

Counting the homeless – improving the basis for planning assistance

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1. Experiences with counting the homeless

- 1.1 For 5 years now, there has been a comprehensive definition of homelessness by FEANTSA (ETHOS definition). Does your country use this definition (as a whole or partly)? What experiences have been gained using this, or a similar definition? If it has not been used, are there any reasons why not?

FEANTSA defines homelessness as follows:

- *Rooflessness* (without a shelter of any kind, sleeping rough).
- *Houselessness* (with a place to sleep, but temporary, in institutions or shelters).
- Living in *insecure housing* (threatened with severe exclusion due to insecure tenancies, eviction, domestic violence).
- Living in *inadequate housing* (in caravans on illegal campsites, in unfit housing, in extreme overcrowding).

The definition used by The National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW) is in complete congruence with the first two categories in ETHOS: “Rooflessness” and “houselessness”. The third category, “living in insecure housing”, is included to a certain extent.

However, people in risk of eviction are not included.

ETHOS contains an additional category that is not included in the definition used by The National Board of Health and Welfare: “living in inadequate housing” (living in a hut, accommodation without sanitary facilities, accommodation which has been condemned according to national legislation, living in caravans or campsites not intended for year-round living, crowded housing).

NBHW had a commission from the government to do a mapping of the scale of homelessness in Sweden. 2005. The mapping was to be designed as to allow comparisons with results from previous mappings carried out 1993 and 1999. The category “living in inadequate housing” is captured in the questionnaire and it is a quite small group in Sweden. People at risk of eviction are not included because we consider our definition is

broad enough. Most of the persons who live at risk of eviction are not actually evicted – we capture them in other categories, like people living in insecure housing.

1.2 In several Member States there have already been countings of and studies about homeless people. What preconditions (general framework) had to be established beforehand? – political, administrative, organisational. Who had to be ‘convinced’?

The aim of continuously monitoring homelessness is to create the conditions necessary for carrying out an effective work for combating homelessness and to design measures in order to support homeless people. A monitoring system also makes it possible to assess the effects of measures that have been taken.

The homeless people and the persons working in the field of homelessness also have to be convinced that the knowledge received from the monitoring system is used for that purpose, by authorities on local level as well as on the national level. The persons involved have to see action - not just words.

1.3 Are countings and studies (commissioned) by public authorities one-off initiatives or are they carried out at regular intervals? How have the findings of studies been used?

1.4 Did studies lead to a change of strategy? If yes, why and what changes? Has there been a change in the aims of the strategy?

The national strategy in Sweden is based on the mapping carried out in 2005 and the experience from the previous work to combat homelessness, on national level as well as on local level. A lot of knowledge and inspiration is also gained from strategies and work in the other Nordic countries. In Sweden there are some important researchers who have a great impact on the policy level. The Swedish government have an aim to build there policy on evidence based practice.

1.5 What has been the impact of studies on the target group? What is the effect on the public perception of the problem?

Nobody in a welfare country like Sweden is supposed to be homeless. It is a wide agreement from all political parties. The Swedish strategy to combat homelessness is a concrete example.

1.6 In your opinion: Is it really possible to steer the battle against homelessness through standardised/harmonised counting?

It is one piece of action – but just one piece. To be successful a full strategy has to be conducted.

1.7 Which data has not been collected in your country so far, but proved to be very relevant for your country?

NBHW has presented a plan for how homelessness in Sweden can be systematically monitored over time.

2. Strategies, planning, evaluation

2.1 Who is developing the strategies for assisting the homeless in your country? (development on national, regional or local/city level?) Who provides the financial resources to implement them?

Since 2002, the National Board of Health and Welfare has been commissioned by the government to obtain knowledge about the extent of homelessness and to develop methods for counteracting homelessness using surveys and supporting local development projects.

In February 2007, the government presented for the first time a national strategy for counteracting homelessness, called *Homelessness – multiple faces, multiple responsibilities*.

2.2 Who are the actors concerning planning and strategy development? Who has a co-ordination role and what are the problems encountered?

The National Board of Health and Welfare was given the commission by the government to lead and coordinate a national work to counteract homelessness and exclusion from the housing market. The work is to be carried out in consultation with the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, the Swedish Enforcement Authority, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. Together, these entities make up the national steering group for the homelessness strategy. An external reference group is also affiliated with the assignment. Among others, user organisations are included in this group.

2.3 Are there any targets at local or national levels? If so, who sets them and who is accountable for achieving them? Is progress regularly monitored? If so, by whom?

In February 2007, the government decided on a strategy for counteracting homelessness and exclusion from the housing market [5]. The strategy comprises the period 2007–2009.

Four objectives have been pointed out:

1. Everyone shall be guaranteed a roof over his/her head and be offered further co-ordinated action based on the needs of the individual.

2. There shall be a reduction in the number of women and men who are in prison or at a treatment unit, or have supported accommodation and who do not have any housing before being discharged or released.
3. Entry into the ordinary housing market shall be facilitated for women and men who are in temporary and transitional, supported accommodation, provided by the social services or others.
3. The number of evictions **shall decrease and no children shall be evicted.**

2.4 The European Parliament has adopted a declaration calling for an end to street homelessness by 2015. What consequences does this have on the local and national levels? How do EU legislation, processes and exchanges of best practice influence the local and national levels?

Everyone shall be guaranteed a roof over his/her head and be offered further co-ordinated action based on the needs of the individual. This is one of the four objectives in the Swedish strategy.

2.5 Have there been any specifics looking back on a certain time frame? (taking into account economic, judicial, structural and societal conditions, housing and labour market, migration, income, tenancy law, etc.). How is evaluation carried out?

NBHW provide financial support to 23 development projects in the field of the target above. All of them are included in an extensive and external evaluation, run by the University of Lund. The evaluation is led by Professor Hans Swärd. The result has to be presented in January 2011.