (from the services) and processing data in a Relais Social

However, when challenged further, some key features arise that are thought to help with service participation.

The first condition, repeated by several participants and interviewees, is the need for an extensive feedback from the data collection. This is a criticism of what is currently being done, the services fail to see what the data collection is for also because they have insufficient feedback.

A shared view among the Relais Sociaux is that, in Wallonia, considering the culture and history of the homeless care sector, any project can be implemented with the cooperation of the services only if they feel associated in the decision making and management of such a project.

Being associated in the implementation process and receiving a feedback proving how useful the collected data is are the two key conditions for the services feel concerned with such a project.

... unless they have the impression that they proposed it themselves⁵³.

Said in other words by another participant, the point is summarized as:

If it's a rigidly imposed project, expect low response. If it is flexible enough, collaboration with be much higher⁵⁴.

The importance of services feeling concerned, and being convinced of usefulness is highlighted by the participation to the current data collection of services not subsidized by the Relais Social. The services are said to be concerned, as far as data can help with those issues, by the understanding of their own work; their public visibility; the stability of their financing.

Cooperation dynamics need to be built up where the feedback from the use of collected data shows that:

- It makes sense for the projects and activities of the services toward their public
- It doesn't threaten the subsidization
- It offers enough guarantees to be useful to the service users

⁵³ Continuation of the quote above

⁵⁴ Quote from the focus group with data collection experts

4.5. SWOT analysis registration practices

Based on the review on the available administrative data and the registration practices and attitudes of data experts and practitioners, we finish this chapter with a SWOT analysis of homelessness registration practices.

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant amount of knowledge on different levels • Sector where field workers protect their clients • Sector eager to start war on homelessness 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of registration systems • Diversity of organisations offering different types of support • Different federal and regional governments involved
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work together • Share experiences • Get on the same page in Belgium to fight homelessness • Design common variables • Link registration to policy measures 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to work on separate islands

Figure 4.4 SWOT analysis registration of homelessness in Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia

5. SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

In this chapter we go more deeply into the topics of hidden homelessness, rural homelessness and the link between migration and homelessness. For each topic a brief overview of the literature is given. We also give the results based on our qualitative exploration of these three issues.

5.1. Hidden homelessness

As captured by the ETHOS typology of FEANTSA, homelessness represents people according to a diversity of ‘living’ situations: roofless, houseless, in insecure housing, in inadequate housing (see table II in chapter 1).

Policies and organizations for the homeless often focus on the roofless and the houseless. Their visibility on the streets and in homeless organizations creates a sense of urgency. However, a group of people who experience homelessness exist out of sight of organizations, researchers and policy makers. They are often referred to as ‘hidden homeless’: people who are not visible on the street or in homeless care.

In this study we **define hidden homeless** as:

- ETHOS Light 5: people living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing (Squad, garage, makeshift shelter)
- ETHOS Light 6: people living with family/friends due to lack of housing

Non-conventional housing is often ‘a choice’ of people who have no access to services and social rights (e.g. undocumented migrants), who are not aware of specific services, who have an insufficient income or who have bad experiences in the past and as a consequence avoid services. Because they are or become so called ‘service avoiders’. Living with family/friends is remarkably a first question/suggestion by social workers of various organizations when someone ends up homeless. People living temporarily with a family member or a friend (often referred to as ‘couch surfers’ or being ‘doubled up’). The situation of hidden homeless is not visible, not on the street and in shelters not in official homelessness statistics.

In the next pages we present a short literature review on hidden homelessness, the results of our qualitative study on this matter and a short in depth study into the use of Youth Hostels by homeless persons.

5.1.1 Literature review

Turning to friends and family for a few nights stay seems like a logical first step to take when having no place to sleep. And most homeless people do not turn to shelters until they have completely exhausted their social networks (Shinn et al, 1991). It can be the most convenient option. But it can also be a result of the lack of availability of other options. Sometimes no shelters are available in the vicinity or people are not aware of them (Robinson & Coward, 2003). In other cases people have bad experiences in homeless organizations or are afraid of them.

The size of the hidden homeless group is hard to measure as they often don’t use services for homeless and consequently don’t appear in homelessness statistics. Studies that did try to put a number on hidden homelessness report this group to make up for 70% of the homeless population (Eberle, Kraus, & Serge, 2009).

Recent studies show that hidden homeless are extremely vulnerable. Only a few studies have been carried out that bring into light their socio demographics. Researchers report slightly more males, and a largely single or divorced group (Crawley et al, 2013; Robinson & Coward, 2003). 20 out of the 34 questioned hidden homeless in the study by Crawley and colleagues (2013), had one to five children. Yet, those children were not living with them at the moment. One group often reported to be couch surfing are youngsters (Distasio, Sylvestre, & Mulligan, 2005; Robinson & Coward, 2003). Studies also show how women and families avoid shelters (Baptista, 2010; Edgar & Doherty, 2001). They fear the 'roughness' of shelters and rely more often on informal networks for support. According to Peters (2012), women more often stay with family members and men comparably more often with friends. Immigrants are also reported to fall back on their social network when looking for a place to stay (Fiedler, Schuurman, & Hyndman, 2006; Robinson & Coward, 2003).

The interviewees in the study of Crawley and colleagues (2013) have been 'absolutely' homeless once in their lives, often in the past six months. The most common previous housing situation before ending up homeless was living with parents or with a partner (Robinson & Coward, 2003). Relationship breakdown or dispute with parents were common reasons for leaving their last home (Robinson & Coward, 2003). Some studies find that staying with friends is far more common than staying with family. Yet the length of stay is longer with family members (average six months) than with friends (average three months) (Robinson & Coward, 2003).

Studies that report numbers on drug dependency of hidden homeless report varying numbers, from 23% of participants to all participants (Crawley, 2013, Peters, 2012; Reeve, 2011; Robinson & Coward, 2003). In a study by Reeve (2011), 34% of hidden homeless reported mental health problems. The vulnerability of the hidden homeless is also reflected in their low educational achievement. More than half have no high school diploma and live on no income at all (32%) or a social security benefit (35% in the study by Crawley et al., 2013). Many became homeless at a young age, almost half of the respondents at the age of 20 (Reeve, 2011). Many of the female hidden homeless experienced violence in the past. In the study by Reeve (2011), 54% of the women experienced violence or abuse from a partner, 43% from family members or friends in the family.

People who reside temporarily with family and friends **lack the stability** of permanent housing. Some of the hidden homeless combine couch surfing with shelter use and living on the street (May, 2000; Robinson and Coward's, 2003). Not being certain of a place to sleep and having to search for one can be extremely stressful. Even when having a couch to sleep on, there is no autonomy to 'go home' when you feel like as you are dependent on others. Only on rare occasions people are given their own key (Robinson & Coward, 2003).

Few studies that have focused on the lives of hidden homeless report how the **stressfulness** of their situation makes it extremely difficult to gain and sustain employment (Reeve, 2011). It is reported to have mental health impacts such as depression. It can also cause health problems as many report they try to spend as much time outside as possible, not too cause too much burden on their host family.

Reeve (2011) also describes how some people report **financial exploitation** by their 'friends' they are staying with. Others engage in sex work or shoplifting to be able to pay a night in a hotel (Reeve, 2011). Women sometimes use sex to avoid sleeping in a shelter or on the street.

28% of the women in the study of Reeve (2011) had spent a night forming an unwanted sexual partnership with someone just to have a roof above their head.

People are often **forced to move** constantly, as it is hard to find a place where it is possible to stay longer timer periods. Vacha and Merin (1993) explain this pointing to the precarious nature of informal shelter providing. The families where they end up have their own lives and troubles. Quite a large part of the informal shelter providers (38% in the study by Vacha and Merin, 1993) has been homeless themselves at some time in the past. This can also cause them to be unable to provide long-term housing. Their homes are small where this extra person on the couch has a rather large effect on the household. If host household members are on social benefit, they fear income break down. In case of a social rental home, hosts can fear to lose their housing.

As described before, staying with friends and family is a **common first strategy** when ending up homeless. Many of those looking for a place in a formal shelter already lived this experience. Contrasting to what one might expect, Shinn and colleagues (1991) found that homeless individuals not per se had smaller networks than a housed comparison group. In their study, those seeking formal shelter were in greater touch with their social networks than were housed participants. Yet they perceived themselves as less able to stay with them than did their counter parts. The researchers explained this as that 75% of the shelter seeking group had stayed with members of their social network in the past year and had worn out their welcome. Eventually, people just run out of friends to stay with. When having been asked to leave earlier, people felt unable to return (Shinn, Knickman, & Weitzman, 1991).

Many hidden homeless have positive things to say about their stay with family and friends, often based on the comparison with the alternatives such as a formal shelter or sleeping rough (Robinson & Coward, 2003). Some report little issues regarding privacy or problems. Often these are youngsters finding their new lodging with a friend less restrictive than their former stay at their parents' place. However a large group talks about their housing solution as merely a place to sleep. They often can't remain in their accommodation during the day or feel uncomfortable doing so (Casey, Goudie, & Reeve, 2008). Robinson and Coward (2003) made an overview of the pros and cons of staying with friends and family.

Peters (2012) asked 56 hidden homeless how they manage their interactions with the friends and family members they are staying with. The following **strategies** were used to negotiate household relationships (Peters, 2012):

- minimize their presence;
- move frequently;
- provide services such as cleaning, cooking and child/elder care
- pay into household budget
- eat little or eat elsewhere

Table X Pros and cons of staying with friends and family (Robinson & Coward, 2003)

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • access to the comforts of home • familiar company • emotional support from friends or family members • living with people who care • being of some use by helping around the house • strengthening of the relationship with friend or relative • people to talk to in own language and from own culture • friends understanding of situation and difficulties • help from friends with problems • safety, compared to hostel accommodation and living on the street • cheaper than living on streets or in a hostel • safer than the street when drinking heavily • can choose who you are living with • living with friends rather than strangers in a hostel • friends willing to help when drinking or taking drugs • flexibility of the situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of privacy • limited security – never knowing when might be asked to leave • impact of insecurity on well being and mental health • inadequate sleeping arrangements • not having a fixed address, and subsequent problems claiming benefits • restrictions on lifestyle and behaviour when staying with family • limits on when can come and go • tensions and arguments and deterioration in relationship with friend or relative • studying and school work difficult • lack of sleep • difficulties keeping down a job • safety concerns and theft of property by other people also staying with the friend • feeling a burden • problems maintaining a healthy diet • difficulties being yourself and relaxing • injured pride having to rely on charity • exposure to drug use, from friends' associates • no home to bring new friends back to • need to move on regularly • lack of formal support or assistance • lack of independence • overcrowded living conditions

Most contribute to the household budget, almost 80% provides something. Yet financial contributions are generally quite small. In the study carried out by Vacha and Merin (1993), almost half of the couch surfers (44%) contributes less than 100 dollar (90 euros) per month.

Busch-Geertsema (2010) states that more studies need to be carried out focussing on these hidden homeless to provide some evidence regarding the incidence, profile and experience of people living in this situation. Even more so because homelessness has been increasing for some groups such as youth (Watts, Johnsen, & Sosenko, 2015; Benjaminsen 2016).

Peters (2012) names three convincing reasons why hidden homelessness should be studied. A first reason is the size of this group, appearing more significant, numerically, than absolute homelessness. As described before, hidden homeless are said to make up for 70% of the homeless population (Eberle, Kraus, & Serge, 2009).

A second reason is that hidden homeless persons demonstrate a strategy for dealing with housing need that is employed more often by particular groups such as youngsters, women and families, and immigrants as described before. It is not unlikely to assume that people living with friends and relatives differ in important ways from homeless making use of public shelters.

Studies at least reveal that the hidden homeless are less likely to seek social assistance than other homeless groups (Robinson & Coward, 2003).

A third reason is that hidden homelessness represents a situation of severe housing insecurity. Couch surfers have no legal rights to stay in their accommodation. Even though homelessness is often considered as the outcome of multiple adversities such as poverty, substance related disorder and psychiatric vulnerability. Other research shows that (episodes of) homelessness might actually precede some outcomes. For example, psychiatric vulnerabilities can be exacerbated by periods of homelessness (Breakey & Fischer, 1995).

Informal sheltering plays a key role in keeping many people off the streets and keeping down the number of people who use public shelters. A better understanding of these arrangements is important to prevent homelessness. Studies should be carried out that can shine a light on the causes and consequences of the situation of people who seek informal sheltering.

There is a need for both quantitative and qualitative studies. Quantitative studies can help to get an idea on the size and characteristics of the hidden homeless group. Examples of this have been carried out using different methods. A common methods used is including hidden homelessness in census and housing surveys such as done in Australia by the Australian Bureau of Statistics ABS and France by the Statistics agency of France (l'Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE) or through random digit dialling, used in several big cities such as Vancouver (Eberle, Kraus, & Serge, 2009) and Los Angeles (LAHSA, 2007).

Qualitative studies are useful to explore the lives and daily life experiences of hidden homeless. How did they become homeless? What are barriers they perceive in receiving help from social services? What can organizations do to better reach out to hidden homeless persons? How can we reform our social system to make less difficult to get out of homelessness? What can be done to make sure their period of homelessness is kept as short as possible. How can hidden homeless persons be helped to develop the personal characteristics commonly associated with moving out of homelessness such as human capital (training, education, history of employment) and social network (access to informal support). And remove barriers including personal disabilities such as physical and mental health, substance abuse). Popular qualitative research methods used to study hidden homeless are case studies and snowball sampling (eg. Crawley et al., 2013).

5.1.2 EXPLORING HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS IN BELGIUM

To our knowledge, no studies on hidden homelessness have taken place in Belgium. In our study we want to explore this topic by using an exploratory approach. As can be read in the method section (chapter 3), hidden homelessness was a topic included in several parts of this study. Not only was it discussed in the focus groups with field workers, it was also subject of interviews with the target group and a variety of organisations for and used by homeless persons. In table XI, an overview of the actions on hidden homelessness is given on the actions on hidden homelessness.

Table XI Methodology concerning hidden homelessness

	Organisations	Location
Focus groups with organisations for the homeless	Night shelters, day centers, street work, PCSW, CAW	Flanders Brussels Wallonia
Interviews with organisations in contact with the homeless	MSOC, psychiatric hospital, day centers, CAW, police	Diest
Interviews with people who experience(d) hidden homelessness		Leuven, Diest
Interviews with users of low-threshold day care centers (24/10/16, 8/11/16, 20/02/17, 7/03/2017)	Various low-threshold day care centers	Brussels
Interviews with Youth Hostel personnel	Leuven City Hostel, The Cube, Hostel De Blauwput	Leuven
Online survey	22/23 Flemish Youth Hostels	Flanders
Limited online survey (7/11/2016, 6/03/2018)	Various non-conventional dwellings (squads, non-official shelters)	Brussels

We find that hidden homeless:

✓ **Are advised to seek shelter with family/friends**

When people end up homeless, for example after a relationship breakdown, they first seek shelter with family and friends. Only when they have worn out their network they turn to services for help. The first question/suggestion by social workers is to look for shelter with family/friends

✓ **Turn to PCSW for emergency housing**

Hidden homeless contact PCSW to ask for housing. One needs to be lucky to find emergency housing provided by the PCSW. Often places are full or kept free for what they call 'unexpected homelessness' (in case of fire, flood). Often 1) there is no emergency housing, 2) existing emergency housing is full or 3) existing emergency housing is available for only certain types of unexpected homelessness (in case of fire, flood).

✓ **Have no place to call home**

Our results document the instability of the housing situation of: not always having a key, not being sure until when they can stay, as is described by these participants:

Every evening around 24h, I go to my room. I put a sleeping bag there. I only go there to sleep. In the evening I hang around the station. I don't like being alone. (Hidden homeless man, sleeps in a squat)

A friend convinced me to move in with her. I didn't want to at first, but I eventually did when my landlord didn't do the necessary housing renovation. I couldn't put my address at her place, so I lost my sickness benefit really fast. I paid her 300 euros per month, didn't want to take advantage of her. At first I had my own key. But suddenly my friends' husband wanted the key 'to make an extra copy'. He never returned it. So I no longer had a key. In the morning I dropped my daughter off to school. In the beginning you go to the center, or visit one of my other daughters. But you cannot do that for hours. In the evening, I stood waiting in front of her door. Once my friend texted me 'we don't know when we'll be back home'. Leaving me no other option than to sleep in my car with my daughter. (Woman who experienced hidden homelessness).

The housing situation of hidden homeless is often just a sleeping arrangement, they do **not** have a place they can call **home**.

✓ **Are sent from pillar to post**

As hidden homeless frequently move from one place to the other, welfare organisations such as PCSW have difficulties figuring out 'who is legally responsible to support them'. Not seldom, people don't receive help and are sent to a different municipality.

✓ **Often refuse crisis centers/homeless care**

The option of a crisis center (e.g. at CAW) is often refused. Three main reasons named are:

Too far

Residential centers are mostly located in (larger) cities. For people who end up homeless in smaller communities or rural areas this means leaving their everyday

environment. When working or having school-aged children, even when a place is found in the closest residential center, this can be extremely time-consuming leaving little time left to focus on finding housing.

Too expensive

The maximum day price in residential centers is 25.5 euro (in CAW in Flanders). This cost can be a good motivator for people to turn instead to family and friends for a bed or couch.

Living together

Besides a personal bedroom, common rooms such as living room, kitchen and bathroom are to be shared in residential centers this can be a reason for people to reject a place in a residential center, because they don't want to live together with (moody and troublesome) others.

✓ **Are not always perceived as homeless by professionals**

Social workers from PCSW and other organisations not always use an extended definition of homelessness, not seldom referring only to rough sleepers or people staying in a residential homeless shelter. In our conversations with field workers, especially when going through PCSW client files using ETHOS Light, workers are surprised to find so many homeless amongst their clients.

✓ **Not always perceive themselves as homeless**

People staying temporarily with family and friends, residing in a camping or squatting, not necessarily perceive themselves as homeless. Similar to the professionals, they can have a more narrow view on homelessness. As said before, staying with family and friends is often a first step into homelessness. Even though it is also a strategy used occasionally by chronic homeless persons who can from time to time find a bed with a friend/family member.

An additional reason is the impermanence of the housing solution, quite often starting as 'only for a few days'. For young people, living together with friends is regarded as a 'common' housing solution. For others, staying with friends or family is limited to a day per week or month, or when it is very cold. A person can have different living situations during one week (street, night shelter, friends, squad, religious organisation, cheap hotel).

✓ **Ask for a reference address at PCSW**

PCSW workers say people staying with family and friends turn to them for a reference address. PCSW have differing policies and interpretations of the laws on this matter. PCSW and

A woman with an alcohol addiction divorced her husband a while ago. After finishing a 6 month rehabilitation program, her ex-husband allows her to temporarily move in with him to give her time to arrange her affairs and find own housing. PCSW understands the situation and allocates a reference address at PCSW. When turning to the town hall, the reference address is refused. The employee from the town hall is aware of her actual place of residence with her ex-husband. In order to register correct information in the database of the National Register, they only want to note down her actual address. The city hall employee judges a reference address in this case as incorrect.

municipalities sometimes refuse the reference address as it does not reflect the actual housing situation. In certain small municipalities, town halls even refuse a PCSW reference address, arguing they are aware of the actual place of residence. As can be read in the illustration.

PCSW workers point to the following reasons why people staying with family/friends ask for a reference addresses:

Debts

Hosts can refuse having someone officially registered at their address when fearing bailiffs.

Income breakdown

Hosts receiving benefits (unemployment, social integration income, invalidity, health insurance) can fear income break down when temporarily hosting a friend.

Losing social housing

Hosts living in social housing can fear to lose their house or having their rent increase when hosting a family or friend.

These fears of hosts and guests can keep people from searching professional help such as OCMW and CAW. PCSW workers on the other side, are sometimes suspicious about people asking for a reference address. Social workers state that sometimes clients request a reference address just to avoid problems relating to their debts, or aiming at higher social benefits.

Stepping into a budget management plan, can increase the likelihood to obtain a reference address. In our talks we hear rules that are stricter than the law prescribes such as maximum duration of 3 months, compulsory visit every week to pick up mail and discuss progress...

I have a reference address at PCSW. Every 14 days, I need to pick up my mail. Since a few months, I am working full time. To be able to collect my post I need to take half a day off. Every 2 weeks. (Hidden homeless man)

✓ **Make use of cheap ho(s)tels**

When looking for an affordable place to sleep, homeless persons sometimes turn to cheap hotels such as hostels. In our inquiry with the Flemish hostels, employees describe their bad experiences. They are aware homeless persons are sent to them by PCSW, CAW and police but state 'We are not trained to host these people'.

✓ **Often receive a social integration income as cohabitant**

As described before, people staying with family/friends are often not regarded as homeless. Their housing situation is seen as advantageous for them and their host, so quite often both receive their benefits as forming one household.

✓ **Are also people who recently left an individual center for asylum seekers**

PCSW workers describe the current term of 2 months (renewable with 2 times 1 month) to be too short for people in individual reception initiatives (IOI/ILA) to find housing. It makes refugees chose 'unstable' housing situations such as moving in with a friend or family member.

✓ **Instable housing situations caused by instable relations**

When going through their client files, PCSW workers bring about quite some cases where the person does not belong to one of the ETHOS Light categories but live in a precarious, instable housing situation caused by instable living relationships. Some examples can be found in the

A 28 year old man has lived with his mother his whole life. The mother is addicted to alcohol and regularly throws him out on the street. At the moment, their relationship is again going through a tough time. (PCSW worker)

A young man was homeless when he ended up in a psychiatric facility. During his admission, he meets a girl. When his stay is over, he moves in with her. Their relationship is so short and so unstable. It can go wrong any time; (PCSW worker)

illustration box.

PCSW workers signal that for some people the line between their current housing situation and being out on the street there is no wider than a razor's edge. **Cohabitation is not seldom a solution because they lack other possibilities.** Four main groups can be distinguished: difficult parent-child relationships, fledgling romantic relationships, instable housing situation caused by lack of income or lack of affordable housing, instable housing situation caused by discrimination on the housing market. vulnerable groups are: PCSW-clients, migrants, people of foreign origin (racism).

✓ **Are sometimes taken advantage of**

Social workers describe that people sometimes take advantage of the vulnerable situation of hidden homeless.

An elderly man of 84 lived was living with a family. He paid monthly 300 euros for a small room with a camp bed. The family abused him also financially. Due to a physical problem he was admitted to the hospital bringing into light his appalling living situation. We were contacted by the hospital and are now helping to find him a place in a home for elderly. (PCSW worker)

✓ **Are sometimes staying in cheap housing solutions**

PCSW workers illustrate how they and their clients have to be creative in their search for affordable housing solutions. Some have clients who are temporarily staying at camping sites, others have good contacts with local B&B's where people can also rent a room per month. Other solutions are cheap ho(s)tels which will be described further on in this text.

✓ **Are sometimes paying for housing they are not using**

Workers from low threshold organisations describe how sometimes people have their own housing but are temporarily staying with friends because they are too afraid to go home. Reasons can be: conflicts with neighbours, begin sought by drug dealers, having been beaten

A mother bought a house together with her 2 adult daughters, each paying 1/3 of the mortgage. A conflict between the daughters causes one of them to move in with her boyfriend. They have a LAT relationship and he was not too happy with her moving in. He won't allow her to put her domiciliary address at his place. Finding a new place to stay is impossible for her at the moment as she is still paying her monthly 1/3rd of the mortgage. Her sister and mother refuse to buy her out. Leaving very little left of her unemployment money.

up, etc.

✓ **Fear effect on social relationships**

Hidden homelessness has an effect on relationships with children who cannot stay over at the place where they are couch surfing.

What I fear most is alienating from my son. He is 13 years old. Sometimes he stays over. He then sleeps with me in my single bed, a sofa pushed against it. But my host don't like it too much when he stays over, a child makes a lot of noise (Hidden homeless man)

✓ **Wait for social housing**

Some people plan to stay with family/friends until they receive social housing, as renting at the private market is simply not an option.

I did all I could to find a house. But I gave up, it makes you so tired. I had no energy left. The prices in the private sector make you fall on your ass! I want to be able to go to a store and buy food at the end of the month. You also need to be able to come outside. I find that important. Now I am waiting for a social housing. I have been on the waiting list for 4 years. So I think that I will have a house in 4 more years. I already know how much I will have saved by that time. Hopefully my son is not too old then, otherwise my waiting to have him with me was in vain. (Hidden homeless man)

5.1.3 Hidden homeless in the Brussels region

Most research on hidden homeless (Peters 2012; Baptista 2010; Edgar & Doherty 2001, Robinson & Coward 2003, Reeve 2011, Casy, Goudie & Reeve 2008) focus on people living with family/friends due to lack of housing (ETHOS light 6). The Brussels city count however does not share this focus. The Brussels city count collects next to the number of men, women and children in residential services (ETHOS Light 2 & 3), data on the extent of people living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing (ETHOS Light 5). It equally allows addressing the issue of hidden homeless in Brussels in three ways.

Firstly the city count collects information on the number of people in Brussels who are hidden homeless in the extent to which they seek refuge in alternative (illegal)

shelters/accommodations, who occupy dwellings with owner's permission and squats (ETHOS Light 5, Ethos). The results of the street count in 2016 show an increase of persons living in a situation of hidden homelessness: the number of people who are settling down in public space camps, tents or in makeshift shelters strongly increased as compared to previous Brussels city counts (ETHOS Light 1 and 5.9 and 5.11).

Secondly, the city counts includes interviews with users of low threshold day care centers and social restaurants, 2 weeks prior to and the day after the count. These interviews are held mainly to reach persons who are not in contact with (homeless) services. The analysis of these interviews shows that a majority of these people do not live in adequate housing (see figure XXX-2). Only 13,2% and 16% respondents of the interviews in 2016 and 6,5% and 2,3% of the respondents in 2017 are living in indepent housing. They often add complaints about the quality (no bathroom, limited electicity and heating) of their dwellings. Thirdly, by comparing the results of the city count in November 2016 (before the winter plan) and the results obtained 4 months later in March 2017 (during the winter plan) we equally can address the issue of hidden homelessness in Brussels. We actually observe an increase of 708 counted persons between these two points in time. However, it is not clear how to interpret this increase in numbers. Indeed, we find the number of rough sleepers to have remained equal. We wonder where these people came from. This result suggest that these additional people that reach the night shelters during the winter plan where priory staying with friends or family or were living in other situations of hidden homelessness. They only make use of a night shelter when the offer expands with the winter plan. In what follows we elaborate on the different parts of the city-count and focus more in detail on the information it provides concerning the hidden homeless in Brussels.

Street count

November 7th 2016, between 11 pm and 12 pm, 707 rough sleepers were counted in the Brussels Region. An increase of 21% compared to the count in 2014 (295 rough sleepers). The form to be completed at the street count includes a detailed description of the person(s) counted (to avoid double counts) as well as of their location and living situation. This exponential increase did not come as a surprise. Street workers identified on numerous occasions, in the previous months, temporary structures as tents and cabins and camps with sometimes large groups and families who refuse every assistance of, or contact with professionals. These temporary structures are not only hidden in the forest near to Brussels (Zonieënwood/bois de Soignies) and the different parks and vacant lots in the 19 Brussels municipalities. We also observe more and more tents, makeshift shelters and even camps in the central lanes, shopping streets and pedestrian zones. The number of people in these temporary structures is clearly an underestimation. We have no complete data on the hidden cabins and tents and only an estimation of the number of persons sleeping in closed tents and makeshift shelters.

Hidden homelessness in illegal shelters and non-conventional or inadequate housing

La Strada collects data for five types of survival strategies of homeless persons who have no access to the shelters for homelessness or (social) housing (no social rights, no or limited income, no priority, lack of places, ...) or avoid services (non take-up)⁵⁵. Although these 'housing solutions' account for a large proportion of the counted persons (40% in 2016, 31% in 2017 with the winter plan) the number of man, women and children in these situations is

⁵⁵ Observatorium voor Gezondheid en Welzijn van Brussel-Hoofdstad (2017) Inzichten in non take-up van de sociale rechten en in sociale onderbescherming in het Brussels Gewest, Thematisch katern van het Armoederapport van het Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest 2016, Gemeenschappelijke Gemeenschapscommissie: Brussel

still an underestimation. La Strada can count for the various stages of the project on the voluntary cooperation of street workers and social workers of the homeless sectors and other involved sectors and private and public services. We argue that the quality of the data strongly depends on the reliability of the go-betweens and requires a continuous investment in a large network including (ex) homeless persons. We briefly discuss the data we collected by way of go betweens that inform us on the (hidden) homeless in hospitals, illegal shelters, religious communities and occupied dwellings.

		7/8 November 2016	6/7 March 2017
Inadequate Housing	Illegal shelters	288	287
	Religious communities	189	189
	Occupied dwellings with owner's permission	275	395
	Squats	587	385
	Hospital - Emergencies	12	11
Total		1351	1267

Figure 5.1 Types of inadequate housing as found in the street counts of 2016 and 2017

Bron: la Strada

Hospital - Emergencies

Every hospital in Brussels is contacted to transfer the number of persons who spend the night of the street count in the Emergencies by lack of housing rather than a need of medical care. The number of persons counted at Emergencies is limited. It would be interesting to extend the survey at different departments of hospitals and other (medical) institutions (ETHOS Light 4)

Illegal shelters

These shelters are not recognized or funded by one of the Brussels governments and control is limited to fire safety of the building. The low threshold services (charitable, non-profit or commercial initiatives) offer shelter for a short, mid- or long-term at paying residents but no professional support or care. They attract vulnerable persons, often single men (82% in 2016) with an income who are not priority for the official shelters, care avoiders and people released from institutions as prisons, hospitals and psychiatric institutions. Due to the lack of control and professional assistance these vulnerable persons are at risks of (financial) exploitation and abuse.

Religious communities

Religious communities provide sometimes buildings/dwellings which can be considered as an alternative for social housing but without legal tenancy. The residents share often the same religion and participate in the costs (maintenance, energy and water). With 40% women, 42% men and 18% children counted in 2016 we can conclude that mostly families and couples make use of this housing solution. It is important to mention that the number is an underestimation because the survey was limited to the catholic community. Other religious communities take the same initiatives on a small or larger scale. More research is needed to study the role of religious and cultural communities in hidden homelessness.

Occupied dwellings with owner's permission

Since 2013, the Brussels housing policy permits public social housing agencies, administrations and municipalities to accommodate vulnerable households and single persons in public and private buildings which are vacant to be renovated or other unoccupied

housing⁵⁶. These dwellings are defined as unfit for habitation by the regional housing regulations, but can be used as a temporary alternative for the street. An 'agreement for precarious habitation' (overeenkomst voor tijdelijke bewoning) is signed with the owner (public or private). The housing situation stays insecure because the residents have no legal tenancy. The owner or the mayor can close the building at any time. Most agreements are for a short time, a few weeks or months. There are some examples of agreements with public owners with an occupation during several years.

For an increasing number of men (46% in 2016), single or accompanied by their family (30% women and 23% children), often undocumented migrants, these occupations are the only access to housing. It gives them the time to take a breath and not have to look for a place to sleep every night.

Squats

The number of persons counted in 2016, in squats is certainly an underestimation. We depend on street workers, low threshold services and homeless persons to identify squats and liable contact persons to transfer information on the number of men (66%), women (19%) and children (15%) in the different squats during the night of the street count. We have only limited information on small squats. The bigger squats are sometimes good organized with a mixed population of activists, undocumented migrants, drug addicts, ...). They try to convince the owner to sign a agreement. Other squatters do everything not to be detected by the owner. The mayor can clock down a squat at any time to guarantee the security of the squatters or the public order.

Interviews with users of low threshold day care centers and social restaurants

As stated before these interviews are an interesting method to come in contact with persons who experience hidden homeless and learn more about their profile. The 13 participating centers and social restaurants are situated in different Brussels municipalities and reach out to various target groups.

The interviews show clearly that a large group of homeless and poor people experience an instable housing situation. To not worn out their fragile social network they limit their stay with friends and family to a few days or only with extreme weather conditions. They combine often different surviving techniques.

The table below gives an overview of the different living situations of the respondents of the interviews 2 weeks prior and the day after the street counts in 2016 and 2017. The first interviews ask for the whereabouts during the seven previous night, the second where they stayed the night before. Residents can stay in different housing situations during the previous week.

⁵⁶ Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest, Ordonnantie tot wijziging van de ordonnantie van 17 juli 2003 houdende de Brusselse huisvestingscode, 11 juli 2013

		2016		2017	
		Prior N = 172	After N = 152	Prior N = 123	After N = 109
Roofless	train and metro stations	13,8%	9,9%	8,9%	3,1%
	other public spaces	21,8%	19,0%	7,1%	16,9%
	night shelters	20,1%	16,5%	55,4%	56,9%
Houseless	residential centers	0,6%	8,3%	3,6%	5,4%
	institutions	3,4%	1,7%	0,0%	0,0%
	housing led	1,7%	2,5%	2,4%	0,8%
Insecure housing	Stay with friends/family by lack of housing	11,5%	10,7%	6,0%	7,7%
Inadequate housing	squat	8,0%	8,3%	6,5%	1,5%
	cellars, attics, closed garage, shed	2,9%	1,7%	0,0%	1,5%
	offices, industrial building, warehouse	0,6%	0,0%	1,2%	0,8%
	common spaces of apartments/city blocks	0,6%	0,8%	0,0%	0,8%
	cars, tents, makeshift shelters	0,0%	0,8%	0,6%	0,0%
Others		1,7%	3,3%	1,8%	2,3%
Independent housing		13,2%	16,5%	6,5%	2,3%
Total		100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Figure 5.2 Overview of living situations of respondents 2 weeks prior and the day after the street counts of 2016 and 2017

Source: la Strada

Although the results of the interviews or mainly illustrative, some observations can be made. In 2016 more than one in five respondents stay in a situation of hidden homelessness. In 2017 during the winter plan this portion drops to 14,3% prior and 12,3% after the street count. This observation seems to confirm our theory (see also before) that the anonymous, unconditional and free beds of the winter plan attract persons in situations of hidden homelessness in Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia.

Another explanation for the apparent increase of respondents who stayed the previous night(s) in night shelters (including extra beds) is project Winter 86.40057, a winter plan for day care centers. People who sleep in night shelters often spend (part of) the day in one of the participating day care centers.

5.1.4 Homeless in Youth hostels

In our interviews with social workers and the hidden homeless themselves, it became clear that cheap hotels such as hostels are a popular option for people who need a bed. To get an idea about these practices, a more in depth study was carried out in June-July 2017. We started with interviews in the three Leuven hostels (Hostel De Blauwput, The Cube Hostel, Leuven City Hostel). Based on these first talks, an online survey was set up and sent to the 23 Flemish Youth Hostels through Flemish hostelling (vzw Vlaamse Jeugdherbergen). After sending one reminder, answers were received from 21 out of 23 Youth Hostels.



Figure 5.3 Map of Flemish Youth Hostels

Flanders has a diversity of Youth Hostels for discovering nature, cities and the beach. According to their website www.ieuqgtherbergen.be their main target groups are young tourists, families, groups. The hostels have on average 114 beds (ranging from 76 to 210).

Table XII Amount of homeless guests per year in Flemish Youth Hostels. Online survey, 15 answers.

Amount of homeless per year	Amount of hostels
1 person	1 hostel
5 persons	2 hostels
5 to 10 persons	2 hostels
10 persons	6 hostels
20 persons	4 hostels

15 out of 21 Flemish Youth Hostels state they sometimes host homeless persons. The six hostels who never have homeless guests are above all nature hostels. For the only city hostel that never hosts homeless persons this is as a policy. Youth hostel personnel guess they have up to 20 homeless visitors per year. The distribution can be seen in Table XII. The largest cities host the most homeless guests. The amounts are estimations by the hostel personnel. It is necessary to mark here that in our online survey the term 'homeless' (in Dutch 'dakloos') was used. Hence the amounts will refer to people who are 'visibly' homeless, at least to the interpretation of the personnel. We also don't know if we can talk about unique individuals. In our talks we notice that some people travel from hostel to hostel when their maximum term has ended. This is above all the case for city hostels which are easy to reach. Homeless guests are merely single men, 30-50 years.

Most hostels (9/13) state that the amount of homeless has stayed more or less the same during the past years. The winter is the season when most hostels see homeless guests (10/14). Although 4 hostels state that homeless persons stay with them all around the year.

The stays of homeless persons in hostels is above all limited to a few days. Only four hostels state homeless persons stay with them for a period of several weeks. In the answers from the personnel we learn that this is a conscious choice, above all when complaints from other guest arise.

Sometimes people will feel too much at home. They step behind the counter, take glasses. They take over. That happens after a week, 10 days, they feel too much at home. When we comment on this, they become angry and will say to other guests how bad we are here. (Hostel employee).

Five nights is often a maximum as Youth Hostels are often fully booked during weekends. Longer stays are above all possible in more rural hostels where people stay 'a few days until some weeks' or '2 weeks'.

Table XIII Average duration of stay of homeless in Flemish Youth Hostels. Online survey, 14 answers

Average duration	Amount of Youth Hostels
1 night	4
2-5 nights	7
weeks	4

Nine out of 14 youth hostels state to know (welfare) organizations that send homeless persons to their hostel. The most named organizations are PCSW (9/14), CAW (5/14) and police (3/14). Youth hostel personnel regret the limited communication and support received from welfare organizations.

We regret the attitude of CAW and PCSW. They don't always say who they are on the phone or from which organization they are. We from our side, need to know who is staying with us... A hostel offers a place to stay for tourists, families, children and youngsters and is no place to accommodate homeless. Unfortunately, this is not always kept in mind by PCSW workers when looking for the cheapest place to stay... (Hostel employee)

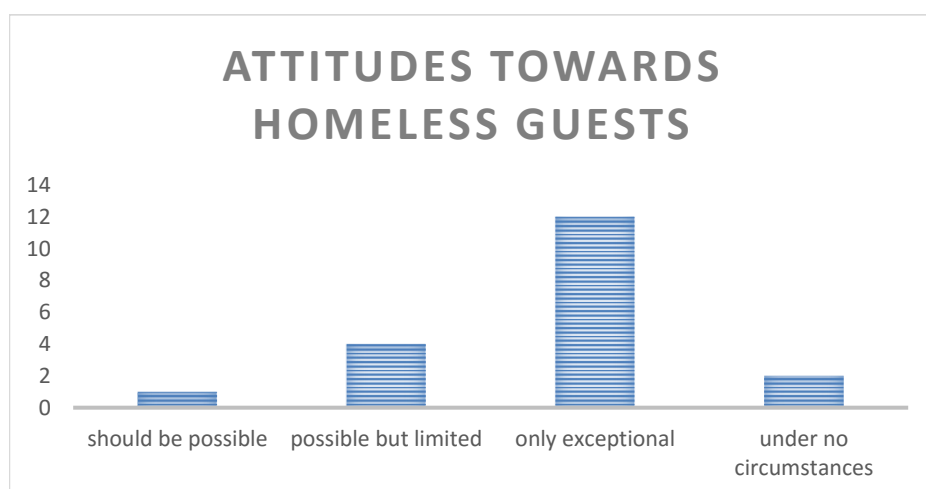


Figure 5.2 Attitudes of Flemish Youth hostel personnel towards homeless guests. Online survey, 19 answers.

Figure 5.2 presents the attitude of youth hostel personnel towards homeless people. In the majority of the Flemish Youth Hostels, acceptance of homeless guests is only exceptional (12/19). Their reluctance is based on their often negative experiences. Although some demonstrate creativity based on humanitarian grounds as well as their business model.

A homeless person wants the cheapest option. What means, sleeping together with other guests. This is often not possible as it often causes troubles. If we know that someone is homeless, we give a single room for a maximum amount of days (Hostel employee)

5.1.5 Conclusion

When someone ends up homeless, individuals as well as professionals show creativity in finding housing solutions. A lot of mutual solidarity is found, people temporarily host others. Even though we find in literature as well as in our experiences that it is often vulnerable people who host other vulnerable people.

Even though the situation of hidden homeless (in particular people living with family/friends) is often regarded as advantageous by professionals, our study above all points out the instability of the lives and relationships of hidden homeless. The effects of this (temporary) solution are unknown and hereby underestimated. More research is needed to shine a light on: the effects of hidden homelessness, their trajectories, hidden homelessness in (larger) cities,

5.2. Rural homelessness

Homelessness is traditionally depicted as an urban phenomenon. Cities is where homeless services and rough sleepers are visible. A visibility that brings about urban homelessness to dominate academic as well as policy agendas on homelessness. Yet evidence is mounting that homelessness can be found also in more rural areas.

What is rural? For reports, publications and statistical analysis, the European Commission uses a typology based on a variation on the OECD typology. This EU typology identifies three degrees of urbanisation:

- Predominantly rural
- Intermediate
- Predominantly urban

To classify communities, this EU typology takes into account the populations density threshold applied to 1 km² grid cells as well as a minimum size threshold of 5000 inhabitants applied to grouped grid cells above the density threshold⁵⁸. Using this typology, predominantly rural communities are those with a population density of < 150 inhabitants/km². As can be seen from Figure 5.3, the predominantly rural areas in Belgium are mostly found in Luxembourg, Namur and Liège. In Flanders, intermediate is the most common degree of urbanisation.

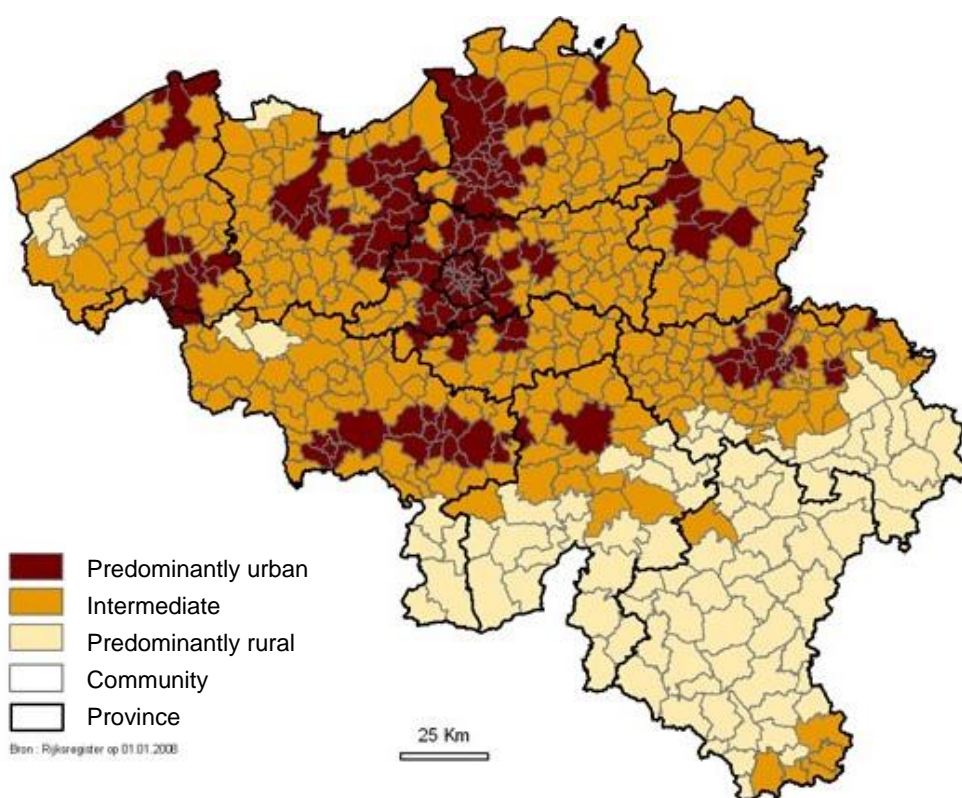


Figure 5.3 Degree of urbanisation in Belgium according to Eurostat concept. Situation on 01.01.2008. Source: http://statbel.fgov.be/nl/statistieken/cijfers/leefmilieu/geo/typologie_gemeenten/

⁵⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Urban-rural_typology#The_new_typology

To define rural homelessness, a diversity of definitions and terminology is used. Some studies report population densities, others use descriptions such as ‘small towns’, ‘villages’, or ‘in the middle of nowhere’.

In this chapter we start with a review on available literature on rural homelessness followed by the methodology and results of an in-depth study carried out in five more rural PCSW in Flanders.

5.2.1 Literature review

In science as well as social services, understanding of rural homelessness is relatively limited compared to urban homelessness. There is little acknowledgement of the size of the group of rural homeless and the situation they are in. Nor do we have knowledge about the link between rural and urban homelessness.

The small body of (academic) literature mainly comes from the United States, England, Australia, and Canada. In the US, link to rural economic crisis (Patton, 1988; A substantial part of the European literature focusses on rural homelessness in **England**. A recent IPPR report describes how in 2015/2016 6,270 families across England’s 91 predominantly rural local authorities were accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need, an average of 1.3 homeless in every 1,000 households (Snelling, 2017). Even though still lower than the 2.79 for every 1,000 in predominantly urban areas, In areas that are “largely rural” there has been a leap of 52%. According to the report, a considerable amount of these rural homeless concerns **hidden homeless**, even though more and more rough sleepers are found in these “mainly rural” areas. From 2010 to 2016, these local authorities reported a 32% rise in rough sleepers (from 191 to 252; Snelling, 2017).

The available studies point to a slightly different profile of rural homeless persons compared to the urban homeless. Rural homeless are found to be **younger**, more highly educated, less disabilities, more likely to be employed or to be currently employed, and more likely to be **women with children** (First, Rife, & Toomey, 1994; Nord & Luloff, 1995).

Reasons for homelessness are similar in rural and urban areas including ending of tenancy, relationship breakdown, family conflict, domestic abuse, losing a source of income and the cyclical nature of mental illness, substance abuse and housing issues (Waegemakers Schiff et al., 2015; Cloke, Milbourne & Widdowfield, 2000; Thrane, Hoyt, Whitbeck & Yoder, 2006). Yet researchers studying rural homelessness point out that housing-related factors are a much more important cause of homelessness in rural context (46% of rural homelessness cases and 28% in urban cases; Cloke et al., 2001). For single people and small households affordable housing is lacking in more rural communities (Snelling 2017; Waegemakers Schiff, Schiff, Turner, & Bernard 2015; Cloke et al., 2001).

Accessing services is more difficult and specialist homeless services are lacking in rural areas. Homelessness is marginalised within the local policy discourses and homelessness is dealt with as a housing issue. Cloke and colleagues (2000) who questioned rural local authorities depict the spatial practices used. A typical practice is the rehousing of homeless households, pushing the location of homelessness support into small towns. Emergency accommodation is provided for in the largest towns of a district. Hereby contribution to the low visibility of rural homelessness.

Research suggests that many cases of rural homelessness go undetected. More than in cities, people perceive stigma due to the close-knit nature of rural communities and the ‘cultures of rurality’ (Cloke, Widdowfield, & Milbourne, 2000). Research from UK also suggests that in rural areas people are more likely to find support with family/friends (Robinson & Coward, 2003). Especially young and single households in rural areas are thought to not approach the local authorities for homeless support (Milbourne & Cloke, 2006).

As such, rural homelessness is said to be **difficult to measure**. Researchers and policy makers sometimes make use of rural poverty and core housing need as proxy indicators.

5.2.2 Exploring rural homelessness

An in-depth exploratory study into PCSW client files was carried out in five PCSW: Diest, Scherpenheuvel-Zichem, Glabbeek, Bekkevoort and Tienen.

Table XIV Population info Diest, Scherpenheuvel-Zichem, Glabbeek, Bekkevoort and Tienen

	Diest	Scherpenheuvel-Zichem	Bekkevoort	Glabbeek	Tienen
Inhabitants on 01.01.17	23.612	22.924	6.134	5.326	34.365
Inhabitants/km ²	395	441	159	195	448
EU classification urbanisation	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate

Source: <http://statbel.fgov.be/>

In each PCSW on a given day, every present social worker was interviewed and asked to go through their active client files. ETHOS Light was presented and for the files where the living situation corresponded to one of the ETHOS Light categories, a few additional variables were recorded.



Figure 5.4 A view on the rural PCSW visited.

In total, 27 PCSW workers were interviewed. In Glabbeek and Bekkevoort, the social workers interviewed were also able to go through the client files or their absent colleagues. In total we went through 953 active client files. Among those, we found 74 homeless clients. This means that in our study in rural PCSW, 1 out of 13 PCSW clients is homeless. The most common named category is ETHOS Light 6: people staying temporarily with family and friends. As can be seen in Table XV.

Table XV Homeless clients according to ETHOS Light amongst active client files in an exploratory study in intermediate rural PCSW.

	Diest	Scherpenheuvel-Zichem	Bekkevoort	Glabbeek	Tienen	Total
Social workers interviewed	7	6	1	2	11	27
Active files (N)	288	188	35	58	384	953
Homeless/N	21/288	16/188	2/35	4/58	31/384	74/953

Table XVI Amount of people living in ETHOS Light categories in an exploratory study in rural PCSW (Diest, Scherpenheuvel-Zichem, Bekkevoort, Glabbeek, Tienen)

ETHOS Light	Amount of active client files
1 People living rough	6
2 People in emergency accommodation	1
3 People living in accommodation for the homeless	9
4 People living in institutions	15
5 People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	5
6 Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	38
Total	74
+ People threatened with Eviction	13

There are more homeless men (52/74) in the client files than women (22/74). Fifteen are 25 or younger (20%). Nineteen of the homeless PCSW clients hold a reference address, three of those are with a private person, sixteen at the PCSW. The income of the homeless persons is varied:

- 28 (additional) integration income
- 15 sickness/invalidity allowance
- 13 unemployment (+ inschakelingspremie)
- 12 no income
- 3 work
- 2 pension
- 1 unknown

The amount of homeless persons in those rural municipalities surmounts the 74 persons just described. We only included the PCSW workers present on the day of our visit. Especially for the larger PCSW of Tienen and Diest, we were not able to interview all the social workers as some were absent or not present due to a meeting or house visit. We did not include asylum seekers living in local reception initiatives provided by PCSW.

Based on our interviews with the hidden homeless and with field workers we identify three groups of homeless persons. A first group are the homeless persons who seek and receive PCSW help. These are the 74 persons identified in the PCSW files. These persons are PCSW clients and can be identified in PCSW registration. The second group are those persons who do contact PCSW when in need of housing but only receive limited help. They often have no other (pressing) question than their housing need. The reason for only receiving limited PCSW help is often related to the restricted housing offer a small PCSW can make. Some have no emergency housing, others have emergency housing but these are full, or housing is available but PCSW prefer to keep this free for 'unpredictable' homelessness (e.g. in case of fire rather than an eviction). Subsequently, help to homeless people in more rural PCSW exists in

referring people to homeless care in larger cities (CAW in Flanders), suggest cheap temporary sleeping places (hostels, B&B's, camping's) or refer to (the waiting list of) social rental agencies. Several social workers state they first advice people to seek shelter in one's own social network. As these help requests are generally not registered, estimating the size of this group is difficult. The third group are the homeless persons not (yet) in contact with PCSW. Our interviews learn that additional thresholds in help seeking can be perceived for people who are staying with family/friends as they might fear (partial) income breakdown for them or their host or the loss of social (rental) housing when identified as 'living together' and 'forming one household'. Also included in this third group are the homeless persons who left their rural reality to find help in a larger city, taking this step themselves or advised by the PCSW.

The visits to (semi) rural PCSW in Flanders and Wallonia show that there are indeed homeless persons fitting ETHOS Light categories all over the territory, even in quite remote rural areas. This is contradictory to the spontaneous view in rural PCSW that homelessness as a mere urban phenomenon. The following specific reasons for homelessness in rural areas are mentioned:

- ✓ There are no studio's
In rural areas almost no studios or small apartments can be found. Leaving no affordable housing for single households. As social rental agencies make use of the existing housing market, the same is true for their housing stock.
- ✓ The housing market is not adapted to changing family composition, eg more single households
- ✓ **ETHOS Light broadens the view** on homelessness
In our contacts, social workers often stated on beforehand not to be in contact with homeless persons. When studying their client files in the light of ETHOS Light, several social workers were surprised by the amount of homeless amongst their clients.
- ✓ More individual reception initiatives for refugees than emergency housing for homeless
All the municipalities visited have housing available for refugees. Even though the occupancy rate is low and many houses are left empty, especially in the rural municipalities. In contrast, emergency housing for homeless is or not available or kept free for cases of 'unpredictable' homelessness such as in case of fire.
- ✓ Few emergency houses
Municipalities or PCSW have emergency houses, but there are issues with their availability when no solution can be found for the families hosted, whose staying may block these houses for longer than planned.
- ✓ Different interpretations in entitlement to a reference addresses
All the persons known by social workers of rural PCSW who hold a reference addresses fit the ETHOS categories, even those with addresses at a private individual. Policy on accepting reference address at the PCSW and municipality vary across the places.
- ✓ Dynamics with other (surrounding) communities
As no homeless services are present in the municipalities visited, PCSW workers state they have to send people to larger cities when in need of housing, for example Leuven. This is done not only for specific homeless services but also in order to for cheap temporary housing solutions such as hostels (see previous part on Youth Hostels in this chapter). Several PCSW workers indicate how people are not keen on moving

(temporarily) to bigger cities. Moving away from family/friends. Even more when having school going children, work.

5.2.3 Conclusion

Homelessness is **not a mere urban** phenomenon. A similar 1 out of 13 homeless PCSW clients is found in urban Tienen as in more rural Glabbeek and Bekkevoort. Further research should be carried out to see what the percentage is in other/larger cities. Rural homelessness should be included in homelessness policies to contribute to the recognition of housing challenges in rural areas and the services supporting them. Our results reconfirm that tackling homelessness should be a part of a wider housing strategy.

5.3. Migration intertwined with homelessness

It seems that the new federal asylum policy can increase homelessness. We list following observations based on our own study and the report of the Brussels city counts (2016-2017, p.91-92):

- More rural PCSW visited in this study all have individual reception initiatives available (even though several places are momentarily empty), but often the decision is made not to provide emergency houses or reserve them for 'unavoidable' homelessness (e.g. in case of fire).
- The term of 2 months given to find housing when a positive decision is received, is considered too short by most social workers even considering the potential prolongation (twice with one month). If the place in the individual reception center is occupied for a longer time, the place is suspended for the remaining time and the subsidy brought back from 47.7 to 15 euros per person per day. Social workers state that when persons are allowed to overstay, PCSW see their income drop. PCSW workers state that as a result, people are forced to move in with friends (ETHOS Light 6), end up on the street (ETHOS Light 1) or settle in non-conventional housing (ETHOS Light 5). They are said to often move to other (bigger) cities to. Not seldom, PCSW evict their refugee tenants when they reach their maximum stay.
- Undocumented households with minor children have a right to accommodation in federal residential centers. As the focus in these centers is often put on the return of the family to their homeland, families refuse to go to these centers or leave and become homeless⁵⁹
- The legislation to prevent marriages and legal cohabitation of convenience can have as a result that women decide to stay in a relationship full of exploitation and abuse by their new husband as they fear to lose their right to a residence permit for them and their children.
- Vulnerable EU-citizens have no access to the Belgian social security nor to the social security system of their land or origin.
- Undocumented migrants are often invisible in counts and registration system. Their social rights are limited to urgent medical aid. They risk to be abused by slum landlords and are forced into illegal employment in order to pay the rent. They often have no legal tenancy and can be evicted at all times.
- Discrimination and racist acts against migrants complicate the access to housing, especially in combination with a precarious economic and social situation.

⁵⁹ PROGRAMMATORISCHE FEDERALE OVERHEIDSDIENST MAATSCHAPPELIJKE INTEGRATIE? ARMOEDEBESTRIJDING EN SOCIALE ECONOMIE, Koninklijk besluit tot bepaling van de voorwaarden en modaliteiten voor het verlenen van materiële hulp aan een minderjarige vreemdeling die met zijn ouders illegaal in het Rijk verblijft, 24 juni 2004

6. BUILDING BLOCKS TO MEASURE HOMELESSNESS

In this chapter we present the potential building blocks useful for monitoring homelessness in Belgium. As not one building block will provide a sufficient view on homelessness, a combination of several building blocks in a strategy will be necessary.

The selection of building blocks is based on the review and reflection of the researchers and field workers on the different possibilities and challenges to measure homelessness. Following selection criteria are used:

- Availability in the three regions.
- Practical use
- ETHOS Light categories measured

We note that for the selection, the cost of development and/or adaptation is not considered.

For each building block, following variables are presented: strengths, weaknesses, ETHOS Light categories measured, source, organizations involved, responsible government, availability of unique client identifier, type of data, necessary adaptations. An overview table is provided at the end of this chapter.

In a next phase, as is described in chapter 7, the building blocks were presented to the MEHOBEL guidance committee and an expert seminar was organized. Based on the information gathered in these two meetings, the finale list of building blocks was selected.

Table XVII *ETHOS Light categories measured by the building blocks*

	ETHOS Light					
	Living rough	In emergency accommodation	In accommodation for the homeless	Leaving an institution	In non-conventional dwellings	With family/friends
Number of persons with a reference address at PCSW	X	X	X	X	X	X
Number of homeless persons with a reference address	X	X	X	X	X	X
Uniform registration of housing situation in integration income forms	X	X	X	X	X	X
Uniform registration of housing situation of all PCSW clients	X	X	X	X	X	X
Registration based on national number in residential centers			X			
Registration based on a unique client identifier in night/winter shelter		X				
Common set of variables in residential centers			X			
Common set of variables in night/winter shelters		X				
EU SILC housing difficulties						
EU SILC housing affordability						
Street count in 5 largest cities	X	X				
PIT count	X	X	X	X	X	X
Panel research	X	X	X			X
Uniform registration of housing situation of institutional care leavers				X		
Capture-recapture	X	X	X	X	X	X

1. Reference address at PCSW	
<i>Number of persons with a reference address at PCSW</i>	
Strengths	Easily available Relatively cheap Allows comparison between municipalities and regions Promote (correct) use of reference address
Weaknesses	Reflects PCSW/municipality policy Does not include homeless persons with a reference addresses with a private person Guidelines concerning granting a reference address are unclear
ETHOS Light	1,2,3,4,5,6
Source	National register (FPS Interior)
Organizations involved	PCSW Municipalities
Government	FPS Interior PPS SI
Unique client identifier	Yes
Type	Population size
Necessary adaptations	Linkage of reference addresses in National Register to PCSW addresses list

2. Homeless persons with a reference address	
<i>Number of homeless persons with a reference address at PCSW or with a private person</i>	
Strengths	Relatively easily available Relatively easy change in coding system Allows comparison between municipalities and regions Promote (correct) use of reference address
Weaknesses	Reflects PCSW/municipality policy Guidelines concerning granting a reference address are unclear
ETHOS Light	1,2,3,4,5,6
Source	National register (FPS Interior)
Organizations involved	National Register Municipalities PCSW
Government	FPS Interior PPS SI
Unique client identifier	Yes
Type	Population size
Necessary adaptations	Add code in National Register 'reason for applying' (cf legislation)

3. Registration of homelessness in NovaPrima forms	
<i>Number of homeless PCSW clients with an integration income</i> <i>Number of homeless PCSW clients with a completing integration income</i> <i>Number of homeless PCSW clients who receive social support</i>	
Strengths	ETHOS Light as a registration tool Relatively easy change in coding system
Weaknesses	Limited to clients with a (completing) integration income or social support (Quid other PCSW clients?) Housing situation is a dynamic variable (updates?)
ETHOS Light	1,2,3,4,5,6
Source	NovaPrima (PPS SI)
Organizations involved	PCSW
Government	PPS SI
Unique client identifier	Yes
Type	Population size Profile Trajectory
Necessary adaptations	Add code in NovaPrima 'Housing situation'

4. Uniform registration of housing situation of all PCSW clients	
<i>Number of homeless PCSW clients</i>	
Strengths	ETHOS Light as a registration tool Includes a broad group of PCSW clients
Weaknesses	Minor adaptation but in many different registration systems Additional registration for practitioners Housing situation is a dynamic variable (updates?)
ETHOS Light	1,2,3,4,5,6
Source	Individual PCSW systems
Organizations involved	PCSW
Government	PPS SI
Unique client identifier	Yes
Type	Population size Profile Trajectory
Necessary adaptations	Adapt registration in all PCSW systems

5. Registration based on national number in residential and ambulant homeless care	
<i>Number of clients in residential homeless centers</i> <i>Number of clients in floating housing support services</i>	
Strengths	No double counting In depth studies possible Allows to measure trajectories and effects of care
Weaknesses	Privacy and ethical issues when combining data Only those persons who use care Should include emergency housing at PCSW, but often not included in registration Different profile characteristics in different regional systems
ETHOS Light	3
Source	Flanders: Regas (CAW) Brussels: CCRS (La Strada) Wallonia : ... (Relais Sociaux/IWEPS ?)
Organizations involved	Flanders: CAW Brussels: CAW, AMA, La Strada Wallonia : Relais Sociaux
Government	Flanders: Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family Brussels: Wallonia:
Unique client identifier	Yes
Type	Population size Profile Trajectory
Necessary adaptations	Study privacy and ethical issues and develop guidelines

6. Registration based on a unique client identifier in night/winter shelters	
<i>Number of clients in night/winter shelters</i>	
Strengths	No double counting
Weaknesses	Privacy and ethical issues when combining data Only those persons who use shelters Can jeopardise low-threshold of services
ETHOS Light	2
Source	Flanders: (VLASTROV) Brussels: Wallonia : ... (Relais Sociaux)
Organizations involved	Flanders: VLASTROV, CAW, PCSW Brussels: CAW, AMA, La Strada Wallonia : Relais Sociaux
Government	Flanders: Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family Brussels: Wallonia:
Unique client identifier	Yes
Type	Population size Profile
Necessary adaptations	Study privacy and ethical issues and develop guidelines Develop systems of unique client identifier

7. Use of common variables in residential and ambulant homeless care	
<i>Number and profile of clients in residential homeless centers</i>	
<i>Number and profile of clients in floating housing support services</i>	
Strengths	Uniform registration in all services Allows comparison between services and regions
Weaknesses	Reaching common variables will be time consuming Does not account for local reality Does not account for history/expenses of organizations Additional registration task for practitioners
ETHOS Light	3
Source	Flanders: Regas (CAW) Brussels: CCRS (La Strada) Wallonia : ... (Relais Sociaux/IWEPS ?)
Organizations involved	Flanders: CAW Brussels: CAW, AMA, La Strada Wallonia : Relais Sociaux
Government	Flanders: Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family Brussels: Wallonia:
Unique client identifier	No
Type	Population size Profile Trajectories
Necessary adaptations	Develop common set of variables

8. Use of common variables in night/winter shelters	
<i>Number and profile of clients in night/winter shelters</i>	
Strengths	Uniform registration in all services Less known group
Weaknesses	Reaching consensus about common variables will be time consuming How to realise the privacy of users? Registration at night shelters can be an additional threshold for users
ETHOS Light	2
Source	Flanders: Regas (CAW) Brussels: CCRS (La Strada) Wallonia : ... (Relais Sociaux/IWEPS ?)
Organizations involved	Flanders: CAW Brussels: CAW, AMA, La Strada Wallonia : Relais Sociaux
Government	Flanders: Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family Brussels: Wallonia:
Unique client identifier	No
Type	Population size Profile Trajectories
Necessary adaptations	Develop common set of variables

9. Street count in 5 largest cities	
<i>Number of persons living on the street</i>	
Strengths	Strong tradition and knowledge development in Brussels Especially needed in those areas with rough sleepers
Weaknesses	Time consuming and complex procedure Depends on the voluntary participation of services and persons Focus on 'population size' in the different categories. How to add 'profile' data?
ETHOS Light	1
Source	/
Organizations involved	Various
Government	?
Unique client identifier	No
Type	Population size (Profile)
Necessary adaptations	Develop a common procedure based on experience in Brussels

10. Point-in-time count	
<i>Number of persons who are homeless according to ETHOS Light</i>	
Strengths	<p>Makes local/regional statistics possible</p> <p>Possible to select and include a variety of local partners and low-threshold services (street work, day centers)</p> <p>Considered useful for local policy</p> <p>Positive experiences in Flanders</p> <p>Possible to include organizations that don't register</p> <p>Part of a war on homelessness</p>
Weaknesses	<p>Someone needs to lead/train/collect/analyse</p> <p>Relation between 'population size' and 'profile': the more questions, the more drop-out</p> <p>How to motivate low-threshold services to take part?</p>
ETHOS Light	1,2,3,4,5,6
Source	Additional data collection
Organizations involved	Various
Government	PPS SI ????
Unique identifier client	Yes
Type	Population size Profile
Necessary adaptations	Design survey Set up survey

11. EU SILC Housing difficulties	
<i>Number of persons having lived with friends/family over past 10 years</i> <i>Number of persons having stayed in emergency or temporary accommodation in past 10 years</i> <i>Number of persons having stayed in a place not intended as a permanent home in past 10 years</i> <i>Number of persons having staying in a dwelling with non-conventional building, temporary or semi-permanent structure in past 10 years</i> <i>Number of persons who slept rough in past 10 years</i>	
Strengths	Allows comparability over time Comparability other EU countries
Weaknesses	Underrepresentation of vulnerable people in EU SILC Currently only in the 2018 wave
ETHOS Light	1,2,3,5,6
Source	EU SILC
Organizations involved	/
Government	FPS Economy
Unique client identifier	No
Type	Population size
Necessary adaptations	No



12. EU SILC Housing affordability	
<i>Number of persons who spend more than 40% of their income on housing costs</i>	
Strengths	Easily available Yearly numbers based on the EU SILC wave Brings into light poverty as wan important risk factor of homelessness
Weaknesses	Underrepresentation of vulnerable people in EU SILC
ETHOS Light	No
Source	EU SILC
Organizations involved	/
Government	FPS Economy
Unique client identifier	No
Type	Population size Profile
Necessary adaptations	No

13. Panel research	
Strengths	Trajectories considered useful by fieldworkers In depth study possible
Weaknesses	Time consuming
ETHOS Light	1,2,3,4,5,6
Source	Not specified
Organizations involved	Not specified
Government	Not specified
Unique client identifier	No
Type	Trajectory
Necessary adaptations	Design research

14. Capture recapture	
<i>Estimation of the amount of homeless persons</i>	
Strengths	No additional efforts for practitioners Easy to carry out count once necessary adaptations are done
Weaknesses	An estimation Reliability highly depends on strict assumptions
ETHOS Light	1,2,3,4,5,6
Source	Administrative databases (federal for national estimations)
Organizations involved	Research institute Scientific institute for Public Health (WIV/ISP)
Government	Federal: Public Planning Service Social Integration (PPS SI) National Register
Unique client identifier	Yes
Type	Number Profile
Necessary adaptations	Make necessary adaptations to the proposed administrative databases

15. Uniform registration of housing situation of institutional care leavers	
<i>Number of persons who stay longer in an institution because they have no housing solution</i>	
Strengths	Important risk group Indicator brings into light the functioning of these institutions and the effectiveness of their after care
Weaknesses	Different systems need different changes Impact on practitioners
ETHOS Light	4
Source	MPD Sidis-Suite
Organizations involved	Prisons Mental Health facilities
Government	FPS Public Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment DG Healthcare FPS Justice
Unique client identifier	Yes
Type	Population size Profile
Necessary adaptations	Develop common set of variables Study privacy and ethical issues and develop guidelines

6.1. Overview table

	Strength 	Weakness 	Unique client identifier	Type	Source	Necessary adaptations/actions	ETHOS Light
Number of persons with a reference address at PCSW	<p>Easily available</p> <p>Relatively cheap</p> <p>Allows comparison between municipalities and regions</p> <p>Promote (correct) use of reference address</p>	<p>Reflects PCSW/municipality policy</p> <p>Does not include homeless persons with a reference addresses with a private person</p> <p>Unclear guidelines concerning granting a reference address</p>	Yes	<p>Population size</p> <p>Profile trajectory</p>	National register	Linkage to PCSW addresses	1,2,3,4,5,6
Number of homeless persons with a reference address	<p>Relatively easily available</p> <p>Relatively simple change in coding system</p> <p>Allows comparison between municipalities and regions</p>	<p>Reflects PCSW/municipality policy</p> <p>Unclear guidelines concerning granting a reference address</p>	Yes		National register	Add code in National register 'reason for applying' (cf legislation)	1,2,3,4,5,6

	Promote (correct) use of reference address						
Uniform registration of housing situation in NovaPrima forms	ETHOS light as registration tool Relatively simple change in coding system	Only for those with an integration income (Quid other PCSW-clients?) Housing situation is a dynamic characteristic- updates?	Yes	Population size Profile trajectory	NovaPrima	Add code in NovaPrima 'Housing situation'	1,2,3,4,5, 6
Uniform registration of housing situation of all PCSW-clients	ETHOS light as registration tool Includes a broad group of PCSW clients	Small adaptation but in many different registration systems Additional registration by practitioners Housing situation is a dynamic characteristic- updates?	Yes	Population size Profile trajectory	Individual PCSW systems	Adapt registration in all PCSW systems	1,2,3,4,5, 6
Registration based on national number in residential centres and different types of 'floating housing support services'	No double counting In depth research possible	Privacy and ethical issues when combining data Only those persons who use care Should include emergency housing at PCSW, but often not included in registration Different profile	Yes	Population size Profile trajectory	Various sectoral systems	Study privacy and ethical issues and develop guidelines	3

		characteristics in different regional systems					
Registration based on a unique client identifier in night/winter shelters	No double counting	Privacy and ethical issues when combining data Can jeopardise low threshold of services	Yes	Exent Profile	Various sectoral systems	Study privacy and ethical issues and develop guidelines Develop systems of unique client identifier	2
Common set of variables in residential centres and different types of floating housing support services	Uniform registration in all services	Reaching common variables will be time consuming Does not account for local reality Does not account for history/expenses of organizations Additional registration tasks for practitioners	No	Population size Profile trajectory	Various sectoral systems	Develop common set of variables	3
Common set of variables in night / winter shelters	Uniform registration Less known group of	Reaching consensus about common variables can be time consuming How to realise the privacy	No		Various sectoral systems	Develop common set of variables	2

		of users? Registration at night shelters could be an additional threshold for users					
Street count in 5 largest cities	Strong tradition and knowledge development in Brussels. Especially needed in those areas with rough sleepers	Time consuming and complex procedure Depends on the voluntary participation of services and persons Focus on 'population size' in the different categories. How to add 'profile' data?	No	Population size (profile)	/	Develop a common procedure based on experience in Brussels	1
EU SILC: housing difficulties	Comparability over time Comparability other EU countries	Underrepresentation of vulnerable people in EU SILC Currently only in the 2018 wave	No	Population size	EU SILC database	No	1,2,3,5,6
EU SILC: housing affordability: more than 40 % of income for housing	Easily available Yearly numbers based on the EU SILC wave	Underrepresentation of vulnerable people in EU SILC	No	Population size profile	EU SILC database	No	No ETHOS

costs	Brings into light poverty as an important risk factor of homelessness						
Point-in-Time count	<p>Makes local/regional statistics possible</p> <p>Possible to select and include a variety of local partners and low threshold services (street work, day centres)</p> <p>Considered useful for local policy</p> <p>Positive experiences in Flanders</p> <p>Possible to include organizations that don't register</p>	<p>Someone needs to lead/train/collect/analyse</p> <p>Relation between 'population size' and 'profile': the more questions, the more drop-out</p> <p>How to motivate low threshold services to take part?</p>	Yes	Population size profile	Additional data collection	<p>Design the survey</p> <p>Design the set up</p>	1,2,3,4,5,6
Panel research	<p>Trajectories considered useful by field workers</p> <p>In depth research</p>	Time consuming	No	Trajectory	Additional data collection	Design research	1,2,3,4,5,6

Uniform registration of housing situation of institutional care leavers	<p>Important risk group</p> <p>Uniform registration of housing situation at release</p> <p>Indicator brings into light the functioning of these institution and the effectiveness of their after care</p>	<p>Different systems need different changes</p> <p>Impact on practitioners</p>	Yes		MPD Sidis-suite		4
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7. FROM BUILDING BLOCKS TO STRATEGY

The validation of the building blocks took place in two steps. A first step was the guidance committee of September 28th 2017 where the building blocks were presented and discussed. The second step was the organisation of a stakeholder seminar on December 7th 2017 at the POD MI. For this purpose, 29 participants came together from the three regions. Policy makers, field workers, as well as target group representatives were present on this half-day seminar. The table with building blocks was circulated on beforehand. On the day of the seminar, the table was presented and discussed in two discussion groups in each language. Simultaneous interpretation was provided for the first and last part of the seminar where the project and conclusions of the work groups were presented.

In this chapter we start by providing some general remarks, followed by specific points of attention per building block as formulated by the different stakeholders. The end of this chapter is reserved for the guiding principles and the fourfold monitoring strategy.

7.1. General remarks from the stakeholders

Provide a link to homelessness/poverty action plans

The homelessness monitoring strategy has to be linked with goals/vision of the action plans against homelessness/poverty: in particular, the Cooperation agreement on homelessness between the federal state, regions and communities, and the action plans to reduce poverty available in all three regions. For Flanders, a link should be provided with the first Flemish Global Homelessness action plan for 2017-2019, for the Brussels Region with the policy paper on assistance to homeless people of October 22th 2015.

The outcome of Mehobel must be more than a recommendation of instruments and methods. It is important that there is a follow up on the application in practice and an evaluation of the methods and results.

It is important to raise public awareness that homelessness is a structural problem related to poverty and to influence politicians to find solutions rather than managing the problem.

Set up clear goals

Stakeholders state that the goals of the different monitoring methods should be clear. What do we want to measure and why? Some of the building blocks (eg the reference address) reflect merely local policy actions and practices of PCSW workers. Collecting this kind of data will reflect local policy more than the exact number of homeless. Motivating field workers to practice the law can be a different goal for certain building blocks.

Combine a pragmatic with a long-term approach

Stakeholders find it necessary that a monitoring strategy is pragmatic while also reflecting a long term action plan. A pragmatic approach is one that starts from the development of building blocks for which only minor adaptations are needed, and is thus likely to be actually implemented within a foreseeable future. This approach is considered necessary to be able to move forward, so that it will not take years until the first data on homelessness are available in Belgium. Meanwhile it is important to simultaneously start the process of developing more advanced measuring methods that will provide solid future data, and provide for improvement of the methods over time, when bias are identified.

Break free from ‘emergency’

Stakeholders find it important to break free from ‘urgent’ help to homeless (eg the organisation of winter shelters and emergency help). All agree that homelessness is a lot more diverse and hidden than the public eye can see. Therefore a monitoring strategy should not only focus on ETHOS Light categories 1 and 2.

Make sure not to exclude any subgroup, including attention for undocumented migrants

Stakeholders note that a non-negligible part of the emergency care users are undocumented migrants who receive assistance to address their direct needs (often limited to humanitarian aid). An additional number of people make no or only limited use of services, not even of low threshold services such as day care centers and night shelters. This is partly a result of the organisation of homeless care as well as due to their (negative) experiences. A monitoring strategy has to make sure that no kind of homelessness is left beyond the scope, and this encompasses specific social groups (migrants), specific living conditions (hidden homeless) and all geographic areas (territorial coverage).

Focus on the total amount, profile characteristics and trajectories

The participants stress to collect data on the extent of homeless (how many people are homeless), on their profile characteristics (who is homeless) and trajectories (how long are persons homeless)

When collecting numbers on homelessness it needs to be clear if we are talking about homeless in contact with homeless services and those who are not in contact with services.

In data collection it is important to strike a balance between ‘need to know’ and ‘nice to know’. An example given by participants is the independence matrix (Zelfredzaamheidsmatrix) to measure the self-sufficiency of homeless persons on various life domains (such as income, social participation, work,...), considered useful by some and full of redundant information by others.

It is important to be aware that collected data always give a snapshot of the living situation. The mobility of the homeless persons between services, living situations and places is not always their own choice. However, following and reconstructing trajectories based on data collection is not easy.

Address the responsible government for each building block

Different levels of government are responsible for different building blocks. Some building blocks are the responsibility of the federal government, for others the different local governments should be addressed. Linked to the Cooperation agreement of 2014, it should be clear who has to take the lead in developing next steps. For this, concrete proposals should be formulated within the competence of each political level so that measures can be taken at the level where they are the most efficient. The inter-ministerial Conference on poverty, housing and homelessness (planned in March 2019) can be an important instrument for doing so.

It is important to point out to politicians that in order to monitor homelessness effectively, continuous investment is needed.

Service use versus thresholds towards help

The majority of the building blocks presented are focussed on service use. Yet stakeholders point out that this tells very little about the actual requests for help. Extra indicators should be developed to bring this broader picture into light such as: applications for support, refusals and waiting lists. However, participants insist that in no way the steps implemented for a monitoring strategy can have as an effect the raise of the service access threshold.

In addition, information should be collected on those who make no use of services, but who are in contact for example with street workers. It must be kept in mind, however, that street work is mostly focussed on (larger) cities, leaving blind spots elsewhere.

Narratives should document numbers

Even though stakeholders see the advantage of numbers, likely to appeal to policy makers, some suggest to add a qualitative component to the presented building blocks: in addition to figures, research should enable field workers to interpret and to document the numbers, and to provide stories behind the data.

Transparency and involvement in data collection

When it comes to data collection, participants want transparency. Their involvement is useful and important in the different phases of the monitoring strategy.

Guarantees on use of data

Stakeholders insist on protecting adequately the users' interests when collecting data and working with and using this data. Protecting privacy through anonymization is a need, and the way confidentiality is managed in the Urgent Medical Aid (AMU) may give some inspiration. If head counts are to be organized, the deontology should be guaranteed by an independent operator entrusted to coordinate the task.

7.2. Points of attention for each building block

7.2.1 Reference addresses

It is clear for participants that the legislation on the reference address is unclear and confusing. Can it be considered a right or is it part of social care?

Some participants find the number of reference addresses unimportant in the light of the Flemish Action plan against homelessness.

According to some participants the goal of measuring the number of reference addresses is not clear. Is this building block meant to measure homelessness or to motivate local governments to use the reference addresses correctly?

An important disadvantage of this building block is that the number of reference addresses only gives an estimate of the number of attributed reference addresses but underestimates the number of applications. It is proposed that registration of refusal of reference addresses should be compulsory. A systematic consultation mechanism should be created between the federal government and municipalities to negotiate solutions for any application that is rejected by municipal authorities.

On the other hand, participants reckon that despite its limitations, the use of reference address is a quite feasible method, and is quite little work intensive. Since its use for monitoring could also help enforcing a better use of it (and thus better service to the homeless), its political positive externalities make it a thinkable building block as long as the limitations are kept in mind.

7.2.2 Uniform registration in NovaPrima forms

The biggest disadvantage of this building block is that it only brings into light a part of the homeless abaseline measurement in Flanders as well as in our own small study in more rural PCSW. In larger cities, the percentage of clients corresponding to one of the ETHOS categories is said to be larger.

Some suggest to include the urgent medical help for illegal migrants, available in MediPrima. However, even though we can assume the difficult financial situation of these PCSW clients, little is known about the proportion of homeless amongst them.

To make the reality visible, some stakeholders suggest to include data on the living situation (friends/family) in other administrative databases such as the National Employment Office (RVA/ONEM) or in the database of Health Insurers.

7.2.3 Uniform registration of housing situation of all PCSW clients

This building block is considered valuable by many stakeholders as it allows for the inclusion of all homeless PCSW clients, even though this is limited to those who applied for and received PCSW help.

In addition, stakeholders find it important to encourage PCSW to register all applications, especially from homeless persons. A proposal in the discussion groups was to provide financial support to PCSW per homeless person helped (cfr the 25 euro POD MI support per housing guaranty granted). This could motivate the PCSW to register applications of new homeless clients and allocate time to help them.

Some stakeholders doubt that PCSW will comprehensively implement the registration guidelines, same as they don't grant the reference addresses uniformly. On the other hand, PCSW are supposed to be key actors in the cooperation agreements, so the requirement for registering housing situations could find a proper framework.

7.2.4 Registration based on national number in residential centers

Registration based on national number is considered useful to monitor homelessness. The main advantage formulated by several stakeholders is that it facilitates the follow-up of clients, bringing into light their trajectories. Nowadays, field workers too often have to appear as fire workers, putting out fire after fire and not being able to follow-up on clients. Yet others find that for field workers, trajectories of homeless persons are generally known. For them, being able to monitor homeless persons has little additional value.

Even though it is considered a useful building block, stakeholders warn against abuse of the national number. Giving consent to a welfare organization to use the national number is not the same as consenting for this number to be used for other purposes such as scientific research.

In Flemish CAW, from January 2018 on, registration based on national number will be implemented in residential centers. Stakeholders remark that this will not be compulsory for CAW crisis centers.

We need to be aware of the coverage of local homeless services. In some areas, homeless services will cover the landscape quite well, in other regions homeless services will be mostly present in larger cities. This presence of services will of course be reflected in statistics on service use.

7.2.5 Registration based on a unique client identifier in night/winter shelters

The main concern of stakeholders is not to hamper the accessibility of low-threshold services.

7.2.6 Common set of variables in residential centers

Experience in Wallonia and Brussels show that harmonizing registration systems can be time consuming. Yet in the talks with stakeholders we hear that this is no good reason to fear starting actions concerning this building block.

7.2.7 Point-in-time count

Several stakeholders see the PIT count as the most interesting method to monitor homelessness in Belgium. Not only can this method include all 6 ETHOS Light categories but it gives the possibility to include a variety of services for the homeless. Additionally, this building block has the potential to mobilize people, to feature in a **"War on homelessness"** and to raise awareness. As described before in this chapter, this means linking the monitoring strategy to homelessness/poverty action plans.

Contrary to the methods that focus on existing registration systems, the PIT count allows to include a variety of organizations that don't hold an own (elaborate) registration system. Including rough sleepers (and thus a street count) is considered useful mostly for Brussels but less for the other two regions. According to some stakeholders, focussing too much on this target group might create a stigmatising image of homelessness. Stakeholders emphasise that the broader picture and hidden homelessness are not to be forgotten.

The PIT count has to be thought through. Who will provide funding? Who will coordinate the count? And what is needed for local governments and local organizations to take part?

Even though there is enthusiasm amongst the stakeholders for a PIT count, some argue that a PIT count is no more than a snapshot, a reflection of a certain situation on a given day, reflecting the time of the year, local policy etc. It is thus not sufficient for a monitoring strategy, where data on trajectories is most useful for the evaluation and improvement of care provided.

In Flanders, some stakeholders suggest that the 11 regional networks can play a role in a PIT count. Others argue that a count should be organized by an independent institute, to avoid political interference.

7.3. Proposal for a Belgian strategy

Based on the proposals informed by this study and the feedback of the participants in the stakeholder meeting, this study proposes a set of guiding principles and a threefold strategy to monitor homelessness in Belgium.

7.3.1 Guiding principles

The Belgian strategy to monitor homelessness

...is a national plan

The aim of the monitoring strategy is to provide data on homelessness on a national level.

...has clear goals

The (political) goals of collecting data have to be made explicit and communicated to all relevant stakeholders.

...is part of the national and regional action plans to reduce poverty and fight homelessness

The monitoring strategy has to be linked to national and regional action plans to combat poverty and homelessness, and to be explicit on which government is responsible for what kind of data collection, as stated in the intergovernmental cooperation agreement. In other words, the data collection needs to be part of national and regional action plan to reduce poverty and to fight homelessness. The intergovernmental cooperation agreement emphasises the need for data collection, states clear goals to diminish homelessness, but needs to be translated into a concrete action plan to implement the goals and to roll out the monitoring strategy. Since data collection requires additional efforts by practitioners, services and other actors, clear policy goals concerning homelessness will motivate them to do the extra work.

...shows clear engagement from policy makers

Different government levels are responsible for different building blocks. Some building blocks are the responsibility of the federal government, for others the different local governments should be addressed. Linked to the Cooperation agreement of 2014, it should be clear who has to take the lead in developing next steps.

...uses ETHOS as a common definition of homelessness

As the European typology shows, a broad conceptualisation of homelessness is needed to grasp all those living situations which are characterised as housing instability. This implies a comprehensive strategy consisting of different methods to cover all living situations.

Data collection necessitates collaboration with different types of services. La Strada in Brussels has developed a convincing methodology to count non-service users, but this method can only be effective with the collaboration of services and volunteers. To be able to include vulnerable groups in the count, a cooperation is needed with all organisations working with these persons.

Specific attention needs to be focused on hidden homelessness: (1) staying temporarily with friend or family (because of no other housing solution) or (2) staying in inadequate housing (car, garage, squat). Using the ETHOS and ETHOS Light framework in defining homelessness will allow the inclusion of these vulnerable people in administrative databases as well as in additional data collection.

...is based on shared ownership and shared responsibility

Different stakeholders such as field workers and poverty organizations are to be involved in every step of the monitoring strategy from the design of the used methods to the discussion of first results so that they share ownership and responsibility of the collected data.

...aims to create a win-win situation

The data collected in a monitoring strategy has to be useful for field workers so that it can help them in their work.

...avoids negative impact on homeless persons

A negative impact of data collection on the lives of homeless persons has to be avoided at all costs. Data collection should not (negatively) impact on contact with services nor the income situation of homeless persons and those close to them (for example a host whenever someone is temporarily staying with family/friends).

Strict procedures need to be developed to prevent unnecessary intrusiveness into the personal sphere.

...Is based on a mixed method approach

There is a broad consensus to gather information concerning the numbers, the profiles and the trajectories of homeless persons. However, different strategies are needed to implement these three types of data collection. Concerning an additional (point in time) count, the stronger the focus on profile, the higher the risk that homeless persons and services will want to avoid the additional data collection.

As data collection on trajectories is the most difficult, this can be a topic of specific research projects. For this purpose, the Crossroads Bank for Social Security is a useful source of information, even though only a part of the homeless persons can be identified (eg persons with a reference address or groups of service users).

More sophisticated data collection is necessary to grasp the dynamics of homelessness. The use of a unique client identifier (such as the national number) makes it a lot easier to study this, but it can be an additional threshold for service use.

...has a focus on prevention

Setting up strategies aimed at preventing homelessness should always be taking into consideration in a monitoring strategy.

...includes narratives

A qualitative component is a crucial part of a monitoring strategy to give field workers as well as homeless persons the possibility to interpret and document the data collected. For this purpose, innovative as well as visual methods should be used.

...gives feedback

Feedback on the collected data should be provided to all participants involved in the collection. Not only on federal and regional level but also feedback on local level in a way that the data can be used by local services and policy makers.

...is coordinated

Data collection should be the responsibility of a non-governmental research institute, so that political intervention is minimised and data collection is strongly protected. This research-oriented institute needs strong links with services and practitioners and building trust relations with them is a necessary task. The interpretation of the numbers has to be an interactive process in which all relevant stakeholders have a voice.

7.3.2 The strategy

Since the various types of data collection in the three regions are elaborated but less streamlined, we have to find a balance between quick wins (pragmatic use of and realising small changes to current data collection) on the one hand and a coordinated, valid and reliable approach on the long term bringing into light the different types and externalisations of homelessness. Quick wins are necessary to have enough critical mass to monitor homelessness, but since the current data collection strategies in the three regions are less coordinated, a more long-term streamlining strategy is necessary. This paragraph defines the definitive building blocks of a Belgian monitoring strategy. The different building blocks can't be disconnected, but have to be realised simultaneously, since homelessness is a complex phenomenon and different methodologies bring into light different aspects of this phenomenon.

Organise a national point-in-time count

To make quick wins possible, we recommend to organise a national count, based on the international examples. This count consists of different modules. In the cooperation agreement on homelessness, the interfederal Combat poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service has the explicit role as a data collection point. They can fulfil this role in cooperation with one or more independent research institutes for the coordination of the count and for the analysis of the data. It is crucial to invest in structural cooperation relations with all stakeholders. Specific procedures to protect the privacy of the homeless need to be developed. Ideally, the

count is biannual or quadrennial so that it can be synchronised with existing counts such as the biannual Brussels street count.

When designing the point-in-time count is it crucial to keep in mind the tension between extent (number of homeless) and profile (who are the homeless). Profile information is crucial for the development of targeted policies. Yet a possible disadvantage of this approach is the dropout of homeless persons and services. The more questions are asked, the more work needs to be done by the services, and the less persons take part in a survey.

A minimum approach is to focus solely on the services for homeless (residential homeless services and shelters) and collect solely the number of users on a specific day. Yet to establish a more complete picture of homelessness, an ambitious approach includes collecting numbers on the users of low-threshold services and rough sleepers. The method used should be tailored to the services. International examples show that it takes time to raise awareness and include organisations in the count. For practical reasons, it can be decided to start with a representative sample of services. Not all types of data collection have to be carried out in every point-in-time count. It can be decided to carry out a specific, more extensive approach less frequently.

The collection of profile data on homelessness needs to be based on the MPHASIS 2009 guidelines. This shortlist of profile data includes the following core variables: ages, gender, nationality, country of birth, household structure, previous accommodation, duration of homelessness, and reason of last period of homelessness. A 2 page questionnaire is filled in by employees from different services – if possible, together with the homeless person. This more elaborate approach implies more workload for workers, but makes it possible to answer more specific questions.

When?

One day before/during winter

How?

For residential homeless services, emergency shelters, PCSW and low-threshold services, a 2 page questionnaire provided by researchers, based on national (baseline measurement, La Strada count, IWEPS exercise) and international experience (MPHASIS 2009).

An additional rough sleeper count is useful in large cities only, on one day during the point-in-time count. Depending on the size of the city, this can be done by interviewing street workers and low-threshold services or by organizing a street count with workers and volunteers (See Brussels example). Rough sleeper counts should take place in the late evening and a short time interval avoids double counting.

A personal identifier should be used based on name and date of birth.

Who?

Questionnaires are to be filled in by social workers. They should decide whether they complete the questionnaires with or without the help of their clients.

Coordination?

The interfederal Combat poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service in cooperation with one or more independent research institutes.

Services for homeless

Count or survey	CAW, RS, PCSW emergency housing, AMA
All services , all interested, or a selected sample	
Qualitative data collection	

Services in contact with homeless

Count or survey	PCSW, day centers, social restaurants,
All services, all interested, or a sample	targeted medical services
Qualitative data collection	

Rough sleepers

Count users low-threshold services, count contacts street workers, **street count**
Brussels, **big 5**, centre cities

Institutions

Count or survey	Psychiatric hospital, hospital, prison
All services or a sample	

Provide yearly statistics on reference addresses

At the moment, the only available data are the number of reference addresses for homeless persons at PCSW. For this purpose, the data from the National Register has to be manually linked to PCSW addresses, an exercise that has been carried out before by the FPS SI. These numbers are easily available.

Meanwhile first steps should be taken to enhance registration of the reference addresses and add the reason for application in the National Register. Based on this small additional registration it should be possible to distinguish between reference addresses of homeless persons at PCSW and those registered with a private person.

Four types of results can be delivered: (1) total amount of persons with a reference address at one moment, (2) yearly prevalence numbers, (3) duration of this status and (4) trajectories based on the information in the CBSS.

A limitation of these indicators is that they merely reflect local policies. As was already shown by the Interfederal poverty report 2016-2017, the granting of the reference address is problematic, since the conditionality of this right is contested at the local level. To enhance the validity of these indicators, a renewed 'circular letter' is necessary to clarify the regulation of these rights. In addition, the refusal of a reference address also needs to be registered in order to obtain a more valid indicator.

Integrate ETHOS Light in registration systems

ETHOS Light has proved a useful tool in describing the living situation of homeless clients. To be able to produce comparable data in and across services, ETHOS Light should be the main framework to define the living situation of homeless clients. ETHOS Light is not only useful to describe prior living situations of clients in shelters or in residential centers, it is also helpful to identify homeless persons in more general social services such as PCSW.

In addition, ETHOS Light can become be the guiding framework for the registration of living situation in neighboring policy domains such as the National institute for health and disability insurance (RIZIV/INAMI) and the national employment office (RVA/ONEM).

Provide yearly numbers based on the EU SILC housing difficulties

The new EU SILC housing instability module for 2018 will provide a first view on the prevalence of housing difficulties and homelessness in Belgium. Collecting these numbers yearly will allow comparability over time as well as with other European countries. We recommend that the housing difficulties module of EU SILC is integrated in the regular SILC questionnaire.

Provide yearly numbers based on EU SILC housing affordability

Housing affordability data are easily available and provide crucial information on the number of persons who struggle to make ends meet. It is a crucial indicator when aiming at preventing homelessness. This indicator can be measured based on the EU SILC. At the European level, the norm of 40% of the equivalised disposable income is used to measure housing affordability.

The SILC-CUT experience has provided useful insights into on the relative severity as well as some key dimensions of poverty among this hidden high-risk group, comparable with the Belgian population as a whole and with the population at risk of poverty in particular. The experience has demonstrated the feasibility of such satellite surveys, using simplified, multilingual and more flexible questionnaires. We would, therefore, recommend a systematic replication at regular time intervals – for example, every fourth year.

Provide yearly numbers on judicial evictions

Preventing homelessness is a national and European goal. In the near future, the family courts will be able to provide data on the number of judicial evictions (ETHOS 9). As these data only provide a limited view on evictions, disregarding the non-judicial evictions and inhabitation declarations, they are easily available and need no additional effort to be collected.

Provide yearly numbers of persons on the waiting lists of social housing

The number of persons on a social housing waiting list is a good indicator of the number of vulnerable people and the affordability of housing. As it is possible to inscribe for several waiting lists, double counting is unavoidable when putting the lists together. At the moment only Brussels has a common waiting list for their region. In Flanders, a uniform waiting list of the social rental agencies, consisting of information on the housing need, is available. For this, it is possible to pursue the work already started by the intergovernmental Combat poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service in their biannual report 2016-2017.

Prepare datasets for ‘capture – recapture estimation’

Three potential administrative sources have been identified that can be combined to produce overall yearly estimates of the number of homeless persons at low cost: the reference addresses, NovaPrima and the Treatment Demand Indicator dataset. At present, each of these sources involves important flaws that prevent matching, but these flaws can be remedied by including a ‘state’ variable describing the housing situation of users according to the ETHOS (Light) definition – as well as dates of transition into and out of homelessness. For a detailed discussion of the methodological issues, see Schepers & Nicaise (2018).

Repeat SILC CUT at regular time intervals

SILC-CUT was executed in 2010 as an EU SILC ‘satellite survey’ with focus on specific excluded groups in Belgium, amongst others homeless persons. The study resulted in hard data and additional information. This is useful for comparability between groups, with the rest of the population and at EU level. As this specific survey is a demanding undertaking, it is advised to repeat this only at regular time intervals.

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Steunpunt Mens en Samenleving
 Steunpunt armoedebestrijding
 Netwerk tegen armoede
 Netwerk tegen armoede
 Front Commun SDF
 Relais Social Charleroi
 Relais Social Charleroi
 VVSG
 Observatorium voor Gezondheid en Welzijn Brussel
 Iweps
 FEANTSA
 POD MI
 SPP IS
 Departement WVG
 Departement WVG
 Statistics Belgium
 SPW Wallonie
 SPW Wallonie
 FOD Economie statistiek
 Belspo
 Belspo
 LUCAS
 LUCAS
 HIVA
 HIVA
 HIVA
 HIVA
 ULG
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