

Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe
(BAWO)

***Wohnungslosigkeit und Wohnungslosenhilfe
in Österreich – eine aktuelle österreich-weite
Erhebung [Homelessness and Services for
the Homeless in Austria – An Up-To-Date
Austria-Wide Investigation]***

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Publikationen/Grundlagen/BAWO-Studie_zur_Wohnungslosigkeit_2009.pdf](http://www.bawo.at/fileadmin/user_upload/public/Dokumente/Publikationen/Grundlagen/BAWO-Studie_zur_Wohnungslosigkeit_2009.pdf)

The added value of reliable data for establishing criteria, assessments and identifying innovative ways of development at both the national level and for international comparative research and exchange cannot be overestimated. Finally, after ten years, the Austrian BAWO (Federal Association for Organisations Working with the Homeless) has succeeded in presenting a definitive nationwide picture of persons using homeless services. The study, which provides a quantitative assessment of the extent and profile of homelessness, as well as the services available for homeless people, was carried out by Heinz Schoibl (BAWO and 'Helix Forschungsberatung' in Salzburg) and colleagues in BAWO, commissioned by the BMASK Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection.

The study mainly relies on reports from administrative departments in the laender (regions) on services for homeless people, and provides prevalence data for one year (2006) and a snapshot of service use on a reference date (end of 2007). Information is also included on the prevention of eviction, extending the coverage from those affected by homelessness to those threatened by housing loss. This highlights the importance of prevention for future homelessness policy.

The book comprises eight chapters (including numerous tables and graphs) and several appendices. It is preceded by a thirteen-page summary of the results and an abstract of the final report. The first three chapters provide a concise insight into the cross-linking of the project within the Austrian field of experts and stakeholders, the quantitative and qualitative homelessness problem, as well as into the methods of data collection used. Based on the reports from the laender, Chapter 4 describes homelessness and services for homeless people in the nine

federal laender, which, due to the federal structure of the state and the strongly decentralised benefits and services resulting from it, is of great importance. Chapter 5 analyses laender-specific data in the Austrian national context and relates them to additional material, such as data and facts on poverty and on housing shortage and homelessness, as well as earlier studies in this area. To ease verification and comparability, the presentation of results also takes into account the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS), as can be seen in Chapter 6, which also highlights the limits of direct transferability. The profile of homelessness in Austria using socio-demographic variables (gender, age, migration, socio-economic activity, access to diverse services, housing status and so on) can be found in Chapter 7. The qualitative dimension was developed in workshops in the respective laender and results on 'municipal models in the services for the homeless', regionalisation and development of standards for the homeless are presented in the final chapter.

The investigation shows a stock of more than 37,000 sets of customer data of 'cases using services' (from 2006). The additional reference date inquiry presented almost 10,000 sets of customer/client data. The services for the prevention of eviction document 15,000 persons (among them one-third accompanying children and young people) per year (2006), and 1,200 on the reference date (end 2007). Slightly less than 13,500 persons (2006) / nearly 4,400 (end 2007) used outreach assistance. Night shelters or emergency accommodation were used by approximately 1,100 persons, and other forms of temporary accommodation and/or floating support by 8,400 (2006) / 5,000 (end 2007).

Due to the complexity of the data and the problem of double-counting, the authors are careful not to provide overall figures about the proportion of the population who were threatened or affected by homelessness in 2006. However, a rough calculation in relation to the 8.3 million inhabitants of Austria in 2007 suggests that a maximum of 0.45 per cent of the 2006 population could be known as 'cases using services'.

The study found that users of homeless services (except for the eviction prevention services) were predominantly middle-aged male Austrians. The rate of women was low in both outreach and housing services (21 per cent and 31 per cent respectively), whereas information from the services for the prevention of eviction indicate that men and women were almost equally affected by precarious and insecure housing provision. The share of clients without Austrian citizenship in services for homeless people mostly averaged at just under one-quarter, and one-third in the housing support services.

The age groups were relatively equally distributed among the various segments of assistance. Their socio-economic situation was particularly affected by the fact that the clients are strongly disadvantaged in accessing employment and only a few have stable employment.

The attempt to base the outline of results on the ETHOS typology highlights the various flaws in the Austrian structure of data collection and assessment. And this study provides another incentive to integrate broader perspectives at the national level.

The comparison within the laender shows a distinct variation in both the extent and type of documented homelessness, which, among other things, depends on the different level of progress in the homeless services. While some possess a wider regional distribution of services, others still suffer from a distinct divide between rural and urban areas. Most laender, however, have established comprehensive services for the prevention of eviction. The qualitative workshops clearly demonstrated that urban agglomerations with well-developed systems of assistance act as 'motors' for the development of standards, while other regions still clearly exhibit developmental deficits.

The provision of a solid inventory of homeless services, and service users, in this study is invaluable. However, there are still distinct gaps in our knowledge due to the limitations of present data collection methods. Correspondingly, the authors correctly interpreted the data prudently and critically. Nonetheless, the study is clearly beneficial for wider housing research that aims to put the phenomena of precarious living conditions, housing threats and housing loss into a broader context of housing policy and housing provision. It is important that the study provided data on both a personal and a household level, and took account of the gender dimension.

The study was strengthened by access to specific data on legal proceedings from the courts, which represents a positive Austrian initiative allowing the coverage of housing threats and providing a system to get in touch with people affected. This forms the basis for the services to prevent eviction in Austria, which are already extensively installed and which may be of interest to other European countries.

The comparison of the quantitative data analysis and the results of the qualitative workshops are a useful conclusion to the study. Beyond this snapshot, the challenges, flaws and promising concepts, which deserve political support within Austria, become visible. The integration of the European development of indicators and of surveys on housing data (ETHOS, EU-SILC 2007 with a focus on housing issues) provides an important linkage to the European context.

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This reviewer hopes that current and future research into homelessness will also include those people not in touch with services (on the streets, rough sleepers etc.) and those affected by hidden homelessness (a subject matter especially relevant for women). The authors acknowledge this gap in the present study. At the same time, it is also hoped that institutional documentation will be further improved based on the clear analysis of this study.

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