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Counting the homeless – improving the basis for planning assistance

Minutes



On behalf of the
European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities



Peer Review: Counting the homeless – improving the basis for planning assistance Vienna, 12-13 November 2009

The Peer Review was hosted by the City of Vienna and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection

Day 1

Welcome addresses

Peter Stanzl, head of the Social Welfare Planning group of the City of Vienna, said that Social housing and welfare policy have a long tradition in Vienna. A wide range of services cover social assistance, long-term care and measures for disabled people. Assistance for homeless people is regulated by the Vienna Social Act. In recent years, social services have been modernised to keep up with a rising demand, and this has led towards a more preventative and integrative approach. Vienna is trying to improve its planning process and Mr Stanzl hoped lessons could be learned from other countries. But the meeting should be more than an exchange of best practice and experience. He hoped it would also be a platform for new and innovative ideas, and welcomed all the participants to Vienna.

Hans Steiner, from the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, said the EU's Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and national policies cover labour market, health and education issues. Although good housing is essential for the quality of living conditions and life satisfaction, there is a lack of consensus about the state's responsibility in this area. Public influence varies in different Member States, and hence the spectrum of housing problems also differs.

Access to housing, prices, conditions, and risks of housing loss vary across the EU and domestically. The risk of homelessness depends on whether the state has influence over housing supply and regulation, protection of tenants and benefits for low-income people. The OMC touches only marginally on housing policy, mainly in the context of measures to minimise damage, and this is a problem, said Mr Steiner. Consensus exists on the need for a sustainable public commitment in the areas of education, health, and employment, in order to provide fair access for everyone. Should not the allocation of adequate housing be of the same importance? Homelessness stems not only from deficiencies in the housing market, but is linked also to individuals' circumstances and their personal shortcomings. It is a policy field in itself.

The current Peer Review focused not on structural causes but on the collection of information, he recognised. Different Member States follow different strategies due to different objectives and different sorts of databases. Therefore, are common definitions possible? Even in Austria, there is only limited scope for common definitions covering the nine *Länder*, which are responsible for housing policy. He concluded by wishing that housing could take higher priority in formal strategies for better social cohesion.

Michele Calandrino from the European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities drew attention to the EU's 2009 thematic focus of the Social Open Method of Coordination on homelessness and housing exclusion.

Peer Reviews are an established instrument within the OMC and will have an even greater role in the future. In fact the Social Protection Committee has recently adopted an opinion on the post-Lisbon Strategy, highlighting two aspects aimed at strengthening the social OMC. These are:

1. monitoring and evaluation of policy impact and implementation
2. setting of priorities fully exploiting the mutual learning process, including through enhanced use of peer reviews.

He confirmed that the current Peer Review was experimental in that it focused on a problem, rather than a best practice. All the participating Member States have made important efforts to counter homelessness, but it remains a challenge. Why? Two of the reasons concern definitions, and the technical issue of data collection. There is no agreed definition at EU level, but the ETHOS classification elaborated by FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) is an important reference point. In order to highlight the broader scope of homelessness beyond the two basic categories comprising rough sleepers, and people in temporary accommodation, in the social OMC the term "homelessness and housing exclusion" is used. In this way, it is stressed that living in insecure and inadequate housing is also part of the problem and that homelessness is strictly linked to the overall (mal)functioning of the housing market.

The second challenge concerns the quantification of the problem. This year the Commission has adopted a series of indicators on housing costs and overcrowding, which are complemented by new background data on housing deprivation. This is a powerful instrument.

Official Eurostat statistics can now state for example, that on average, people at risk of poverty spend 33% of their income on housing, which is twice as much as the percentage for the overall population. In Sweden, this rises to more than three times as much. Across Europe, 38% of people at risk of poverty are affected by housing costs overburden, as they spend more than 40% of their disposable income in housing costs, and this percentage reaches over 50% in countries like Slovakia, Greece, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark and Bulgaria. Furthermore, the new housing indicators show that poor people not only spend more but also live in the worst conditions. More than 27% of them live in overcrowded homes and more than 38% suffer from at least one deprivation measure.

These stark figures have immediately attracted the attention of policy makers, including within the Social Protection Committee. They make it clear that, in designing social policies targeting poor people, housing must be considered as a key priority for improving their living conditions and well-being.

The importance of adequate information systems is acknowledged by Member States, and yet substantial progress on homelessness statistics has not been achieved. Two years ago, Bill Edgar and his team completed a study of the problem on behalf of the Commission, followed up by the MPHASIS project, which is now coming to an end. It is hoped that these initiatives financed by the PROGRESS programme, including the peer review that was about to take place, could effectively contribute to the establishment of a better evidence-base for policies to tackle homelessness.

Mr Calandrino concluded by saying the Peer Review took place at the right moment, since its

conclusions can still feed into the drafting of the 2010 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion which will have homelessness and housing exclusion as a central theme.

Introduction to the Austrian Policy Context

Hans Steiner argued that housing exclusion relates not only to problems of poverty, but also to housing and social policy. Steps to minimise homelessness depend to a large extent on the state. In Austria, the problem of homelessness and poor housing exists, but to a lesser extent than in some other countries, because of the instruments that have been applied.

He outlined the main features:

- 70% of residential building is supported by public resources. This has an impact on the cost of housing in general, and means that the commercial market is not the main player.
- The limited-profit 'third sector' (building associations) plays an important role. Neither state nor private, it is more flexible than state-owned firms and behaves in a more socially responsible way than the private sector.
- Social housing is higher than the EU average, largely due to Vienna.
- Personal housing subsidies ease financial stress for many households but also contribute to rising prices. A dilemma therefore exists with regard to subsidies v. work incentives.
- Protection from eviction.

Public financing and legal obligations on players have a strong influence on the housing market. Subsidised loans and annuities cover 70% of new dwellings. Over 20% of accommodation is provided by building associations and 20% by social housing.

Maximum rent limits apply to housing covered by public financial support (*Wohnbauförderung*). But 80-90% of this funding goes to loans and annuities for building construction, and only 10% to rent subsidies. The aim is thus to subsidise new house building, not poor families. The right to such subsidised accommodation depends on income, but in fact 90% of the population qualifies. The fund is financed by tax revenue of 1%, plus income from loan repayments.

The impact of public support for residential building is to lower prices and reduce fluctuations in the housing market, bring down the need for personal subsidies, and enhance social cohesion. Rules applying to building associations limit profits and their distribution. In return for a commitment to non-profit objectives, companies get tax concessions and privileged access to government funds. These associations are responsible for 20% of housing generally and 40% of new dwellings.

The fact that profit is not the first priority means that housing development is more sustainable: for example, the construction industry has not suffered a decline during the economic crisis. The combination of building and personal subsidies means that good accommodation is affordable for low-income families, promoting a better social mix.

Social housing accounts for 20% of dwellings in Austria, mainly in cities. Vienna is one of the biggest providers of social housing (city-owned flats) in the world. They are available to low-income people and transferable to family members.

An important feature of housing policy is that tenants have very strong legal protection against unjustified eviction. However, the number of limited rental agreements is on the increase, weakening maximum price limits.

Austrian federal housing policy is embodied in three main laws: The Austrian Tenancy Act (*Mietrechtsgesetz*), Law of Condominiums (*Wohnungseigentumsgesetz*), and Limited Profit Housing Act (*Wohnungsgemeinnützigkeitsgesetz*). The *Länder* are responsible for regional planning, distributing funds and services to the homeless, while communities/municipalities apply building law. Vienna is unique in being both a *Land* and a municipality.

The Austrian system helps to prevent social exclusion. Yet developments in recent years have strengthened the free market, with more liberalisation of prices. The social housing stock is not increasing, rules for funding are being weakened, and state-owned building societies privatised. Assistance for the homeless is the exclusive responsibility of the nine *Länder*, with different legal provisions, programmes and services. The federal state cooperates with them, for example, on research and monitoring.

Strategies and planning for the homeless in Vienna

Bernhard Mager, from the Vienna Social Welfare Planning group, said Vienna has 1.7 million inhabitants. Unemployment stands at 5.6%, and although it is increasing, the rate is still relatively low by EU standards. Social welfare assistance goes to 93,547 people on low incomes, at a cost of €277 million. There are 3,767 beds for homeless people.

Until the 1980s, the housing department took responsibility for assistance to the homeless, offering everybody a bed in a dormitory. The 1990s brought a radical change of strategy, including cooperation with NGOs, daycare centres, outreach work and mobile medical services. The *Soziale Schiene* was set up within the municipal housing association to offer affordable, self-contained flats for homeless or 'at risk' clients. A homelessness prevention system was launched in 1996 through FAWOS (People's Aid Vienna Centre for Secure Tenancy), offering advice and counselling to avoid eviction, which proved very successful.

The Vienna Social Fund (VSF) is responsible for assistance to the homeless. Since 2000, the strategy has been based on the principle that people in need should have the right to self-determination, leading to formulation of the Viennese Assistance Programme for the homeless, with a package of measures to promote reintegration, and to stabilise people's health and social situation. A Day-Care Centre and a night shelter only for women were opened 2-3 years ago. From 2004, socially accompanied housing was provided for elderly people to live on their own with the support of a social worker. The 3,767 places include 1,234 beds in transitional accommodation, 292 in night shelters and 267 mother-child facilities. The take-up rate is 96%, and 70% of clients are men. The programme employs 500 staff, and has a budget of €37.9 million.

The planning process started with setting an objective: in this case self-determined living. Despite new data collection methods, attempts at forecasting failed – maybe accurate predictions are not possible, speculated Mr Mager. Discussion of what further efforts were needed led to new offers for women and elderly homeless people.

Access to assistance: 40% of applicants have been evicted. More than 50% have been living with family or friends: 29% following a divorce or separation and 23% mainly young people who have never had a home of their own. Less than 10% come directly from the streets. A lot of money is spent on prevention, which saves more households, but increasing expenditure is a problem. In 2008 there were 4,500 applications to the *Soziale Schiene* for social housing, leading to 1,881 tenancy agreements, but some 2,000 unsuccessful households.

Existing challenges relate to improving governance, and better planning of resources to meet the growing demand for homelessness prevention and support. Homelessness has a number of immediate causes, ranging from addiction or release from prison to rising living costs and debt. There are also underlying reasons for the growth in housing demand. These include an unexpected influx of younger immigrants over the last three years, rising unemployment due to the economic crisis, and changes in the labour market producing more low-paid and part-time jobs. In Austria, counting the homeless is very complex because of the devolved administrative structure and the lack of a national definition of homelessness. Each *Land* only develops a strategy when the problem reaches a certain level. In Vienna, planners need to know where homeless people come from, and what their accommodation situation was in the past.

Strategies are being developed through discussion with NGOs and public/private partnership, with the aim of more prevention and widening the availability of affordable housing. It is important not to concentrate poor people in specific areas. Mr Mager asked participants: How do you plan your measures for the support of homeless people? How do you develop your strategies? What is your experience of counting the homeless?

Questions and answers

The Peer Review participants asked a number of questions: where do migrants come from, and what is the link with homelessness? What does 'self-determination' mean in concrete terms? Can only the nine *Länder* make policy? Does Vienna have data on the number of rough sleepers? And while housing in Austria remains more affordable than the European average, reforms in recent years have tended to raise prices, so what is the political motivation for changing a system that already worked?

Mr Mager said many people come to Vienna from other parts of Austria, or from EU countries, especially Germany, and this trend will continue. The link to homelessness derives from the fact that this population increase was not foreseen, and therefore not enough flats were built. **Kurt Gutleiderer** from the Vienna Social Fund pointed out that there are general connections between homelessness, poverty and immigration; although in some immigrant groups it may be the second or third generation that becomes homeless.

Mr Mager explained that the strategic aim is to offer homeless people the support they need to live independently, in their own accommodation. This means helping people to stabilise their social and health situation – including target groups such as mentally ill, young people, and

women, who need 'special offers'. The exception is elderly people, who cannot live by themselves and need a daily social worker visit. Vienna wants to avoid creating 'ghettoes' of municipal housing, so it tries to give low earners access to building society apartments, although this may be more expensive. Outreach workers estimate that there are 300-500 rough sleepers in Vienna, although it is nigh impossible to give an accurate figure.

Mr Steiner said that responsibility for developing policy remains with the *Länder*, although the state provides funding for regional authorities and NGOs. National government has no legal or political responsibility, but tries to raise awareness indirectly. He added that the EU is driving policy towards more liberalisation and less regulation in housing, as in other areas. "It's neo-liberalism in housing policies. It's as easy as that," he concluded.

Sepp Ginner from the Austrian Federal Task Force for assistance to the homeless (BAWO) said it is very difficult to count people who do not use services. In Boston, for example, students are hired three times a year to go into the streets and look for rough sleepers. However, most people do use services at some stage, and homelessness is a process that can take up to five years to emerge from.

Presentation of the Discussion Paper

Bill Edgar, from European Housing Research Ltd/University of Dundee, stated that a diverse range of relevant materials are now available, thanks to support from the European Commission. Twenty countries took part in the MPHASIS project, and documents are available from each one, including how data were collected, and research reports. It also produced recommendations: <http://www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis>. He said the host country raised two main issues: defining homelessness; and how to review and monitor data and strategies.

Understanding homelessness: the way we look at the problem has changed. We now know that structural issues are important, and governments themselves can create homelessness. Personal circumstances are also influential, especially developments such as family breakdown, domestic violence, and the growth of multi-parent families. Health problems such as drug and alcohol dependence, mental breakdown and learning difficulty are major factors.

Referring to triggers for homelessness, he said preventing eviction, as in Vienna, is a core element of strategy. When people move out of institutions they also run a high risk of becoming homeless. Under Norway's policy, no-one leaving prison should have to go into temporary accommodation, which means accurate figures on the prison population are crucial. Data on paths to homelessness come from various sources, so we need better coordination between different agencies, and to understand gaps in knowledge. But homelessness is a complex problem, and we cannot measure every aspect accurately.

Homeless people are found in a wide range of different forms of shelter. For example, 52% of homeless people in Vienna live with family or friends for part of the time. There are also people living in institutions because there is inadequate support to enable them to live independently. Such cases add up to "hidden homelessness".

Defining homelessness: three aspects can be identified:

1. lack of a **physical** roof over one's head;
2. lack of a **legal** domain: e.g. security, protection from violence;
3. lack of a **social** domain: no privacy or capacity to exclude others from one's individual space.

Mr Edgar emphasised the *process* perspective: homeless people tend to move through different situations over a period of years, although for some it may be a one-off episode that can be resolved (e.g. people who lose their homes through gambling). He presented an operational definition (OD) of homelessness – drawn from the ETHOS typology developed in consultation with FEANTSA, and dubbed 'ETHOS light' (see www.feantsa.org). The first three categories are obvious: people living rough or in emergency or homeless accommodation. The last three are more difficult to count: people living in institutions, non-conventional dwellings or with family or friends. The problem is to find a single definition everyone agrees on. The OD is one attempt, but does not have to be adopted in its entirety in all countries.

Strategic aims – issues for data collection: some trends are emerging. 12 national homelessness strategies exist across the EU. Federal states like Germany and Spain have regional strategies. Approaches are moving more towards prevention and reducing the time people spend in temporary accommodation. This has implications for data collection. He listed the strategic aims which data should reinforce: preventing homelessness; tackling the causes (e.g. demographic change); reducing the level of homelessness and the negative effects on people (e.g. is there a cycle, with the problem passing from one generation to another?); making rehousing sustainable so that people can stay in their own homes on a permanent basis.

Associated Issues include indicators (monitoring of target groups, e.g. Denmark focuses on young people); assessing flows through analysis of different kinds of data (e.g. how do people come into, and leave, temporary shelter?); and data protection issues, especially regarding the linking of information from different service providers, and identifying individuals.

Data collection: three different approaches exist: through surveys, registers and censuses. The next national census in 2011 will offer the opportunity to compile baseline information, e.g. on rough sleepers, but national authorities have to adopt the right questions. How should forecasting be done? Ireland, for example, carries out a housing needs assessment.

Mr Edgar presented a simplified diagram of pathways into homelessness, pointing out that some clients will still end up in institutional living. The system indicators show the data needed, from which indirect conclusions can be drawn, for example, about the number of rough sleepers.

MPHASIS recommendations/conclusions: national strategies need integrated policies, and mechanisms for local delivery. The countries making the most progress have clear lines of responsibility. "It's a difficult nettle that has to be grasped," admitted Mr Edgar. Precise targets and monitoring should ensure that policies are evidence-based. Vienna's budget of some €38 million is generous compared to many EU countries, and outcomes must be measured.

An information strategy requires a definition of homelessness and housing exclusion, identification of core variables and a review of information sources. Authorities should make better use of client register information and service provider databases, although questions arise about how data should be collated at regional or national level. It is not sufficient to rely on single

information sources.

Mr Edgar highlighted a number of national examples.

Sweden has carried out a review of information sources used to underpin strategy, dividing homeless people into four different categories.

Denmark has a clear statement of targets, including reducing rough sleeping and the amount of time people spend in hostels, plus a mechanism for monitoring, but it needs baseline information. The merits of the respective targets are open to debate.

Portugal: the government adopted a national strategy in March, integrating homelessness into the service providers' database. There is a difference between data, information and knowledge, and Portugal is clear about the need for operational, organisational and strategic input.

Ireland has a national strategy, implemented at local level through action plans. 30% of the population lives in Dublin, while a lot of other local authorities are small and rural. There is a clear procedure for reporting to key ministers, although it may not always work perfectly.

Prevention: Mr Edgar drew attention to a recent EU study on youth homelessness, which highlights different definitions, underlining the need for coordinating between agencies and establishing clear definitions. The challenges are large, but there are examples of good practice in existence. Making policy **sustainable** concerns questions of methodology and governance. Coordination entails tracking clients who move from one service to another – and use of client identifiers while at the same time respecting human rights and data protection rules. Once people are in supported housing they are in theory no longer homeless, but this too requires monitoring. A recent issue of the European Journal of Homelessness looked at this issue.

Issues from the host country paper

Forecasting and planning: Mr Edgar referred to a number of examples of existing practice to work from. For example, Italy's national service provider database is an important milestone for underpinning one-off surveys on supply and demand.

Targets: experience in Norway, Denmark and Finland illustrates the need for baseline data and appropriate time frames for monitoring. For example, Finland has set 2015 as its target date for ending long-term homelessness. Mr Edgar concluded by citing physics' 'perturbation theory', indicating that it is better to simplify a complicated problem by finding an approximate solution, rather than do nothing. "We don't need 100% correct data to have homeless strategies. Let's take a perturbation approach rather than wait to get everything right," he suggested.

Questions and answers

Questions related to the division of responsibilities at local and national level, and how to judge when a person stops being homeless.

Miklós Vecsei, a social worker from the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service, queried what data can achieve. Budapest has an estimated 3,000 homeless people, with up to 5,000 across the

country. In 2008 Hungary drew up a “very nice” strategy after two years of consultation with NGOs. But there are still no more beds. Who will put pressure on the decision-makers? he asked.

Peter Juul from the Danish Ministry of the Interior and Social Affairs, said ministers in Denmark asked for a count of homeless seven or eight years ago. He insisted that when they had the result they should act on it, otherwise there would be no point preparing the data. Some years later, the government has taken action. “Never do a count unless you can do something about it,” he concluded. In Hungary, NGOs should compile good data in order to publicise their demands and put pressure on government. Every year, in Denmark, municipalities negotiate levels of public spending. They must show they can deliver on targets, so data are important in responding to public expectations.

Nicoletta Pannuzzi from the Italian National Institute of Statistics warned that “invisible” populations do not appear on accommodation lists or service provider registers. We need surveys of country-specific, cultural and ethnic situations, using a variety of instruments. **Jonina Hermansdottir** from the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development said counting can offer a new perspective. Norway’s 2008 survey revealed 6,100 registered homeless people, but only 2% of them are rough sleepers, even though this is the persistent stereotype of homelessness. In fact, more people are in prison, living with family etc. Surveys in 1996, 2003, 2005 and 2008 show a growing number of homeless young people (under 24), so this group will form the focus of future policy. Thus, counting can influence policy.

Michele Calandrino said that having a homeless strategy helps to identify the data required, but data is also needed to draw effective strategies in the first place, so data collection and policy developments reinforce each other. Concerning data, core variables are as important as counting. For example, it is not only important to know the number of homeless people in Vienna, but that, for example, 93% of people using shelters in Vienna do not come from the streets. Can such figures be used to break down stereotypes of homeless people? Sharing of responsibilities applies also at EU level, with the Lisbon Strategy implemented by Member States. It is also important to distinguish high-level aims from measurable targets. “Ending homelessness” is valid as a general policy aim, but quantified targets need to be more specific. Ending rough sleeping or prevent evictions are specific and realistic targets. As for the other groups of homeless people, the government role should be seen more in terms of getting people back into adequate and secure accommodation in the shortest possible time, hence designing targets in terms of duration, since not all causes of homelessness are within Government control.

Freek Spennewijn from FEANTSA spoke in favour of the objective of ending homelessness. The majority of EU countries still lack strategies and data, and FEANTSA is willing to offer assistance.

Stefano Galliani from the Italian Federation of bodies for Homeless People felt ending homelessness entails improving the quality of life not only of individuals but also of the community. As well as a roof over their heads, people need rights as citizens. How can this be measured?

Margareta Mahidi from Statistics Austria argued that more realistic objectives would have positive effects even if they might be less ambitious. She regrets that conferences are too seldom attended by housing statistics specialists so the chance to recognize what is feasible in this field is small, for example, a categorisation of institutional households. This objective does not lead to a coverage of the homeless sleeping rough but at least of those living in institutions for the

homeless.

Bernhard Mager said Vienna spends a lot of money on services for the population and tries to collect data, but the economic crisis across Europe is the biggest challenge. There is no national homelessness strategy in Austria. Vienna's annual homelessness reports indicate the sex and age of people and where they go, but forecasting has been unsuccessful and the City is having problems improving its planning process. "We try to ensure that everybody who needs a bed will get one, especially in the winter," he said. Until the 1980s, providing a bed was the main objective. But it became apparent that some people were living in shelters for more than 30 years. That would not happen now, but how long is "too long" in a hostel?

Bill Edgar confirmed that there needs to be a political will to take action, otherwise counting is futile. Data should be *good*, should be *relevant* to resolving the problem, and should take account of impacts. Information strategy should be driven by homeless strategy, but actions should be evidence-based. Collecting data is different from a homelessness information strategy, which requires a regular, monitored effort. Some conclusions are obvious, e.g. that people should not spend too long – probably more than six months – in hostels. Hostels should be a service of 'last resort' when other options fail. So it is necessary to find out how long individuals actually stay. The UK rough sleeper initiative's baseline survey in 1998 produced figures that no-one believed. However, local authorities have drawn up strategies as a result, so even inaccurate data can have an impact.

In identifying aims, he drew attention to Finland's target of ending long-term homelessness, which it has defined as more than six months, or returning within two years. It is important to focus on long-term homelessness. As for responsibilities, in the Netherlands, for example, there is a clear division. Local authorities are responsible for housing policy, but small municipalities may need extra resources from government to implement policies. Failure to provide this support would be an abdication of national responsibility. Federal governments can also do more to promote studies and research. There should be more research on how statistics are compiled. It should be simple to compile a typology of institutional living situations, and this should be done before the 2011 census.

Experiences with counting the homeless

Introduction

Sepp Ginner explained that BAWO was contracted to undertake a study of the number of homeless people in Austria. The project was carried out via the *Länder*. A questionnaire to service providers collected information on accommodation and other facilities. Researchers carried out an evaluation of statistical data, and organised three workshops. Analysis was quantitative and qualitative, covering both 'inpatient' and 'outpatient' services.

The data sources were annual statistics for 2006, plus figures for the key period (15 December 2007), counting accommodation, non-accommodation and adjacent services, as well as measures for prevention of eviction, which almost all *Länder* have adopted. The motives behind the study were to obtain planning data, to compare regional and municipal provisions, and to provide an incentive for improving and expanding services.

The project encountered a number of problems. It took a long time, and comparison was difficult because of different systems in different *Länder*. The key 'day' survey was designed to cut out double counting. In the end, the study period was extended due to staff problems and to handle the inflow of new material. Following the ETHOS project, data had to be reorganised and fresh material collected in categories that were not already covered. It would have been better to design the survey in line with ETHOS from the outset. The timing was in parallel to that of the MPHASIS project.

It was hoped that the study would supply data on numbers of homeless people, their profiles, and the different provisions available in different cities and regions. It would also be a vehicle for establishing standards and promoting ways to improve services, especially through the three workshops. Results for 2006 revealed 8,400 inpatients among a total population of 8 million, 13,438 outpatient services, and 15,142 eviction preventions. The stock of inpatient services in December 2007 totalled 5,005. However, there was too little – if any - information on rough sleepers, people who do not use services, people in precarious accommodation, and the proportion of double counts. Mr Ginner said that in future, surveys in all Member States should use the ETHOS model and be comparable, combining data from a number of sources, including releasing institutions and censuses. He added that homelessness is a reason for, as well as a result of poverty, so poverty statistics must be linked in.

Questions and answers

Questions concerned how far the study diverged from ETHOS, the nature of the questionnaire, and whether figures were broken down by *Land*. Did it cover people living with family and friends?

Mr Ginner said ETHOS has not been adopted by Austrian regions, and provisions such as emergency shelter for young people are handled in different ways. The questionnaire asked service providers to supply numbers. Figures were collated nationally and regionally. An earlier study by BAWO, 10 years ago, offered more scope for comparison, and served for planning and giving providers confidence in the services they are supplying. This is more important than the numbers themselves, which change. In the same way, if data could be compared across Europe, it would incentivise countries that are less active or successful. It was impossible to count people living with relatives because they did not make contact with service providers.

Peer country discussion on definitions, counting and studies, impacts on target groups, and data collection

Miklós Vecsei revealed that the Hungarian national census does not reach 2% of the population: some 200,000 people who have been born, are not dead, and are thought to be living in Hungary. Since 1999, the '3rd February Working Group' has carried out an annual survey of homeless people in Budapest, but it is clear that a lot of people prefer to remain hidden – especially immigrants. Many services exist, but people who use them (for example attending a day centre to have a bath) may not be homeless.

Margareta Mahidi believed that in Austria in the register-based census, people who have

actually moved abroad but are still included in the population register compensate for those not covered. **Jonina Hermansdottir** said there are 6,100 homeless people registered in Norway. That does not include individuals unknown to the service providers including illegal immigrants. Initials and dates of birth help to eliminate double counting, which amounts to some 10%.

Sepp Ginner suggested that double counting can be minimised by comparing different data sources. But it is virtually impossible to collect data on rough sleepers other than physically. Barcelona is experimenting with a one-day count on the streets. The new Austrian social aid system will give everyone an 'e-card'. This could facilitate sharing of data, although it might be opposed on the grounds of revealing too many personal details.

Lars Benjaminsen from the Danish National Centre for Social Research said that in Denmark, service providers are asked to supply individual data, and this reveals more about personal circumstances. Double counting is estimated to reach 16% approx. According to **Bill Edgar**, the Dutch system compiles personal data using a unique identifier, and then aggregates it to preserve identities. The London Chain system counts rough sleepers through outreach workers who are in constant touch with people on the streets. **Annika Remaeus**, from the National Board of Health and Welfare in Sweden, said individual rough sleepers in Nordic countries tend to be well-known to social services.

Frédéric Berger from CEPS/INSTEAD in Luxembourg said his organisation carried out a national survey of homeless people three years ago, in 2006, based on face-to-face interviews. Between 6 and 12 February, they counted 715 people in shelters and supported accommodation. Their situations were very diverse. Of these, 568 took part in the survey (79%), which revealed a roughly equal proportion of men and women, and a high representation of younger people and members of single parent families. One in three had already been on the streets before. The Ministry of Family and Integration has now decided to implement a new counting system run by NGOs, using common criteria.

Cecile Kellens-Greisch from the Luxembourg Ministry for Family and Integration added that clients can give social assistance workers permission to pass on their details to other services, to save time. Luxembourg does not use an ID number but a secret PIN that the client can choose to reveal. In Germany, said **Helmut Güntert** from the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, institutions, cities and *Länder* carry out voluntary counting, but since it is not obligatory there are gaps. Some NGOs submit figures to national authorities that aggregate and publish them annually. The only statutory figures relate to homeless people picked up by the police. **Renate Walter-Hamann** from German Caritas confirmed that *Länder* use different reporting standards and Germany has no standard basis for data collection.

Sepp Ginner pointed out that data collection costs money, which NGOs do not have. Governments must make funds available to them. The demand for comparable EU data on unemployment – which are now available – was launched 20 years ago. Individual governments must be pressured to do the same for homelessness. Both statistics and profiles are needed for the design of good services. **Bill Edgar** said the UK employs 15 staff to collect data from social housing providers. It costs £1 million a year, but the saving for the government is enormous. Many service providers have computerised data systems, which could be collated with a modest investment. During the credit crunch, it is useful for local authorities to be able to show they are saving money by rehousing people. The political message should be that hard data show that good services save money.

Freek Spennewijn said governments are obliged to include homeless people in the 2011 census, but FEANTSA is concerned it will not yield useful information because the baseline figure in many countries will be inaccurate. In Belgium, existing datasets on homelessness will not be used in 2011. The European Commission has a political responsibility to intervene, through Eurostat, to prepare an EU strategy to avoid inaccurate data. It is not a threat but an opportunity.

There were **questions** about whether governments know they must include rough sleepers in the census. In Sweden, discussions are underway on how to do it. In Denmark it would be politically unacceptable to leave them out. After 2011, will governments make it known that the figures exist? **Lars Benjaminsen** said it is important to develop a range of data sources (housing registers, social providers, rough sleeper surveys) to build up a historical record of how people become homeless.

Bill Edgar said that for the purposes of the census, there is an EU definition (Directive 2008) of people with "no usual place of residence". Countries with register-based systems could include people in insecure accommodation, but it will be hard to recognise them. We need to refine different categories of homelessness in register-based countries, and separate them from other forms of collective living such as student hostels. Finland can identify 26,000 homeless people in four different categories. There must be a mutual learning process, especially for countries in the process of modifying their systems, without waiting 10 years until the next census. For example, it should be possible to obtain figures on people living with relatives, and an EU-wide definition of houses unfit for human habitation is lacking.

The UN Economic Commission for Europe and Conference of European Statisticians (CES) recommendations of July 2006 includes definitions. Secondary homelessness covers insecure and institutional accommodation. Census offices should declare publicly how they mean to count primary homelessness.

Michele Calandrino wondered what the European Commission could further do at this stage to help. He proposed a "strong political push" from the EU, by urging Member States to put resources in place.

Final session

Following a long debate about whether homeless people have special needs, said **Sepp Ginner**, FEANTSA concluded that they have exactly the same needs as other people. However, administrations should be aware that merely providing housing is often inadequate and that homeless people have multi-faceted problems requiring the combined intervention of different services. Homelessness is a big problem at the political level but a small problem at individual level (it is easier to house one person than to resolve the problem).

Špela Razpotnik from the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education, said homelessness is a relatively new phenomenon in Slovenia and the country has been developing strategies for some 10 years. Clients do not form a single group, like drug users or mentally ill people, and those with multiple problems are most likely to find it difficult to access services. New emerging groups have special problems: for example some service providers refuse to recognise young people as homeless. Therefore, the first step is recognition.

Peter Juul emphasised the need for coordination. People who are merely homeless can seek help by themselves. Services have an obligation to draw up a 'master plan' for the individual that may include health care, debt aid, or psychiatric help. This does not happen because municipalities give homeless people low priority.

Christl van Gerven from the stakeholder organisation Eurocities said group members recognise the need for an 'integrated chain' approach tackling not only housing but also mental health, addiction, debt and coping ability. Most cities have specific housing types, such as unconventional, so-called 'freak' houses, which can be appropriate for some people, but are hard to establish in city centres. She also highlighted the administrative burden that data collection places on staff – it is frustrating for people who have to spend 50% of their time not actually helping people.

Bill Edgar said that the 2007 *Measuring Homelessness in Europe* study for the European Commission tried to identify core variables for case management systems, for use in strategic planning. Monitoring structural and institutional factors is easier than personal pathway issues. However he urged participants not to be overwhelmed. It might not be possible to put integrated national strategies into place at once, but programmes in capital or key cities can be built on and extended. It is important to share information, as Eurocities does. He gave the example of Ireland, where the data collection scheme set up in Dublin in 1990 led to the development of a nationwide system.

The day concluded with the screening of a short video on active inclusion, produced for the European Commission.

Day 2

NGO Statements

Eurocities: Christl van Gerven said the discussion about data collection needs to be seen in the context of what it is used for. Deeper analysis is required to get to the root of the problem, in order to end homelessness rather than manage it.

She wondered what can be done to count people who do not want to be counted or do not want to be in the system – like Roma or people without legal papers. A lot of data collection is taking place, but it is more focused on input than output. Policy-making requires flow data. In the City of Rotterdam, a business case has been made showing that every €1 invested in care for the homeless saves €2 on police and justice services. Such data are important to demonstrate the benefits of action. She noted that policy-makers tend to talk *about* homeless people, but not *to* them, whereas they could form a useful resource. They know about their circumstances and have views on the quality of services. "We need to take their opinions to heart," he concluded.

FEANTSA: Freek Spennewijn said data collection should not just be for planning purposes, but also for the design and evaluation of policy. Both data collection and planning only make sense in the context of an overall strategy to combat homelessness. We should not allow information to remain isolated at local level, but collate data at the level where policies are decided, i.e. regional

and national.

The MPHASIS project has developed models, and we should not try to repeat the work, he noted. The MPHASIS results already provide answers to some of the questions raised in the Peer Review. Both quantitative and qualitative data are important in formulating policy on homelessness. More and more countries are trying to reduce the time people spend in shelters, because these are artificial locations for people awaiting a permanent solution, so flow data is crucial. Continuous recording is more useful than point in time surveys.

Planning: setting targets is important, and ending homelessness *is* a realistic objective. In preparation for the European Year for combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, FEANTSA has defined five objectives:

1. nobody should have to sleep rough;
2. nobody should be in emergency shelters;
3. nobody should stay in hostels longer than necessary;
4. nobody should be homeless on release from an institution;
5. no young person should be homeless during the transition to independence.

He remarked on a tendency to overcomplicate solutions. They should be straightforward: supported housing, plus institutional accommodation for those who need it.

Budgeting: why do different countries make such different budget provisions? In Europe, cost-benefit analysis is a bit taboo, whereas in US and Australia it can – if done well – drive homelessness policies. Few countries have strategic research programmes underpinning policy. A common understanding of the scope, nature and causes of homelessness, as well as consensus on the solution, is fundamental to effective policy.

Role of the EU: the current momentum on homelessness must be exploited. The Commission must follow up the MPHASIS project. The 2011 census is a unique opportunity to compile accurate figures, and the Commission and Eurostat should provide technical and financial support to Member States. Finally, Written Declaration 111 of the European Parliament, calling for an end to street homelessness by 2015, is an important tool vis-à-vis the Commission and Council, and its demands should be integrated into the OMC and national policies.

Questions and answers/debate

Bernhard Mager said Vienna depends on information about evictions from the courts, but this has been found to be unreliable. There is no point collecting the information if it cannot be acted upon. **Michele Calandrino** queried the distinction between 'voluntary' and 'non-voluntary' homelessness. In Italy, Roma are not considered to be homeless because their lifestyle is itinerant. Does such a distinction make sense? Europe-wide definitions are made more difficult by the fact that some countries, especially in the south of Europe, also do not consider people involuntarily living with family or friends to be homeless. **Nicoletta Pannuzzi** said Italy's 2008 study did not include Roma, not because they choose to be homeless, but because they are not known to service providers and so a different instrument is required to collect reliable data. "It's not because we are not interested."

Jonina Hermannsdottir said Oslo has rough sleepers who choose to live outside the system. However, this does not mean services do not work with them. They have special needs – almost all have severe mental health problems – and specific solutions include ‘freak’ houses outside the community. This is one of the most difficult groups to deal with.

Other questions raised included the possibility of making the private housing sector more socially and politically accountable, given that most countries are increasingly privatising their housing stock, and whether using cost-benefit arguments, particularly with regard to security spending, could be politically counter-productive, in that they stereotype homeless people as dangerous. Other participants felt that cost-benefit evidence is a pragmatic means of showing that investment in housing support saves money on hospital care, police and courts. However, it is easier to demonstrate cost benefits for rough sleepers than families in hostels, for example.

Mr Spennewijn felt that EU policy of funding Roma lobby organisations makes it more difficult for other organisations to represent them. Responding to a suggestion that the homelessness debate could be approached via the concept of inequality, like poverty, he warned that while society does need to be more equal, this could stand in the way of immediate or targeted action for homeless people. Finally, he said it is not a solution to put homeless people in empty houses. Although more must be done on the supply side, it is not simple. For example, in Belgium, only 6% of housing stock is social housing.

Session two: Counting the homeless – strategies, planning, evaluation mechanisms

Planning in rural and in urban areas

Social planning in Upper Austria

Barbara Gerstmann from the regional government of Upper Austria said the *Land* has 1.4 million inhabitants, 31% in towns. It covers 12,000 km², and the capital is Linz. Legal responsibility for homelessness is established by the 1998 Social Aid Law. The provincial government commissions support organisations to provide services, and finances premises and operating costs (€3 million in 2008).

Preparation of the Social Programme started in 2003. In 2007 the planning circle was implemented, followed in 2008 by a decision (Ordinance) of the provincial government. Support organisations give annual feedback on costs and provided services. Service and technical standards are agreed in cooperation between the regional government and the organisations, and this forms the basis of future contracts.

The Social Programme has to cover:

- The aims of social planning (principles and guidelines);
- Analysis of current status and future needs;
- Development of necessary measures;
- Implementation.

The Social Programme also sets down the instruments for social planning: the province is divided into six planning regions with different structures. Nine separate organisations provide services for homeless people – at least one per area. One organisation is responsible for the preparation of a comprehensive report for each planning region, which must be submitted to the Department

of Social Affairs by April. The report covers the number of people threatened and affected by homelessness, socio-demographic data, and needs and measures to be taken.

On the basis of this data, a professional committee (*Fachgremium*) prepares a single consolidated report for Upper Austria, which must include concrete implementation measures for a period of up to six years. The Department of Social Affairs heads the committee, which includes representatives from all nine service providers, as well as homeless people, public administration, and experts as required. It consults with the federal government on all matters relating to homeless people, and meets at least once a year in May. Information in the report goes to the political adviser in charge, and is used for updating the Social Programme.

The committee carries out evaluation and assessment of the planning process, although a customer survey is planned for the future.

Social Planning in Vienna

Kurt Gutleiderer (Vienna Social Fund) said that annual reports have been obligatory since 1991. The restructuring of the social sector created the demand for uniform standards of documentation. In 2004 the office for reporting devised a basic data set, including accounting and social statistical data. Data are submitted to the VSF once a year and an evaluation published in an annual report on the homeless.

The VSF controls social services. Stakeholders from the private and non-statutory welfare sectors provide services to homeless people. Funds are supplied in two ways: subsidies to service providers or direct payments to supported people. The Counselling Centre for the Homeless (bzWO) was set up in 2008 to verify who was eligible for support and allocate needs-oriented services. The case management system assesses services and objectives. A client-related evaluation takes place for every individual, while system-related evaluation helps in planning and modifying services. The counselling centre collects data in a number of fields, including personal information, history, current accommodation situation and reason for homelessness, education, debts, health, psychosocial situation and ability to live independently.

Mr Gutleiderer presented a model of stock and flow which demonstrated the complexity of planning. When clients enter the support system, they have many different options for counselling and support. Connections between internal areas enable them to switch at any time. People leave the system when they secure their own accommodation, or return to homelessness without claiming support. The VSF is monitoring entry criteria, but even if these can be tightened, the number of people needing assistance will continue to rise, unless the number of people leaving the system increases. The “negative side of the positive” is that if support enables people to live longer, this also has an impact on demand.

Planning: Attempts at statistical analysis of the links between unemployment, divorce, and eviction and the rate of homelessness have so far proved inconclusive or contrary to empirical observations. The database needs improvement, he said, “but we have to abandon mathematical models for forecasting because the factors are too complex”. Observations allow specific trends to be identified, and as a result priority is now going to outpatients provisions (medical care, childcare etc), temporary accommodation with support, and adequate forms of permanent accommodation. Mr Gutleiderer concluded with a quotation from John Lennon: “Life is what

happens when you're planning other things."

Peer country discussion on development of strategies, targets, influence of EU legislation and evaluation mechanisms

Michele Calandrino underlined the possible role of the private, for-profit sector. It could be more involved in planning, e.g. concerning housing supply and giving prior notification of evictions. Housing policy as such is not an EU competence, but internal market rules apply, which means that the issue of housing is approached not only in terms of policy coordination but also from the point of view of consumer protection, access to the housing market and competition in housing provision. The private sector needs to assume more responsibility, which could be developed through corporate social responsibility (CSR) and promoting social sustainability in public procurement.

Mr Gutleiderer said the VSF would welcome more involvement from the private sector. It has launched a project with one service provider to enable homeless people to be placed in private flats. **Sepp Ginner** felt the problems are in the social not the building sector: landlords are not interested in "complicated" tenants who require other services. **Bernhard Mager** said that in Vienna, private landlords who get building subsidies still have to be forced to cooperate. A small number are willing to offer affordable flats e.g. to women with children, around Christmas-time, but they want to decide whom they regard as deserving. **Freek Spennewijn** argued that the private sector is only interested if there are opportunities for high profit margins, and should not be an excuse for public authorities to shirk their responsibility.

Gerhard Eitel from the VSF said social sustainability has just been introduced as a new criterion in public procurement procedures for builders securing contracts. Vienna stopped privatisation five to six years ago, but he referred to the "shocking consequences" in some new EU Member States in the 1990s: flats were given to sitting tenants at low prices, leaving the state without funds for new housing, while investment in building maintenance disappeared.

Mr Mager said Vienna has a strong tenants' union that gives advice, and some financial support to prevent eviction is available through FAWOS. He explained that every resident has access to the subsidised housing market, up to a certain income threshold. However, they have to provide some of the building costs of new flats themselves, so this option is unavailable for the very poor. Older flats are oversubscribed. In 2010-11 it will be hard to get extra funding because of the economic crisis and rising unemployment.

Country reports

Germany: homeless people receive a grant (social welfare aid) a) for food/clothing, b) for housing rental, depending on the size of the family and local housing costs. They find their own accommodation. Average payment for one person is €380 per month. Within the framework of the Federal Social Assistance Act, the *Länder* and communities take the main responsibility for social support, so coordination between national, regional and local levels is important. Six big NGOs have a strong, traditional role in the welfare system: for example, more than half a million people work with Caritas. The social housing system has changed since the 1980s, when there used to be a complex system of subsidies. Current policy is to turn homeless people into consumers on the private housing market. A combination of measures would be better because it is difficult for

vulnerable people to secure commercial housing, especially in big cities. On the other hand, empowering homeless people is important, and over the last 10 years they have set up their own associations.

Sweden: has a national strategy with four targets (see country paper) and involving a lot of stakeholders. The challenge is to get it applied at local level. There are 295 independent municipalities with their own political points of view. When asked, 150-160 of them said they collect data, but only 22 had comprehensive datasets. The 2005 mapping exercise was carried out through a questionnaire to stakeholders, and revealed 17,800 homeless people. However, municipalities do not feel they "own" the figures. There are a number of umbrella organisations working with homeless people, but they tend to focus primarily on other issues (e.g. mental health, addiction and abuse).

Denmark: services are regulated by the Social Assistance Act. The 98 municipalities are obliged to support homeless people, but provision varies. The state gives a 50% subsidy, allowing it to set standards. In 2008 the government adopted a national strategy with four objectives: 1) reduce rough sleeping; 2) prevent homelessness among young people (under 24); limit stays in hostels to a maximum of three to four months; 4) people should not be homeless on release from institutions. The government allocated €65 million for four years, and selected eight municipalities with about one-third of the country's homeless population. They have drawn up local strategies with 'SMART' (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely) objectives, and signed 'contracts' with the Ministry, which provides an advisory team to monitor progress. Projects must be evaluated, and will be implemented nationally if successful. Other municipalities received a budget of €4-5 million for housing support. The strategy will be assessed in 2012 to see which measures have worked. Denmark is privileged to have quite a lot of data. However, it is located in different databases (for specific categories such as drug abusers). Putting it together would help in constructing risk models, flows etc. Municipalities and service providers must know they have something to gain from collecting data.

Slovenia: **Barbara Staric-Strajnar** from the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs said the country has no homelessness strategy. Major privatisation of housing stock took place 18 years ago, reducing rented accommodation from 25-30% to 8%. Local authorities do not have enough housing to meet demand, so people can get a subsidy, although vulnerable individuals have difficulty getting into the market. Many of those registering with social services for accommodation are living with family or friends. **Špela Razpotnik** added that Slovenia has a 'bottom-up' approach because support starts at NGO level. However, NGOs also have to rent on the private market, which is very expensive. Links need to be improved with government at different levels. NGOs are involved in planning where it exists, for example on the European Year for combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

Hungary: **Gellert Ghyczy** from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour said Hungary's national strategy was drawn up by NGOs. There are two levels of administration: national government is responsible for legislation and municipalities supply services. The strategy's main principles are 1) zero tolerance of rough sleeping, especially among women, children, families or elderly people; 2) extending services, e.g. longer opening times for night shelters, daycare centres; 3) reform of housing policy. Support for the homeless is currently separate from housing policy so coordination of services is difficult. **Miklós Vecsei** added that provision is at the core of the problem, with only 4% of homes in municipal ownership, and the government claiming it cannot help because it does not control housing. Large numbers of evictions take place. He urged state intervention to fund house building.

Italy: there are two main issues: 1) homelessness, poverty and social exclusion are not priorities for the national government. There is an annual report, but it gets little attention. 2) homelessness is not related to housing policy, which is a regional competence. Social provision is a municipal responsibility, so there are thousands of different strategies, usually with a lack of vision and coordination. NGOs are often involved, but without coordination there is a lack of data. The current national project was set up by the previous government and may not get support in the future. The government recently produced a White Paper on welfare, with three pillars: the individual, the family, and enterprise – ignoring the social community. This is a dangerous trend since homelessness is closely linked to social relations. **Nicoletta Pannuzzi** praised the groundbreaking agreement between the Welfare Ministry, the umbrella body for homeless people (Fio.PSD) and Caritas, to carry out the study, which will furnish national data for the first time. It includes a census of service providers in 158 municipalities, including the biggest ones. It will attempt to count homeless people, although it excludes Roma, people in overcrowded homes or living with family or friends. Finally, it will carry out interviews with service providers and homeless people, and undertake a quantitative breakdown by age, sex, nationality and physical/mental conditions. The aim is to create a network of service providers, raise awareness, and encourage them to collect data.

Norway: the country is privileged to have money and political commitment. Senior ministers want to end homelessness, but problems still exist and good data are needed. The country has some experience from the 2005-2007 homelessness strategy that it can share: 1) The time frame is important, and three years is too short; 2) Goals must be measurable (the strategy set five, but only one could be fully evaluated) and realistic. Goals are set by government but implemented locally, and it is difficult to secure local authority support if goals are unrealistic; 3) Plan for implementation, because “there is life after strategies”. Some municipalities thought they could stop work once the strategy ended; 4) involve NGOs and users. The Norwegian State Housing Bank acts as the government’s coordinator. **Liv Kristensen** said the bank would like to be able to reach every local authority, but if this proves impossible it may adopt the Danish strategy of selecting those with the highest number of homeless people and agreeing a contract.

Luxembourg: **Frédéric Berger** said there is no national strategy, and no bridge between ministries of housing, health and social affairs. The new government has proposed better coordination, but each ministry is anxious to retain its powers. Competition also exists between NGOs. Luxembourg does not have a lot of social housing, and it is allocated according to income. However, rents are revised each year, and can be more expensive than the private market.

Netherlands: **Christl van Gerven** made a brief report. The Netherlands has 450 municipalities, including 43 large ones receiving a special grant from the Ministry of Health and Welfare to subsidise NGOs working on homelessness. A four-year strategic plan for social relief in four big cities was put in place in 2006, but the time scale is too short. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment has a National Action Plan, but it does not cover homelessness. Municipal goals relate to outcomes (numbers of people in stable accommodation) and Rotterdam is on course to meet its targets.

In a short **final debate**, some participants felt countries with national strategies are lucky, in having a single competence at high level. Others pointed out that regional authorities are proud to deal with their responsibilities, and it would be hard to harmonise needs, for example, between cities and rural areas. It was pointed out that strategies that suit a country like Denmark, which has little immigration, could be a source of inspiration but would be hard to apply in France, for example.

Transferability aspects, relevance and key learning elements for peer countries and stakeholder representatives

Bill Edgar presented a wide range of lessons and recommendations:

- Different EU countries are at different stages with regard to data collection and support for the homeless. Mapping service provision is a good place to start for those Member States that have little information.
- Highlighting the cost benefit of prevention can help to draw attention to the main issues at stake. For example, a 2008 study in England suggested savings of £21,000 on temporary accommodation and £54,500 on health, legal and other costs, over two years.
- More research is needed on specific groups such as young people, and on the extent of empty housing, how housing markets operate, and how the private rental sector can be harnessed to help counter homelessness. The growing privatisation of housing stock brings a need for better regulation of landlords, or social rental agencies (SRAs) as in Belgium.
- People may become voluntarily or involuntarily homeless, and groups with difficult lifestyles may need permanent support. Homelessness is often the result of failure in other service areas such as psychiatric care. Involuntary sharing with family or friends is one of the least understood phenomena, including overcrowding in ethnic communities.
- Evidence is necessary to establish service and quality standards, so there is a need for studies on outcomes and successful strategies. Efficient structures for planning and monitoring are required: for example Ireland has local planning forums.
- Forecasting is never 100% accurate. Yet there are models in existence for predicting housing support and community protection needs. Whereas case management takes place locally, sustainable centralised data coordination and analysis is vital to support policy-making, and can be outsourced e.g. to university research depts.
- We need to understand what information is needed, in order to develop mechanisms to acquire it. The MPHASIS website identifies core data.
- Norway and Denmark have developed SMART goals. Lessons can be passed on to others. Programmes need a baseline and timescale (three years is too short).
- Organisational management: In Member States with many small local authorities it may be more cost-effective to focus on large urban centres. Some countries have NGO-led (bottom-up) systems. Capacity building may be necessary to create structures and mechanisms for data collection at local level (Norway has a fund for capacity building). Service users must be involved. Care is needed in transplanting existing systems into different contexts (e.g. Ireland to Budapest).
- Information output must be appropriate for use. It is important not to overcomplicate efforts.
- Governance: should data collection be mandatory or voluntary? Where governments

provide money for NGOs to offer services, compiling information could be a funding criterion, although this could be politically sensitive in some countries.

- Staff must be properly trained to carry out and understand the purpose of data collection.

Closing remarks

Michele Calandrino outlined the three main aspects of the EU's role:

1. The EU must reinforce political will in Member States through a high-level mandate to the relevant actors to collect data. A clear message should go to the Spring Council 2010 on the need for robust information and monitoring systems.
2. Data should be used for defining strategy and achieving specific goals, and the EU can support this process. The existing European objective is broad (access to affordable and quality housing). However, progress is underway on questions such as measuring affordability and defining overcrowding. The Commission will continue talks with all stakeholders on the preparation of the next census, which has the potential of providing useful baselines. Eurostat will produce the set of agreed indicators each year, which will also be published in the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion.
3. The EU does not have competency on homelessness or housing policy, and therefore is not yet in a position to draw up a Europe-wide strategy. However, the Commission will continue to support Member States.

He concluded that data collection and strategy must go hand in hand, rather than one preceding the other. Objectives should be SMART, but not every aim can be subsumed under quantified targets. The key message is that homelessness is a complicated problem, but solutions are possible. A number of examples already exist of data collection systems operating and showing benefits. "The work starts now," he added, urging participants to disseminate what they had learnt from the Peer Review.