

MEASURING HOMELESSNESS IN BELGIUM

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FINAL REPORT

SUMMARY

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Promotors

Prof. dr. Ides Nicaise (HIVA KU Leuven)
Prof. dr. Tine Van Regenmortel (HIVA KU Leuven)
Prof. dr. Marc Jacquemain (Ulg)
Prof.dr. Koen Hermans (LUCAS KU Leuven)

Authors

Evelien Demaerschalk (LUCAS KU Leuven)
Patrick Italiano (ULg)
Nicole Mondelaers (La Strada)
Katrien Steenssens (HIVA KU Leuven)
Wouter Schepers (HIVA KU Leuven)
Tuba Bircan (HIVA KU Leuven)

SUMMARY

Reliable data on the number and profile of the homeless is a crucial part of a national homelessness action plan. Numbers can help prioritize and formulate specific initiatives to fight homelessness and monitor and evaluate their efficacy. This project aims to develop a Belgian monitoring strategy. The study is based on an analysis of good international examples, an exploration of the possibilities of administrative data bases and existing registration systems and interviews with data experts and field workers from the three regions. The results is an identification of necessary principles and concrete methods contained in a strategy to monitor homelessness in Belgium. In addition, this research project aims to contribute at the growing evidence base on measuring and monitoring hidden and rural homelessness and the possibilities and limitations of the capture-recapture method.

1. Definitions and methods used

We make use of ETHOS, the European Typology of Homelessness and housing exclusion. As stated by the Agreement of Cooperation between the Federal State, the Communities and the Regions on May 12th 2014, ETHOS is also the guiding framework in Belgium to conceptualise homelessness. This definition is derived from the physical, social and legal interpretation of what a 'home' means. The ETHOS framework does not refer to individuals but to living situations: roofless, houseless, insecure housing and inadequate housing (see annex).

During the research process, ETHOS light is used as an operational tool. This Light version was developed in 2007 as a tool for researchers to measure homelessness. ETHOS light distinguishes between 6 categories of homelessness (see annex). An additional advantage of ETHOS light is that it pays more attention to hidden homelessness than ETHOS itself. 'Hidden homelessness' refers to persons who don't live on the streets or in specific services for the homeless, but temporarily with friends or relatives ('couch sleepers' or 'couch surfers') or in non-conventional housing (such as a garage, a car, a garden house, squats...).

Different methods exist for measuring homelessness. Each method brings into light a different aspect of the phenomenon. 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.

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

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

Table 1: Summary of the main approaches adopted to collect data on homelessness and housing exclusion

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

During the past decade, enormous progress has been made in Europe when it comes to homelessness strategies and measurement methodologies. In our report we focus on the good practices of Denmark, Finland, Scotland, and The Netherlands. The first three countries have a national homelessness strategy. We describe their strategies and methods used to measure homelessness. Based on a literature review and peer reviews of the European Observatory on Homelessness, we describe the strengths and weaknesses of their monitoring strategy.

One method that receives special attention is the capture-recapture method. This method has its origins in biology and refers to the estimation of an unobserved part of a certain population. The advanced capture-recapture approach of linked administrative sources uses incomplete lists with members of the study population. 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.

2. Methodology

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

- Scientific literature review
- Analysis of administrative 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

3. Available administrative databases and registration practices on the federal level

Based on our literature review and interviews with policy executives and data expert, we provide an overview of the usability of several federal data bases for the monitoring of homelessness.

National register: persons with a reference address

The reference address is a separate information type in the National Register. The input is provided by municipalities and the Immigration Office. However, reference address holders cannot be subdivided according to the reason for applying (such as homelessness, itinerant life or work abroad, prisoners¹) and the modality of the reference address (private person/PCSW/organization) is not specified. Regarding the latter obstacle, it is possible to select those holding a reference address at PCSW by delivering a PCSW address list to the National Register. These numbers are therefore available by means of a number of analysis procedures. To be able to calculate the number of homeless persons with a reference address, adapting the codes in the national register (for example the reason for applying) is a relatively easy solution. However, this solution still depends on the local policy priorities and practices in granting a reference address. In their biannual report 2016-2017, the Interfederal Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service pointed out the difficult access to the reference address. This was also confirmed in the talks with the (representatives of) homeless people and PCSW- workers.

Crossroads bank for social security

At the moment, the selection of homeless persons is impossible in the CBSS. The CBSS can be very useful for studies when a list of persons is identified elsewhere. For example, first identify persons with a reference address at PCSW in the National Register or persons with an installation premium and then send the list to CBSS to analyse their socio economic profile. As CBSS data are updated continuously, they allow to study trajectories over time. For example to study the socioeconomic profile (such as income, household structure). CBSS data are publicly available until 2014 but are actualised at regular intervals.

¹ http://www.ibz.rn.fgov.be/fileadmin/user_upload/nl/bev/omzendbrieven/omzendbrief-20151222-houden-bevolkingsregisters-2016.pdf

PPS SI: the housing situation of social assistance clients

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.

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). Adapting codes of the NovaPrima forms (for instance 2b) can be a good first step.

PPS SI also holds data on (part of) ex- homeless persons: those who received an installation premium (attributed only once in a lifetime) and those who received an Individualised social integration project (GPMI). The installation premium is 100% refunded by the PPS SI, for the GPMI clients who were homeless and found stable housing, PPS SI refunds the integration income for the PCSW at a 100% for two years.

Using ETHOS Light as a registration instrument for *all* clients of their social service department is a promising second step. 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.

Psychiatry: Minimal Psychiatric Data

Psychiatric problems are an important risk factor for homelessness. ETHOS and ETHOS light pay special attention to those who have to stay longer in a hospital or other service because they have no housing solution. Concerning psychiatry, the MPD are available. The housing situation prior to and after hospitalisation (no fixed address, residential centre for homeless) is a compulsory variable in MPD. At the same time, based on interviews with practitioners from these services, it becomes clear that the information is not really reliable. Large adaptations are necessary for the MPD data housing situation to be reliable. Another disadvantage of MPD is the lack of a unique client identifier as every psychiatric centre uses their own identification key.

Drug addiction care: Treatment Demand Indicator (TDI)

Drug addiction is also an important risk factor for homelessness. The European TDI 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. The Belgian organization responsible for the collection of this European TDI is the Scientific Institute for Public Health (WIV/ISP).

TDI includes questions on housing situation. Interesting for homelessness monitoring are the following two questions: (1) Living status past 30 days (fixed residence, changing residence, street (new since 2015), institution, prison, other) and (2) Living status past 30 days (alone, with partner, with parents, other family members, friends or other persons, other). This makes TDI a useful additional indicator. Registration is based on national number. As a

consequence, linkage to other homelessness databases is possible. However, there is only information concerning the inflow of persons, not the outflow. As such, it can't be used as an indicator to cover the persons leaving institutions without a stable housing situation (in ETHOS and ETHOS light).

Prison: 'Sidis-Suite'

Registration of housing situation in Belgian prisons is the official address, as an update from the National Register is taken at prison entry. Hence only 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 this data, 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, fear their release will be withdrawn when having no fixed address to go to can make people give up an incorrect address.

Registration in Sidis-Suite is at the moment no additional value to information available in national register.

Judicial 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 companies².

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 a code concerning eviction. 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.

Available information only indicates the number of judicial evictions. The number of persons who loses their house due to an uninhabitably declaration or an eviction where the family court is not involved are not included.

Police data bases: local ISLP and federal ANG

Local police registers in ISLP (Integrated System for the Local Police). 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.

Useful information concerns persons withdrawn from registration (in ISLP and ANG) and support provided to bailiffs (in ISLP). Little is known of the persons who have been withdrawn

² [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.](#)

from registration. It can be a potential indicator of hidden homelessness. Further research is necessary.

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.

EU SILC

Since 2003, the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) collects annual data on income, poverty, social exclusion and living conditions. For current study these data above all are useful to bring into light the housing affordability. Following indicators are measured annually: housing quality and housing affordability (percentage of the population in households where the total housing costs represent more than 40% of disposable income). Concerning housing, Belgium decided to add the optional questions on homelessness in the 2018 EU SILC. This concerns a one-time measurement.

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. Additional surveys are necessary to shine a light on the situation of vulnerable groups.

4. Regional registration practices

In all three regions, the possibilities of current registration to get a view on homelessness were studied with field workers and data experts.

Flanders

Discussions with data experts and street level workers learn that registration of (identifiable) persons differs to a large extent between organizations. It ranges from practically no registration (e.g. NMBS, day centers) to detailed and extensive registration (e.g PCSW and guidance CAW). These differences in registration practices relate to:

- Philosophy/vision towards marginalized target group and basic services offered (focus on attracting people, not wanting to scare off people)
- Philosophy/vision towards clients and extended services offered, e.g. integration income, housing (focus on something for something)
- Imposed by government-subsidy

Amongst those organizations with an extensive registration practice, there is a broad consensus that registration is too often extensive, time consuming and little efficient. Too little use is made out of the available data.

- Concerning the **CAW**, which are in Flanders the main provider of services for the homeless, a relatively new system (WE-dossier) was implemented, but at the moment less policy-oriented analysis are made concerning homeless users. Normally, 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.

- Concerning the **PCSW**, each PCSW has its own registration system in addition to the registration forms that need to be filled in for the POD MI. As a consequence, only the information sent to the POD MI is comparable.

In the focus group of data experts, there is a broad consensus that the ETHOS light tool is a promising instrument to register the housing situation of the user more reliably. Even though participants 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.

Not only is the population size of homelessness important, but also profile characteristics. There is also interest in the measurement of trajectories and effects of care. However at the same time this brings along ethical and privacy issues. Especially field workers find it a 'dirty thought' that people can be monitored. In other words, ethical and privacy procedures have to be developed and implemented to guarantee the privacy of the client.

Baseline measurement

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 centres (ETHOS 3-4-7)
- Users staying temporary in PCSW housing
- Court eviction orders received by PCSW (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)

Focus group members often refer to the baseline measurement as a good practice to measure homelessness in Flanders at a regular time. De focus group members point to the support to repeat this measurement.

Brussels

La Strada, the support centre for the Brussels Homelessness sector, developed 2 methods for to measure homelessness at the regional level:

- an anonymous Central Client Record System (CCRS) for the homeless services for short, mid- and longer term accommodation (°2010), and for people in supported housing programmes (°2013).
- a recurrent street count (2008, 2010, 2014, 2016, 2017) as a point-in-time (snapshot) data collection of the different operational categories of ETHOS (1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 12).

Central client record system

The central client record system is a centralized data base for **3 different temporary accommodation registration systems** which correspond with the competent governmental authorities (GGC-COCOM, COCOF, VG/VGC) in Brussels:

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

The CCRS is based on these 3 registration systems on client level. The data on some 20 common variables is centralised and provides information on the profile of the users of the accommodation for homeless people in Brussels (95% coverage, overnight shelters not included). In order to avoid double counts, a unique client identifier is developed based on name and date of birth. Registration started in 2010. In addition to a yearly report La Strada has delivered a report evaluating the data for the period 2010-2014.

The development of the CCRS was a participatory process. A working group with representatives of the stakeholders discussed the centralisation, the common variables, the analysis of the collected data and the ongoing evaluation of the central registration system.

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 centre have limited information on users. Services who offer medical support have extensive information on profile and sometimes trajectories.

Comments

- Registration in one or more registration systems demands an important time investment of social workers (administrative personnel or volunteers) and financial resources to actualise the data and the registration system.
- Limited to users/clients of the services, no data on refusals.
- Anonymous client identifier (based on name and date of birth of the client) helps to avoid double counts but these still occur because of misspellings.
- CCRS holds interesting data on population size and profile of users of temporary accommodation on a regional level, but is limited to this type of support.
- There is willingness to transfer data for monitoring on a regional level to have an impact on regional policy if no additional efforts are required.
- There is no legal obligation for the services to participate and transfer data for the CCRS. The participative work with la Strada and feedback via annual reports and studies on certain specific problems or public are important to motivate services to participate.

Point-in-time count

The point-in-time count 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.

For the 4th edition 2 street counts were organised: 7 November 2016 before the start of the winter emergency plan and 6 March 2017 at the end of the winter plan. These street counts are a snapshot of the situation at night. The number of people counted and their living situation can differ from the situation during the day. Also, the date of the street count has an important impact on the numbers of homeless persons counted in the different living situations (ETHOS): 3386 homeless persons were counted in November 2016, 4094 homeless persons in March 2017. The added value of a street count is the repetition of the count and the evolution between successive editions.

Wallonia

Seven Relais Sociaux are the organisations in charge of taking care of homelessness in Wallonia. Their help covers day centres, night shelters, street work and social emergency (DUS). 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. The harmonization of data collection by the Relais Sociaux (RS) has been a long time project, and its current state is a noticeable improvement over the former data, as there are now fields that describe the housing situation in a way that partially fits the ETHOS categories (namely...).

While the services providing the data have been found cooperating better than expected, they find the workload excessive and time consuming, and therefore are not fond of any supplementary monitoring or counting task, including participation to point-in-time actions.

It appears, both in the knowledge of the RS and in the direct testimony of service employees that the services actually have far more information than what is shared with the RS and IWEPS, but those data are collected and processed in a way that fits the needs of the services themselves. From those existing data, aggregated information is forwarded to the RS. RS code according to the glossary and process the data from the services, then sends those aggregated figures to IWEPS.

The RS have their own use of data for monitoring some aspects of homelessness care or evolution on their territory, for instance researching trajectories or the impact of policy changes (PIS introduced by PCSW cause homeless to less willingly apply at PCSW).

The application of a unique ID is made in a manual way within the RS who have several shelter services, and double counting is an issue. Nothing is done about possible double counts across RS, so each RS dataset is cleaned, but summing up the data from the seven

of them may cause double counting. Interestingly, while cleaning of double counts is performed only on shelter's data (where profile information and/or names or IDs are available), the RS of Liège is currently researching ways of doing the same on day care data, although that seems difficult.

The RS and the services are very concerned with the use of monitoring data. Trust is not at all granted, and there's a significant sensitivity to negative effects that monitoring data could have on homeless care. Distrust is mostly against policy makers.

The currently computed data, including housing situation fields that can be matched to the ETHOS categories, are mostly recorded at the first contact of a person in a service. There are no updates in the shared datasets, so it is quite likely that information is no longer accurate after some time, since housing situations change quite often. The most wide-reaching information on hidden homelessness, by street workers, is also the most sensitive to missing or outdated information.

The 46 Walloon maisons d'accueil provide shelter for men, women, couples and families. Similar to their Brussels counterparts subsidized by the COCOF, they register in AMAstat.

The Arlon night shelter has been visited and is currently not associated with the RS nor with the IWPEs data collection. As it has currently applied for a Region's recognition, it will in a near future share some data with the Region in activity reports. The public comes from Belgium, not Luxembourg, and is sent by rural PCSW from the Luxembourg province, and also from the south of Namur province. Homeless who have used their quota of nights at the Namur night shelter can also move to Arlon. Psychiatric institutions of the South of the country may also seek temporary housing solutions with the Arlon night shelter. While the social worker in charge has a wide view on the southern rural areas through the contacts with PCSW and institutions, they seem not to be computed as useable data beyond the public hosted at the shelter.

5. Hidden and more rural homelessness

In policy as well as in research on homelessness, the focus is often on large cities and on (persons who make use of) residential shelters. In this research, we also put our attention on the more rural areas, outside the large cities.

For this part of the project, focus is on the PCSW, a social service present in every one of the 589 Belgian municipalities. To gain a view on homeless PCSW clients, we paid a visit to the PCSW of Scherpenheuvel-Zichem Diest, Bekkevoort, Glabbeek and Tienen. We presented them the ETHOS Light typology and together with 27 social workers we went through 953 active client files. In these rural PCSW, we find 74 clients to be homeless according to the ETHOS Light typology. This means that in more rural PCSW, **1 out of 13 PCSW clients is homeless**. An additional 13 persons were threatened with eviction. The most common found ETHOS Light category are the 38 persons who are temporarily living with family/friends due to lack of housing.

To get a better view on homelessness in rural municipalities, we visited relevant organisations in Diest and interviewed seven persons who are or recently were hidden homeless.

ETHOS Light broadens the view on homelessness. In our contacts with more rural PCSW, social workers often stated on beforehand not to be in contact with homeless persons. When discussing their client files on the basis of ETHOS Light, several social workers were surprised by the amount of homeless amongst their clients.

One of the reasons can be the significant share of hidden homeless persons. In our interviews with hidden homeless persons and other field workers we find that several hidden homeless not label themselves as homeless (yet). Two intertwined reasons for this are 1) that for some young people it is a widely used strategy, a part of their 'culture' and 2) that staying temporarily with family/friends is often 'just' a first step into homelessness.

Living together with others is often seen as advantageous by PCSW workers, an opinion that is reflected in the height of the social benefits received. However, our interviews point out the vulnerability of persons who are forced to couch surf. Social workers give very little attention to this. People who are temporarily living with family/friends are not 'at home' there and sometimes are even abuse because of the vulnerable situation they are in.

In our study we identify some specific spatial characteristics of intermediate rural areas in Flanders that relate to homelessness. The rural housing market contains little or no studios or small apartments, leaving no affordable housing for single households. Compared to urban areas, the housing market in more rural areas is less adapted to (the growing number of) single households.

As more rural municipalities have no or only a limited housing offer for homeless persons, a common first advice from PCSW social workers is for people to seek shelter with family/friends. But it also leads to dynamics with other (surrounding) municipalities. As almost 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. This is done not only for specific homeless services but also in order to find a cheap sleeping place such as hostels. Even though several PCSW workers indicate how people are not keen on moving (temporarily) to bigger cities. Common named reasons are too far (not only moving away from family/friends but also from school and work), too expensive and having to share (living room/kitchen/bathroom) with others.

6. Principles for a Belgian monitoring strategy

Based on the analysis of existing administrative data bases and regional registration systems, the researchers constructed several building blocks to monitor homelessness. This overview was presented and discussed with the MEHOBEL guidance committee and a stakeholder seminar on December 7th 2017. Based on these discussions, we formulate **13 principles for the Belgian monitoring strategy**:

...is a national plan

The aim of the monitoring strategy is to provide data on homelessness on a national level.

...has a clear goal

The (political) goals of collecting data have to be made explicit and communicated to all relevant stakeholders. What do we want to measure and why? Some building blocks (e.g. reference address) reflect local policy more than they provide information on the number of homeless. Motivating practitioners to apply the law can be a goal of these building blocks.

... 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, in particular to the Interfederal cooperation agreement homelessness and the action plans to reduce poverty in the three regions. For Flanders, a link has to be clear with the Homelessness action plan 2017-2019, for Brussels with the policy paper on homelessness of October 22nd 2015.

The MEHOBEL results have to be more than a recommendation of instruments and methods. A follow-up of the elaboration in the field and an evaluation of methods and results is crucial. It is also important to create awareness that homelessness is a structural problem, linked to poverty, and to influence policy officers to look for solutions rather than to manage the consequences.

...shows clear engagement from policy makers

Different government levels are responsible for the start-up, financing and follow-up of the 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 purpose, concrete proposals have to be formulated so that measurements can be taken where they are most efficient. The inter-ministerial conference on poverty, housing and homelessness (planned in 2018), is an important policy organ. It has to be clear to politicians that a continuous investment is necessary for monitoring homelessness.

...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.

Specific attention needs to be focused on hidden homelessness: (1) staying temporarily with friends 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.

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. The Interfederal Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service was explicitly assigned the role of data collection point in the inter-ministerial Cooperation Agreement on homelessness. Coordination must be done with a strong link with the professional field. The interpretation of the numbers has to be an interactive process in which all relevant stakeholders have a voice.

7. The Belgian homelessness monitoring 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.

Next paragraph describes the fivefold approach for the Belgian homelessness monitoring strategy: organise a national point-in-time count, provide yearly statistics, start with the integration of ETHOS Light in registration systems, prepare data sets for capture-recapture and repeat SILC CUT at regular time intervals.

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. An independent research group should be responsible for the coordination of the count and for the analysis of the data. This research institute has 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 it is 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 questionnaire based on national and international experience (MPHASIS 2009).

An additional rough sleeper count is useful in large cities only. In smaller cities this can be done by interviewing street workers and low-threshold services. The five largest cities can opt to organize 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.

In order to avoid double counts, a personal identifier should be used based on name and date of birth (see example of Brussels in CCRS).

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,
All services, all interested, or a selected AMA
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

Yearly statistics on reference address

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.

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.

Yearly numbers on housing difficulties (EU SILC)

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.

Yearly numbers on housing affordability (EU SILC)

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.

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)

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.

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 other policy domains such as the National institute for health and disability insurance (RIZIV/INAMI) and the national employment office (RVA/ONEM).

Prepare data sets 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.

Annexes**ETHOS**

	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 shelter accommodation	Women accommodated due to experience of domestic violence and where the period of stay is intended to be short term
	5	People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1 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
10	People living under threat of violence	10.1	Police recorded incidents	Where police action is taken to ensure place of safety for victims of domestic violence	
INADEQUATE HOUSING	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

ETHOS Light

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