

European Observatory on Homelessness

# Counting Homeless People in the 2011 Housing and Population Census

# 2

**EOH Comparative Studies  
on Homelessness**

**Brussels - December 2012**





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EUROPEAN  
OBSERVATORY  
ON HOMELESSNESS

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# 1. Foreword

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Data collection has always been an issue of prime concern for FEANTSA. Too often, policies to prevent and tackle homelessness are based on assumptions and beliefs. FEANTSA promotes evidence-based policy making to ensure public intervention strategies and services for homeless people become more effective and efficient. Such evidence can only be generated on the basis of solid data.

It is surprising just how few member states collect data on the extent of homelessness and profile of homeless people on a regular basis. FEANTSA had hoped that the 2011 European census, which obliged member states to cover homeless people for the first time, would produce comparable data on the extent and nature of homelessness for all EU member states. We asked the European Observatory on Homelessness to look into the way the census was carried out, and to analyse to what extent and how homelessness was covered. The result of this analysis is this research. It demonstrates that we were overly optimistic. Regrettably, the census will not allow for reliable comparisons between EU member states on the extent of homelessness, and in several countries the quality of the homeless data remains questionable. On a positive note, for some countries, the census was used to produce reliable statistics on homelessness for the first time ever.

This research shows that additional efforts to collect high-quality and timely data on homelessness are necessary in the *post-census* era. FEANTSA prefers registered data collected by NGOs and public authorities that manage services for the homeless. Registers can generate stock, prevalence and flow data, which all provide essential insights for policy makers and service providers. Occasional surveys might be necessary to include the *unserved* audience or to get more detailed information on the profile of the homeless population. The NGO sector is increasingly aware of the importance of evidence-based policies, and is willing to play its part in the collection of the necessary data.

The research also shows that the census results will not provide a reliable unique figure of the number of homeless people in Europe. This proves that FEANTSA's call to include a question in EU-SILC on past experiences of homelessness is probably the most realistic way to get an idea of the extent of homelessness in the European Union.

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This research is the second edition in a series of thematic research carried out by the European Observatory. In 2013, we will publish the results of the Observatory's thematic research on the costs of homelessness – another issue of key concern for FEANTSA.

I wish you pleasant and interesting reading.

**Rina Beers**  
President of FEANTSA

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## 2. Summary

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Fifteen homelessness experts were asked to complete a questionnaire on the enumeration of homeless people, and the estimation of the homeless population in the 2011 national level censuses that took place across the European Union. The experts were requested to draw upon their own knowledge, collect and review relevant material that detailed census methodologies, which were related to homelessness. They also conducted interviews with staff in census offices and with homelessness NGOs and other agencies that had a particular interest in the enumeration or estimation of the number of homeless people. Questionnaires were distributed to experts in the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Spain and the UK.

Some EU member states have relatively rich data on homelessness. These countries all tend to define people living rough and in emergency shelters or accommodation as being homeless. However, people in precarious or unfit accommodation, or who are concealed or 'hidden' in households, for example two families in housing designed for a single person or one family, may be regarded as homeless in one country but not viewed as homeless in another. This means there is inconsistency in the size and nature of the population that is defined as homeless, and therefore in the population which is counted or estimated as being the 'homeless' population across different countries.

The 2011 censuses represented a potentially important opportunity to collect consistent and comparable data on homelessness, allowing countries to be compared and, at least theoretically, to produce a figure or estimate that was representative of at least some forms of homelessness across the EU as a whole. In some countries, the 2011 census would also be the first time that a serious national-level attempt had been made to enumerate or estimate the extent of homelessness. In brief, work on generating more reliable data on homelessness commenced in 2005 with a project on measuring homelessness funded by the EC, which was specifically designed to facilitate statistical data collection. The MPHASIS project, from 2007 to 2009, also sought to improve and unify data collection on homelessness and housing exclusion. Limited EC guidance had been issued on how to define homelessness in advance of the 2011 censuses, which drew the following distinctions between forms of homelessness:

- (a) *Primary homelessness (or rooflessness). This category includes persons living in streets or without a shelter that would fall within the scope of living quarters;*
- (b) *Secondary homelessness. This category may include the following groups:*
- (i) *Persons with no place of usual residence, who move frequently between various types of accommodation (including dwellings, shelters or other living quarters);*
  - (ii) *Persons usually resident in long-term (also called “transitional”) shelters or similar arrangements for the homeless.*

This research explores the extent to which the 2011 censuses enumerated homelessness, reviewing their methodology and contrasting the approaches used in different countries with both the EC guidance for the 2011 censuses and the ETHOS typology of homelessness, which was developed by FEANTSA and the European Observatory on Homelessness. The research does not look in detail at the data that were collected (as in most instances these were yet to be released by the national census offices), but is instead a critical assessment of the extent to which the 2011 censuses collected robust and comparable data on homelessness across the EU.

The research found important differences between countries with register-based and non-register based methods of census enumeration. Register-based countries employed the national level databases to produce a count of their population during 2011, which could be updated on a continual basis. As register-based systems tended to be based on a home or institutional address, any population without a fixed address could be excluded from the main enumeration conducted for the census, though practice in register-based countries varied:

- Germany undertook a specific count of the population living in communal accommodation, including institutions on the night of the census. While this population included people in emergency and other communal accommodation for homeless people, no distinction was made between homelessness services and other forms of communal living, meaning that while homeless people in communal accommodation were counted, no separate data were produced that enumerated the homeless population in Germany.
- Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden did not count homeless people within their register-based censuses. All three countries had undertaken specific, national level, survey work to attempt to estimate at least their homeless populations, but this data collection was not part of the 2011 censuses.
- Slovenia undertook a partial count of homeless people as part of the register-based census, though only the population registered with local centres for social work were enumerated and this relied on cross-checking databases.

Using register-based systems was not a methodology that was well suited to enumerating or estimating homelessness. Although several register-based countries undertook separate exercises to estimate or count homelessness, none drew any distinction between primary or secondary homelessness in a way that reflected the 2011 EU guidance for the 2011 census.

Countries that did not use register-based systems and which instead used traditional counts to undertake the 2011 censuses tended to have made some efforts to enumerate homeless people as part of the general population count. However, the extent and nature of attempts to count homeless people varied considerably between different non-register based countries:

- Only Poland attempted to systematically enumerate primary and secondary homelessness in a manner consistent with EU guidance on incorporating homelessness in the 2011 censuses. Ireland partially followed the guidance, but only attempted to enumerate people who were living rough in a street count that was confined to Dublin. Hungary did employ a distinction between primary and secondary homelessness, but significant limitations in data collection are likely to have resulted in only a partial picture of homelessness.
- Portugal enumerated homeless people who were living rough and in emergency accommodation (effectively covering the population defined in the 2011 EU census guidance as primary homelessness), but did not enumerate other homeless populations.
- The Czech Republic, France, Italy and Lithuania attempted street counts and tried to enumerate the population living in accommodation based services for homeless people. None of these countries applied the distinction between primary and secondary homelessness in a way that was consistent with EU guidance for the 2011 census.
- Spain employed a census methodology based partially on register data and partially on surveys. As was the case in Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden, a specific survey was about to be undertaken on homelessness, but this was not part of the 2011 census.
- The UK had attempted a street count in the 2001 census, but had abandoned this approach as unreliable. Instead people in accommodation based services for homeless people were enumerated. Day centre services for homeless people were also visited in an attempt to count people living rough (who were identified as currently living rough to census enumerators by service providers). A distinction was made between homeless people in emergency shelters and accom-

modation based services and those who were literally living rough, but not between primary and secondary homelessness in the sense of the definition in the 2011 EU census guidance.

There were differences in how methodologies for counting homeless people were employed for the 2011 censuses:

- Street counts, where they were undertaken, were not consistent in their methodology. As street homelessness is illegal in Hungary, there was an incentive for people living rough to stay hidden, Ireland confined the street count to Dublin, while both Poland and Portugal conducted much larger street counts. The UK census had dropped the street count methodology after it was judged to have failed in the 2001 census, and instead tried to count people living rough by visiting daytime homelessness services and relying on service providers to tell them who was living rough.
- Some countries used a combination of asking NGOs to distribute and collect census questionnaires with direct data collection by census enumerators, including France, Hungary, Italy and Poland. Others relied on enumerators, such as the Czech Republic, Ireland and Lithuania.
- While some countries that enumerated homeless people used a full census questionnaire, i.e. asked exactly the same questions as they did for the general population, others used a more restricted questionnaire that was designed for people in institutional or communal settings or specifically for homeless people or people living rough.

Definitions of homelessness for census data collection across all 15 countries only partially reflected the full ETHOS typology of homelessness:

- Every country defined people living rough and who were living in emergency accommodation as being homeless (ETHOS categories 1 and 2, respectively).
- Portugal did not define people in accommodation based services for homeless people (ETHOS category 3) as being homeless, though all the other countries did include this group.
- Women in refuges or other services for women at risk of gender based/domestic violence (ETHOS category 4) were defined as homeless in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland and Spain, but not elsewhere.
- Immigrants living in dedicated accommodation (ETHOS category 5) tended not to be regarded as homeless, though this was linked to their legal status rather than their housing situation.

- Nor were the potentially homeless populations about to leave care, prisons or hospitals (ETHOS category 6) defined or enumerated as people who were homeless.
- A minority of countries defined people receiving support due to homelessness (ETHOS category 7) as homeless, including Hungary, Ireland, Spain and, in some circumstances, the UK.

Data from the 2011 censuses on homelessness were only going to be released in some countries:

- Data had not been collected as a part of the 2011 census in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Sweden.
- Hungary and the UK had collected data, but were reported as having no immediate plan to release those data.
- Data on people living rough and in emergency shelters were expected in the Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Poland and Portugal and on people in accommodation based services for homeless people in Ireland and Poland.
- A figure including people living rough and people in emergency and other accommodation for homeless people was expected in Italy and Lithuania.

Data collected for the 2011 census were expected to enhance information on homelessness in Ireland, Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Sweden. However, the expert respondents reported that the census would make little difference to the understanding of homelessness in France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, the UK and Hungary. No improvements could occur in Slovenia, Germany, Denmark or the Netherlands, because no specific data had been collected.

The 2011 censuses enhanced understanding of homelessness in some countries, and in a few instances, were the first time a national level attempt had been made to enumerate homeless people. However, sustained efforts at EU level to harmonise data collection on homelessness for the 2011 censuses and more generally, have been met with only limited success. The guidance issued by the EU on enumerating homeless people for the 2011 censuses was limited and for the most part, the guidance was not followed by the 15 member states included in this research. As a consequence, it will not be possible to provide a EU level count or estimation of the extent of primary and secondary homelessness from the 2011 censuses, nor will the data enhance our capacity to contrast homelessness in one member state with another because the method of collection was inconsistent, limited or flawed.

A census is primarily designed to collect demographic data on a whole population rather than as an exercise in enumerating and exploring the nature of homelessness. There are particular problems with register-based systems, which, while it is not the intention of those who employed this methodology, are actually a highly effective mechanism in excluding homeless populations from the census.

Censuses collect limited data and only occur every decade, further limiting their usefulness as a means of understanding homelessness. There are questions about how far incorporating an enumeration or estimation of homelessness in a census is actually an effective exercise in understanding homelessness, or whether time and resources would be better spent elsewhere. A dedicated and well-resourced national survey on homelessness, particularly if regularly repeated, may be potentially more useful, though it needs to be kept in mind that some methodologies, such as street counts, are not universally viewed as effective. Another alternative may be the merging and sharing of administrative data, across welfare, health, housing, taxation and other databases as a means of identifying and enumerating homeless populations, though these systems may not include everyone and there are strict legal limits to data merging in some societies. Census questionnaires and surveys of the general population can also be modified to ask about past experience of homelessness, which, while not enumerating the problem on a given date, could nevertheless provide valuable data on its nature and extent.

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## 3. Introduction

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This chapter provides an overview of the research undertaken by the European Observatory on Homelessness in 2012 on the coverage of homeless people in the 2011 round of Population and Housing Censuses across the European Union. The report begins by explaining the focus of our targeted research in 2012 and then provides some background information about the attempts to link the censuses with the task of measuring homelessness. Thereafter we will discuss the focus of the research (section 3.2), our method (section 3.3), and the key research questions (section 3.4).

### 3.1 About the research

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*In the integrated European Union, national censuses are of greater value if their results can be compared between Member States. This is why the European Union is taking steps to harmonise census outputs. There were European census programmes for the 1980, 1990 and 2001 rounds. The framework set up at European level for the 2011 round continues this work on a larger scale. The objective is to disseminate more detailed data in a user-friendly way, and to make the data more comparable. After the 2011 round, comparative studies in the EU will be able to focus on population groups about which less information is otherwise available or to explore the context of socio-economic phenomena better in the light of people's background, e.g. their household and family situation or migration history. (European Commission, 2011a, p. 3)*

There was a hope and expectation that the EC guidance on the 2011 census would focus national level censuses on homeless people in a consistent way, and the 2011 censuses would produce reliable and comparable data on the extent of homelessness in the EU member states. There was a strong commitment in the recommendations of the EC for this round of the census to include homeless people: “*The population Census is a primary source of these basic benchmark statistics, covering not only the settled population but also homeless persons and nomadic groups.*” (United Nations, 2008: 7). In 2006 the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) published a detailed paper with recommendations for the 2010/2011 censuses prepared by the Conference of European Statisticians in close cooperation with the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT) where homelessness was defined and recommendations were given on how to

include homeless people in the census (see UNECE, 2006, p. 109). These recommendations remained almost unchanged in later publications with revised “Principles and Recommendations” for the census. In the most recent of these papers, the following was stated:

*1.452. A household may also consist of one or more homeless people. The definition of the homeless can vary from country to country because homelessness is essentially a cultural definition based on concepts such as “adequate housing”, “minimum community housing standard”, or “security of tenure” (...) which can be perceived in different ways by different communities. The following two categories or degrees of homelessness are recommended:*

- (a) Primary homelessness (or rooflessness). This category includes persons living in streets or without a shelter that would fall within the scope of living quarters;*
- (b) Secondary homelessness. This category may include the following groups:*
  - (i) Persons with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation (including dwellings, shelters or other living quarters);*
  - (ii) Persons usually resident in long-term (also called “transitional”) shelters or similar arrangements for the homeless.*

*These definitions should be supported by a data collection strategy that ensures, for example, that dwellings are properly identified as shelters and not households. (United Nations, 2008: 101)*

A study on the “Measurement of Homelessness at European Union Level”, commissioned in December 2005 by the European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) and published in January 2007, refined – among many other things – the ETHOS typology into a reduced version called “ETHOS light” in order to provide a more feasible definition of “homelessness” for statistical purposes fitting with the UNECE recommendations for the census (see Edgar *et al*, 2007, p 64).

A follow-up project, again funded by the European Commission in the framework of the PROGRESS programme, called MPHASIS (**M**utual **P**rogress on **H**omelessness **T**hrough **A**dvancing and **S**trengthening **I**nformation **S**ystems)<sup>1</sup> sought to improve the capacity for monitoring information on homelessness and housing exclusion in 20 European countries on the basis of the recommendations of the previous EU study. The MPHASIS project ran from December 2007 to December 2009 and involved the organisation of national meetings in each of the participating European countries and

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/>

an EU level conference towards the end of the project. Key stakeholders and experts in the field, including representatives from national statistical offices, attended both the national meetings and the final conference. One purpose of the national meetings (and the final conference) was to discuss the preparations of the 2011 censuses and how they would cover homeless people. In addition, two members of the coordinating team of MPHASIS attended a joint UNECE/ Eurostat Meeting on Population and Housing Censuses in Geneva in October 2009 and presented a paper on counting homeless people in the coming census. The paper concluded:

*The definition of homelessness given in the census recommendations is unambiguous in relation to primary homelessness but the definition of secondary homeless requires elaboration. This is important if the homeless are not only to be included in the census but are capable of being identified as homeless so that information is made available on the size of the homeless population or of those homeless persons covered by the census.” It was recommended to include “people living temporarily with family and friends who have no usual place of residence” as a key component of homeless population: “The Census provides the one occasion when it is possible to provide a baseline figure of this group. It is important to ensure that enumeration methods using the census household form and register based approaches can adequately identify this group. (Edgar and Busch-Geertsema, 2009: 8)*

However, the final regulations of the European Commission only included limited obligations on the coverage of homeless people in their censuses and provided only minimal guidance. The following text was relegated to a footnote:

*Homelessness: In principle, the data on the total population shall include the number of all primary homeless persons (persons living in the streets without shelter) and secondary homeless persons (persons moving frequently between temporary accommodation). However, Member States are **free not to include** the number of homeless persons in their data on the total population, or to include the number on the homeless but not to break the data on the homeless down by any breakdown or category (figure included only in the total and/or categorised under ‘Not stated’). If Member States do not include the number of homeless persons in their data on the total population, they shall provide the Commission with the best available estimate for the number of all primary and the number of all secondary homeless persons in the whole Member State. (European Commission, 2010: 11, footnote 4; emphasis by the authors of this report)*

As a result of this guidance, member states had a range of options that allowed them to cover homeless people in the census or to provide an estimate of the numbers of homeless people and it was left up to them to decide if they would publish any more detailed data on this group.

Notwithstanding the rather weak guidance for covering homeless people in the censuses, there was optimism in the European Commission and in EUROSTAT that improved knowledge about the extent of homelessness would be generated from the census results. A recent report about “Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2011” noted the problems in covering homeless people in poverty statistics, but also that:

*Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Commission, is also conducting a new initiative to collect national estimations on homeless people across the EU-27 through census data communication. (European Commission, 2011b, p. 114)*

It is self-evident that the European Observatory on Homelessness has been very interested in how homelessness was covered by the census offices in the different member states of the European Union. Therefore it was decided in accordance with FEANTSA that the targeted research of the Observatory during the year 2012 would focus on the coverage of homeless people in the 2011 Population and Housing Census. Although we were aware that we could not yet expect the publication of any data, we wanted to know more about the methodologies employed and how – if at all – homeless people were defined for census purposes at the national level.

### 3.2 The focus of the research

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The research was designed to explore and critically assess the processes used to enumerate and estimate the homeless population within the censuses that took place across the EU in 2011. The key concern of our research was to understand what level of coverage of the entire homeless population (as defined by ETHOS, the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion)<sup>2</sup>, was provided by the 2011 population censuses and which methodologies were used to cover those groups targeted.

The research was also designed to understand the degree of consensus across EU member states about how homelessness is defined and to explore the extent to which the enumeration and estimate of homeless populations across different EU countries was compatible with the ETHOS definition.

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<sup>2</sup> For ETHOS, translated in national languages see <http://www.feantsa.org/code/en/pg.asp?page=484>

We did not expect any data and were not asking for an examination of the actual data collected or estimated on homelessness by the census offices of EU member states, as we were aware that results of the census concerning any enumeration or estimates on homeless people would probably not be published before 2013 in most countries – if at all.

### 3.3 Methods

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A detailed questionnaire focusing on the estimates and enumeration of homeless people in the censuses was distributed to national experts on homelessness in 15 European countries:

- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- France
- Germany
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Italy
- Lithuania
- Netherlands
- Poland
- Portugal
- Slovenia
- Sweden
- Spain
- UK

Our aim was to include a sufficient number of countries that primarily used population registers for the census as well as those that used more traditional enumeration techniques or a mix of both. As always in our work for the European Observatory on Homelessness we were keen to cover a geographical mix of countries across Europe and include member states from all different welfare regimes in Europe.

Another criterion for selection was to have contact with a national expert who is known to be well informed about homelessness in the respective country and capable of acting as a reliable informant completing our questionnaire.

All experts were asked to conduct interviews or make contact with census officials and with representatives of service providers for homeless people to explore how data were collected or estimated, and to ascertain the degree to which service providers were involved in and/or were consulted about the enumeration or estimate of homeless people in each responding country. We also wanted to get first impressions on whether the expected results from the census would improve knowledge about homeless people at the national level<sup>3</sup>.

### 3.4 Key questions

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The research was concerned with several broad questions including:

- Whether or not homeless people were enumerated in the 2011 population censuses and if so:
  - Which groups of homeless people were included?
  - How was the enumeration undertaken?
- Whether the extent of some or all of the homeless population was estimated by the 2011 population censuses and if so:
  - For which groups of homeless people were estimates of the population produced?
  - What were the methods used to generate the estimate?
- What was the level of involvement of NGOs and other service providers during the census?

We were interested in the extent to which the enumeration and estimation of homeless populations in different censuses was in accordance with the ETHOS definition of homelessness as a reference point and, alongside this, in understanding how the actual definitions of homelessness used by different national censuses varied.

Some questions explored the robustness and rigour of the various enumeration and estimation methodologies employed. In addition, we wanted to know whether existing data about homelessness could be expected to be improved by the censuses.

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<sup>3</sup> See chapter 11 for a list of the national experts who have completed the questionnaire.

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We also added a more general question at the end of the questionnaire as to whether different groups of people (at a policy rather than academic level) were regarded as 'homeless' in each of the 15 participating countries, as we hoped to extract from the answers an empirical basis for the current debate about the ETHOS typology<sup>4</sup>. Within this, there was a concern about exploring the questions around whether some groups who are currently classified as living in insecure or inadequate housing should instead be classified as homeless, while some people currently classified as homeless (for example people due to be released from institutions and having no home to go to) should perhaps not be included in the ETHOS definition (Amore *et al*, 2011).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> More details about his debate may be found in Amore *et al*. (2011) and in various responses in the *European Journal of Homelessness*, volume 6.2 (2012).

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted in this context that the ETHOS typology has not only been taken over as the conceptual framework for the new definition of homelessness in New Zealand (see *Statistics New Zealand*, 2009), but also by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (see *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, 2012) and by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (2012).

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## 4. Differences between Register-based and Non-register-based Countries

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A general difference in the approach to counting homeless people in the census is between, on the one hand, those countries with a fully register-based census and, on the other hand, the countries where the census is not register-based. In the countries with a register-based census, it was generally the case that no count or estimate of the homeless population had been undertaken as a part of the census. In those countries with a 'traditional' interview-based census or with a combination of a register and interview-based census, a count of homelessness had been done. However, there was considerable variation in the methodological approaches amongst these countries.

### 4.1 Countries with a register-based census

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Amongst the countries with a register-based census (Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Slovenia and Sweden), no registration of homelessness was conducted as a part of the census (Table 4.1). A common barrier is that it is not possible to measure homelessness with sufficient certainty from general population registers and in particular, housing registers do not have adequate information to identify whether an individual is homeless at a given time.

**Table 4.1: Coverage of homelessness in census**

	Homelessness covered in the 2011 census	Homelessness not covered in the 2011 census
Non-register-based census	Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Spain, UK	
Register-based census		Denmark, Slovenia, Netherlands, Sweden, (Germany)*

\*in Germany homeless people living in communal accommodation have been covered by a separate count as part of the census, but it will not be possible to identify them among all residents of different types of communal accommodation.

A 'traditional' census using a single point in time or cross-sectional survey approach can potentially ask an entire population whether or not they are homeless on a given date or have ever experienced homelessness over a period of time. Such an exercise has never been conducted as part of a census. In France and the UK, attempts have been made to try to assess the 'prevalence' of past homelessness by including questions on homelessness in national level surveys of households. However, such attempts represent at best an estimation based on a sample of housed people, not an actual count of experience of homelessness that some census methodologies could – at least in theory- provide (Brousse, 2009; Burrows, 1997a). By contrast, register-based approaches use *administrative* data that record the number and basic characteristics of a population and where it is living at any given time. These systems are 'rolling' in the sense that whenever people change address, the 'register' (i.e. a population database or databases) should be rapidly updated. Depending on how data collection for a register-based system is organised, there may be no mechanism by which accommodation or housing that is designed specifically for homeless people or homeless individuals or households can be effectively identified. The registration of changes in housing status may depend on individuals reporting such changes to their local registry office, which may cause delays in registration and measurement error in registers. Thus, there may be difficulties in determining whether a lack of registered address is due to other reasons than homelessness such as a temporary stay abroad or a delay in registering a new address. Furthermore, it may be difficult to measure concealed households through registers, as the registers usually do not hold information on whether a formal contract exists in shared accommodation.

In Germany, the approach adopted was to count all the people covered by population registers, including those with a fictive non-residential postal address and to do a separate count of all people in special types of housing (communal accommodation) on the night of the census. In preparation for the census, the statistical offices of the 16 German regional states (Bundesländer) compiled lists of addresses where communal accommodation was provided on the basis of information given by municipalities. These lists covered night shelters and "other forms of accommodation for homeless people" alongside a whole range of other types of communal accommodation such as hospitals, prisons, homes for single mothers and their children, youth welfare institutions, homes for the elderly etc. The population of these different types of communal accommodation will not be separately analysed or presented in the publication of the data. Thus, while homeless people living in services and projects that were providing them with accommodation were counted in the German census, they were defined and enumerated only as a part of the total population living in communal establishments, making it impossible to identify homeless people in the data collected.

In the Netherlands, the census is conducted as an anonymised register count. There was no count of homeless people or of any other specific group of vulnerable people. There will also not be any attempt at an estimate of these groups based on analysis of available data. The main data-sources for the Dutch census are the municipal registration/administration of inhabitants and the municipal housing administrations. The latter administration is only a couple of years old and in 2011 the data were used in a census for the first time. According to the Dutch response to the questionnaire, nothing can be said at this time on the accuracy and completeness of the particular housing data in the Netherlands<sup>6</sup>.

In Slovenia, according to census office representatives, no definition of homelessness was used in the census after the decision was made that it would be carried out as a register-based activity. However, some categories of homeless people were counted; specifically people who had their residence registered at local centres for social work (or at the NGO Caritas and some of its branches). These data were limited and potentially inaccurate because they relied on a homeless person or household having their address registered as a place in which social work was delivered, meaning that there was the potential that at least some groups of homeless people were missed by the census.

Furthermore, a homeless person who had an 'administrative registration' with an NGO was not directly recorded in the register databases, but was instead detected by comparing current addresses against lists of addresses that were associated with centres of social work. The population within local centres for social work consisted of primary and secondary homeless people, some Roma people, people who do not have their own residence and live somewhere without having the possibility of having their permanent residence registered at that address and maybe even a (small) number of people who do so because of other conditions and reasons. There was no way of differentiating these subgroups of people and thus no mechanism by which homelessness could be separately counted or estimated in Slovenia.

In Denmark, data for the census is drawn from several registers including the Central Personal Register and housing registers at Statistics Denmark. These databases do not contain data of sufficient accuracy to allow identification of people with no fixed address or a "care of" address and whether they are actually homeless or whether there are other reasons why they have no fixed address, such as shorter stays abroad or just a delay in registration in case of a change of address.

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<sup>6</sup> Although there has been no count or estimate for census purposes there is research available from the CBS (Statistics Netherlands) on the number of homeless people per primo 2009. See <http://www.cbs.nl/en-GB/menu/methoden/toelichtingen/alfabet/h/homeless-people.htm>

Also in Sweden, the ordinary census undertaken by Statistics Sweden did not include homeless people. The Swedish census is based on a new register of all dwellings in Sweden, and because primary and secondary homeless people and people in non-conventional shelter do not have dwellings, they were not included in the 2011 census.

In both Denmark and Sweden, national counts of homelessness have been carried out every few years and in both countries such a count was carried out in 2011. These counts (which in Sweden is actually referred to as a 'census' of homelessness) were not part of the 2011 census, but in both countries the Statistical Offices will refer to these counts in their reporting on the census, as these counts are official national counts of the extent of homelessness. In both countries these counts are carried out following an almost identical procedure of asking a wide range of local actors (local authorities and services providers etc.) to fill out individual questionnaires for each homeless person they are in contact with or know of in a certain 'counting week'. The questionnaires can be filled out either by staff or through interviews with the homeless person depending on the individual case. The approach in these national counts in Denmark and Sweden are very similar to the approaches used to count homeless people in those EU member states that did not use a register-based system (see below) and similar also to the methods employed in national homelessness surveys that were undertaken in France, Scotland and the USA (Join-Lambert; 2009; Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2005; Burt, 2001).

This underlines a general conclusion we can draw from our study i.e. that solely register-based census approaches cannot – given the current data collected through public registers – give *any* adequate information on the extent of homelessness, and that counting homelessness instead requires more complex and specifically designed data collection, and perhaps in some instances exploration of data-merging. Despite providing extensive information on the general population, population and housing registers do not collect sufficient data to give an exact picture of relatively marginal social phenomenon such as homelessness. This is not an inherent limitation in the register-based systems as such, but it reflects that current systems have not been designed with vulnerable groups in mind and more specifically, that it is not possible from current data on housing status to determine whether a lack of a fixed address is actually due to homelessness.

## 4.2 Countries with a non-register-based census

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In most of the countries with a 'traditional' interview-based census approach (see Table 4.1) there was a tendency to have conducted some form of specific count of homeless people. However, there was considerable variation amongst the countries in how homelessness was defined and in the methodologies employed for these homelessness counts. In this section we give a brief overview of these methodological differences, and in the following sections we will go into more detail on the definitions applied and the different methodologies used.

The key differences amongst the non-register based countries were first whether the distinction required in the EU-regulation between primary and secondary homelessness and people in non-conventional shelter was applied, and second, whether a 'street count' and/or a count centred on accommodation based or fixed site services for homeless people was conducted.

In Poland, a distinction was made between primary and secondary homelessness and a count was conducted both in the streets and in homeless facilities. Also in Ireland, there was a broad distinction made between primary and secondary homeless. However, whereas homeless people in facilities were counted across the whole country, a street count only took place in Dublin.

In France, Italy and Lithuania, there have been counts both in the streets and in homeless facilities, but an explicit distinction between primary and secondary homelessness was not applied. However, in France a distinction has been made between different groups, but using another terminology, as we shall explain in the following section. In Portugal only primary homeless people were counted in the street and in night shelters. In the Czech Republic there was a count in homelessness facilities, but again there was no distinction made between primary and secondary homelessness.

In Hungary, a distinction between primary and secondary homelessness was applied in principle. Both a count in the streets and in facilities was undertaken, but due to the recent criminalization of living rough in Hungary, carrying out the collection of data amongst rough sleepers faced considerable difficulties. Furthermore, there is no information on the coverage of the data collection that was carried out in homeless facilities.

After an attempt to conduct street counts in the 2001 census was perceived to have failed, the UK undertook a count of homeless people living in or using homelessness services for the 2011 census. Within this exercise, a distinction was made between 'people living rough' (i.e. currently or repeatedly homeless people on the streets) and other 'homeless' groups identified as being homeless because they were living in or



using homelessness services. This did not quite correspond to the distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' homelessness but there was some similarity in definitions, and people living in non-conventional shelter were also enumerated.

In Spain, the census used a combined methodology based on registers and surveys. The survey will be conducted in 2012 to estimate the number of homeless people. The sample will be based on samples of homeless services, and people using those services. There is no explicit distinction between primary and secondary homelessness but these groups could indirectly be distinguished in the definition, which will be used in the survey. No street counts will be undertaken, but estimates of rough sleepers will be made from the survey of homelessness services.

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## 5. Definition of Homelessness in the National Censuses

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### 5.1 Primary and secondary homelessness

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As described in Chapter 3, the guidance on the census makes a distinction between primary homeless persons, who are persons living in the streets without shelter and secondary homeless persons who are persons moving frequently between temporary accommodation, with 'moving frequently' defined as residing in a place or household for less than one year.

Amongst the countries we surveyed, there was considerable variation on how homelessness was defined although it is noteworthy that only a minority of countries actually followed the EU guidance on making a distinction between primary and secondary homelessness. Several countries only partially implemented the recommended distinction between primary and secondary homelessness in their counts and a substantial number ignored it altogether. Table 5.1 gives an overview of the differences amongst the countries in defining homelessness.

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**Table 5.1: Definitions of Homelessness employed in the 2011 censuses**

Definition of homelessness in censuses	Countries
Not applicable (no count or estimation undertaken)	Denmark, Germany, Slovenia, Netherlands, Sweden
Primary and secondary homeless defined separately	Ireland, Poland, (Hungary)
Homeless people defined as one group including both primary and secondary homeless	Italy, Lithuania, Czech Republic
Only primary homeless defined	Portugal
Distinction between different categories of homeless, but terms of primary and secondary homeless not explicitly used	France, Spain, UK

Source: Questionnaire responses.

## 5.2 Use of ETHOS definition of homelessness

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As the definition of homelessness in the guidelines for the census was made with the distinction between primary and secondary homelessness, reference in the guidelines has as such not been given to the categories of the ETHOS definition. The definitions of homelessness recommended by EU guidelines for the 2011 censuses were not based on the ETHOS or ETHOS light definitions but were based on a more basic distinction between people living rough (the primary homeless group) and other groups of homeless people living in temporary accommodation (the secondary homeless group). In practice, 'homelessness' is often defined in different ways. In almost every EU country, people living on the street are generally defined as 'homeless', whereas practice varies between countries as to whether people in emergency accommodation are also defined as 'homeless'. In some EU member states, 'concealed' or 'hidden' households, for example two families sharing housing that is only designed for one family, can also be defined as 'homeless', but this is not the case in many EU countries (Busch-Geertsema *et al*, 2010; Pleace *et al*, 2011).

The ETHOS typology distinguishes different groups of homeless people and identifies seven operational categories of homelessness and is designed to promote a shared understanding and definition of homelessness across the EU, and to provide a common language with which to speak about homelessness. The ETHOS model is based on the idea of what constitutes a home, and draws upon physical, social and legal definitions of adequate, safe and secure housing.

The most acute forms of housing needs are defined by ETHOS as those in which a household lacks adequate housing across one or more of the physical, legal and/or social domains. The first shortfall in a living situation that ETHOS uses is centred on the physical, i.e. a lack of housing or adequate housing. The second shortfall in a living situation is a legally insecure situation, which ETHOS defines as restricted rights or no rights to remain in accommodation. The third shortfall identified by ETHOS is social, i.e. accommodation or a living situation that impairs quality of life because it offers insufficient privacy, physical security or space for social relations within a household. According to ETHOS, a state of homelessness in which a household's living situation is unacceptable under at least two of the physical, legal and social domains, is defined as either 'roofless' or 'houseless' (Categories 1.1 through to 7.2, Table 5.2).

**Table 5.2: Situations of Homelessness as defined by ETHOS**

Situation	Category		Operational category		Living situation
Homeless	Roofless	1	People living rough	1.1	Public space or external space
		2	People staying in a night shelter	2.1	Night shelter
	Houseless	3	People in accommodation for the homeless	3.1	Homeless hostel
				3.2	Temporary accommodation
				3.3	Transitional supported accommodation
		4	People in women's shelters	4.1	Women's shelter accommodation
		5	People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1	Temporary accommodation or reception centre
				5.2	Migrant workers' accommodation
	6	People due to be released from institutions	6.1	Penal institution	
			6.2	Medical institution	
6.3			Children's institution or home		
7	People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)	7.1	Residential care for older homeless people		
		7.2	Supported accommodation for formerly homeless persons		

Table 5.3 shows the extent to which the definitions of homelessness used for the 2011 censuses in different countries reconciled with the ETHOS typology of homelessness. As can be seen, there was a high degree of correspondence between what ETHOS defines as homelessness and what was regarded as 'homelessness' in the censuses with regard to people living rough and people staying in emergency accommodation and, in most instances, people in accommodation for homeless people. It was uncommon to regard women in refuges and people receiving support due to homelessness as being 'homeless'. People about to be released from institutions were never regarded as homeless and nor, in almost all instances, were people in accommodation for immigrants. As described above, in several countries, homeless people were defined by Census Offices but were not counted or were counted only within a larger general group living in communal settings rather than in ordinary housing.

**Table 5.3: ETHOS categories covered by national census definition of homelessness**

	Czech Rep.	France	Hungary	Ireland	Italy	Lithuania	Poland	Portugal	Spain	UK
1 People living rough	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2 People staying in emergency accommodation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
3 People in accommodation for the homeless	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
4 People in women's shelter (refuge)	X		X	X					(X)	
5 People in accommodation for immigrants									(X)	
6 People due to be released from institutions										
7 People receiving support due to homelessness			(X)	X					X	X

Source: Questionnaire responses

### 5.3 National level definitions of homelessness

Ireland and Poland were the only countries making a distinction between primary and secondary homelessness that actually fully reflected EU guidance on what the 2011 censuses should attempt to count. In both countries, the primary homeless group corresponded to ETHOS category 1 (people living rough) whereas secondary homeless in both countries included ETHOS categories 2 (people staying in emergency accommodation) and 3 (people in accommodation for the homeless). In Ireland women in refuges or shelters (ETHOS 4) were also included as homeless.

In Ireland primary homelessness was defined as people living rough. Secondary homelessness was defined as existing among individuals living in communal facilities that were designated as providing a service to homeless people.

In Poland the Census Office defined a homeless person as:

*One who, for various reasons – economic, family or administrative – declares no fixed dwelling-place. Primary homeless includes people living on the street, in public spaces without a shelter, which could be regarded as living accommodation. Secondary homeless are people without a permanent living place, who often move between different types of accommodation (hostels, night shelters and institutions for the homeless). (Questionnaire response)*

Hungary made some distinctions between primary and secondary homelessness. People were considered homeless by the census office, if they were living rough (ETHOS category 1), i.e. were not living in an independent household and could not be counted in a community shelter for homeless people. In addition, those people who were living in services and emergency shelters for homeless people were also regarded as homeless in Hungary (ETHOS categories 2 and 3). Thus homeless people in Hungary were defined either as those who lived in homelessness services or did not access these services as they were rough sleepers. The homelessness categories are inferred from tenancy conditions as there were no specific questions on homelessness in the Hungarian census questionnaire. There were close parallels between these definitions of homelessness and the 'rough sleeper' and 'resident in homelessness services' definitions employed in the UK. However, according to the national correspondent for Hungary, despite the fact that the census office has adopted the distinction between primary and secondary homeless people, the data collection did not make a clear distinction between the groups.

In Italy and Lithuania homeless people were defined as a single group, including both people living rough and those living in emergency and other accommodation services for homeless people with no distinction between primary and secondary homelessness. In both countries, the definition of homeless people in the census corresponds to EHTOS categories 1, 2 and 3. In Lithuania a homeless person was defined as:

*A person who does not have permanent housing and sufficient funds to rent or buy at least minimum housing and due to the lack of dwelling sleeps outdoors, in sewage wells, dumps, heating networks, in non-conventional shelters, temporary living shelters (shelter for homeless people, etc.)” In this definition there is no distinction between primary and secondary homelessness but both groups are as such included in the definition. (Questionnaire response)*

In the Italian census homeless people were defined as:

*All people without fixed dwelling that, at the date of the census, do not have some address (neither dwelling neither other type of lodging – people who live in road, under bridges, etc). (Questionnaire response)*

In Portugal only primary homelessness was recognised by the census and secondary homelessness was not defined, enumerated or estimated. Primary homeless persons were defined as those either living in the streets or in night shelters corresponding to ETHOS categories 1 and 2. The definition used by the Portuguese Statistical Office (INE) was the following:

*Anyone is considered homeless who, at the point of the Census, is living on the streets or in any other public space, such as gardens, metro stations, bus stops, bridges and viaducts, porches of buildings among others, or anyone who, despite being sheltered at a night shelter is forced to spend several hours of the day in a public space. In the latter situation, we include anyone who despite being able to have dinner or to have a place to sleep in a night shelter is obliged to get out the following morning. (INE, Manual do Entrevistador, p. 7).*

Portugal also defined those groups of people who were not to be regarded as homeless for the purposes of the census. These groups included:

- people living in abandoned buildings;
- people without regular accommodation living in collective institutions or sharing with family or friends;
- people without regular accommodation living in long stay accommodation,
- people living in private rooms or 'bed and breakfast' accommodation paid for by social services, women's refuges or in any other kind of temporary accommodation.

INE in Portugal focused on groups that were (in effect) within the ETHOS categories 1 and 2 for logistical reasons, as it was thought to be too resource-intensive and challenging to attempt counts of other groups of homeless people. Similar practical limitations to enumeration were reported elsewhere, for example the UK made no systematic attempt to count populations in abandoned buildings and following a failed attempt in 2001, did not attempt to physically count people living rough, instead trying to enumerate this group by cooperating with service providers.

In France, the categories of primary and secondary homelessness were not used in the census. Instead other terms were used. The 'sans-abri' (living rough) notion was fairly close to the definition of primary homelessness (and was also close to ETHOS category 1). People are defined as 'sans-abri' if they usually sleep in a place not meant for habitation. This includes people living in the street but also in other places, private or public, closed or not, such as cars, cellars, parks, metro, cabins etc. There is also no definition of secondary homeless in the French census, but there is a definition of 'sans domicile' (which is broadly equivalent to homelessness) which includes rough sleepers and people sleeping in a place such as an emergency shelter, a long-stay hostel for the homeless, or in a flat or a hotel with support from an NGO. This meant that in some instances, there was some correspondence between the single French definition of what constituted homelessness and ETHOS categories 1, 2 and 3.

In Spain, the survey of homelessness, which is part of the census, uses the following definition of homelessness:

*A person experiencing housing deprivation is someone who does not have access during the reference period to accommodation which meets commonly agreed criteria for human habitation which he/she can occupy, whether this accommodation is legally their own property or whether the property is occupied under a tenancy agreement or occupied rent-free under license or some contractual or other arrangement of a non-temporary nature (including provision by public sector or non-governmental organisations; provision by employers). Consequently, they temporarily have to sleep:*

- 1. On the street, or*
- 2. In buildings which are commonly considered not to offer the necessary conditions for human habitability, or*
- 3. In emergency accommodation provided by the public sector or non-governmental organisations, or*
- 4. In long-stay group accommodation provided by the public sector or non-governmental organisations (non-emergency centres, shelters for women at risk of gender based violence (refuges), centres to accommodate persons requesting asylum or irregular immigrants), or*
- 5. In guesthouses or boarding houses, or*
- 6. In other short stay accommodation, or*
- 7. In squats.*

*This excludes people that live in the following types of accommodation: Hospitals; mental health centres; old people's homes; prisons; confinement centres; students' residences; boarding schools; orphanages; adoption homes; barracks; military sea missions; moored ships; mobile homes (circuses); au-pairs; domestic service; hotel personnel who live in the hotel; tourists staying in hotels; subsidised accommodation. (Source: Questionnaire response)*

The Spanish definition of homelessness did not include primary and secondary categories based on EU regulation, but in practice primary homeless corresponds to category 1 above and secondary homelessness corresponds to categories 3, 4 and 6. Accordingly the Spanish definition corresponds to ETHOS categories 1, 2, 3 and partially 4 and 5. In a similar study in 2005 only a small fraction of the centres for women at risk of gender-based violence answered the survey, while others decided not to do so in the belief that their users were not homeless. In the same way, the majority of confinement centres for 'irregular immigrants', asylum seekers or refugees were excluded.

In the Czech Republic distinction was made between primary and secondary homelessness. Homelessness in the Czech census was defined as 'people who are primarily without home, living on the street, thus primary homeless' (source: questionnaire response). However, this understanding of 'primary homeless' actually covered homeless people living in facilities too, and so corresponded to ETHOS categories 1, 2 and 3.

In the UK there was no explicit reference made to the categories of primary and secondary homeless. Thus 'primary homeless persons' were *not* defined for the purposes of the UK census, instead a definition based on '*people sleeping rough*' (i.e. homeless people living on the street, in parks, in structures not designed as accommodation such as car parks or bus shelters) was employed to establish numbers of homeless people in the literal sense of the word. To be regarded as a 'rough sleeper' for the purposes of the census, an individual had to be identified by a homelessness service provider as being a habitual or frequent 'rough sleeper'. In practice, this was not a precise definition, but was described as incorporating those individuals who habitually or frequently 'slept rough'. 'People sleeping rough' broadly equates to primary homeless people, but it *also* includes individuals who may not have actually been living on the street at the point when the Census was conducted, who were enumerated as 'rough sleepers' because they were identified as such by a homelessness service provider (ETHOS categories 2 and 3.1).

The UK also did not use the 'secondary homeless persons' definition and made no reference to *frequency of moves* as a means of identifying homeless people. Instead, the UK Census enumerated what was termed "homeless people" who were resident in temporary accommodation and accommodation based support services that were *designated* as being for "*homeless people*". This group of "homeless people" included those resident in accommodation based homelessness support services, using a communal model, transitional housing for homeless people, homeless hostels and a small number of long-stay supported housing

services for homeless people<sup>7</sup>. Being enumerated as a homeless person in some form of temporary accommodation depended on whether or not that temporary accommodation was defined as being for homeless people, and not on the accommodation status of the household. This approach of only enumerating homeless people in designated 'homelessness' services was also adopted in Ireland, while in France, homeless people living in accommodation based services and emergency shelters were part of a wider group including homeless people in various other forms of temporary accommodation identified by NGOs, and including rough sleepers, a wider definition than that which was used in the UK.

In Germany, people living in temporary accommodation for homeless people (including emergency shelters, hostels and other types of temporary accommodation for homeless people) and people who had only a non-residential postal address or who were defined as "of no fixed abode" in the population registers were included in the census. However, there was no attempt to enumerate this population separately; they were instead just counted as part of the broadly defined population that did not live in ordinary housing in the community.

In Denmark and Sweden, definitions of homelessness were wide. They reflected ETHOS categories, but these definitions were employed in separate and discrete data collection exercises that were specifically focused on homelessness and which were not within the population census.

France also conducts separate surveys of homeless people alongside the enumeration included in the census. Finally, in the Netherlands and Slovenia, homeless people were not identified in the 2011 censuses.

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<sup>7</sup> This meant that statutorily homeless households placed in temporary ordinary housing (households found in priority need, unintentionally homeless and with a local connection, which were placed in temporary housing by local authorities while awaiting a more permanent home under UK homelessness laws) were often not recorded as homeless by the census. This was because much of this accommodation was ordinary housing with addresses that would not have been recorded as temporary accommodation provision for 'homeless' people because of the fact that they were ordinary housing. This population was counted, but there was no way of determining whether they were statutorily homeless households in temporary housing or ordinary tenants from the data collected by the census.

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## 6. Methodology Applied in Counts

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### **6.1 Counting and estimating primary homeless people**

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The ten countries with a ‘traditional’ interview-based census approach conducted a specific count of homeless people, though the methodologies employed across these countries varied considerably. Among the 10 countries, only three did not conduct a street count: the Czech Republic, Spain and the UK. However, in the UK, an attempt was made to count people living rough (in ETHOS category 1.1) by specifically asking NGOs to identify individuals using day centres (day time services providing food and basic services but no accommodation) who were current or habitual rough sleepers. This approach was adopted because an attempted street count for the preceding 2001 census was not regarded as having been successful. The additional UK enumeration of homeless people living in communal and accommodation based services identified as being for homeless people was likely to have included people who were habitually living rough. However, people who usually or often lived rough who were in homelessness services on ‘Census Day’ would have been enumerated as ‘usually resident’ in these services and thus not identified as people living rough.

In Hungary, in theory, all rough sleepers in contact with outreach services were visited. According to the national experts, public notaries (i.e. the administrative directors of mayors’ offices) were advised to make use of the knowledge and acceptance of street workers and other colleagues/social workers working with homeless people who would know where these people live/stay and to facilitate the data collection. However, the actual count in Hungary was reported as being particularly affected by the controversial context arising from the criminalization of street homelessness, which occurred in Hungary from autumn 2010. The original concept of the method and organisation of the counting of street homelessness was not supported by all partner institutions involved in designing the census data collection regarding the homeless. Therefore, according to the Hungarian experts, street and other outreach social workers were discouraged to take part in the process and collect data about the people living rough (especially with hindsight to the location of their “residence”).

In Spain, where a survey will be conducted in 2012, estimates of rough sleepers will be made from the survey of homelessness services and service users within those services. The survey will, however, be based on a large sample (focused on larger

towns with over 20000 inhabitants and people aged 18 or over) rather than encompassing the whole of Spain. This means it will generate a projection of the number of people living rough at any given time, rather than being an actual count.

In the seven countries (France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland and Portugal) where street counts took place it was common to attempt to 'map' the locations where those living rough were reported to be found. This mapping was usually carried out with the support of NGOs though there were variations in the actual scope of this cooperation between census offices and the NGO sector. In some countries (France, Italy, Lithuania, Poland and Portugal) there is evidence that this initial stage involved a specific effort from NGOs to provide lists and maps of places where people living rough might be found in preparation for the actual count.

In France, special enumerators went to places where people living rough were reported to congregate according to NGOs and other support agencies. Prior to the fieldwork, the French census office (INSEE) organised several meetings with NGOs to identify areas where street counts should take place.

In Italy, the street count of primary homeless people was preceded by a 'field recognition' process carried out by the municipality census office (UCC) in order to identify the areas with a higher concentration of people living rough (including specific railway stations, parks, etc.). In larger towns people living rough were either interviewed directly by a representative of the municipality or with help from major NGOs.

In Lithuania, the police and NGOs helped municipal coordinators to prepare lists of places where homeless people usually stayed during the day. These lists were delivered to the census office and the enumerators used these lists as the basis for their field work on the census period.

In Poland, similarly to Hungary, the municipal census offices worked in collaboration with NGOs to prepare maps of 'uninhabitable place's which had homeless populations (e.g. bus and train stations and their surroundings, heating ducts and nodes, streets, beaches, abandoned bunkers, woods and parks, cemeteries, shopping centres, car parks, abandoned vehicles, caravans, stairways, refuse chutes, basements, attics, dugouts, wagons and railway sidings) prior to the street count. At the local level, the implementation of the census count in Poland was the responsibility of the mayor and of the municipal census office, although NGOs sought to cooperate with the GSU (central statistical office) to help prepare and implement the census. The national correspondent for Poland reported that the degree of joint working with the NGO sector varied and that census returns were probably more comprehensive in those locations where NGOs working with

homeless people were more active in delivering services and engaged in joint working, making it possible for data to be better in the larger towns and cities with significant NGO activity around homelessness.

In Portugal, the census office undertook a street count of the homeless people all over the country on the night of the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2011. In order to prepare the street count, the census officers contacted the local homeless units to establish the locations and situations in which homeless people were likely to be. In the smaller municipalities, the census officers often undertook the census count on their own. In the bigger cities, like Lisbon and Porto, mixed teams of census officers and workers from NGOs were used to conduct the count.

In Ireland, the street count only took place in Dublin. According to the Irish expert, a meeting was held between the Data Subgroup of the National Homelessness Consultative Committee and the staff member of the Central Statistics Office (CSO) on how best to collect the data for the 2011 census. In practice, the standard methodology employed for the counting of the periodic rough sleepers that took place in Dublin was used by the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive with the support of volunteers to undertake a count on the night of the 2011 census. Census enumerators collected data on those observed living rough on the night of the census, but no attempt was made by enumerators to search for those living rough, by, for example, entering derelict buildings etc. The rationale for not attempting to collect data on rough sleepers outside of Dublin was that the numbers were very small and were usually to be found in derelict sites and other areas where census enumerators are not permitted to enter.

The nature of the data collection on people living rough varied between countries. In some countries the questionnaire applied was the census standard personal questionnaire (France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal and the UK). In Ireland and Poland the questionnaires used to collect data on people living rough were different from the standard census questionnaires with the Irish census enumerators utilising the existing questionnaire used for the periodic count of those living rough. In Poland the questionnaire used included some additional questions specifically addressing the risks of double counting and the type of homelessness of the people identified as living rough. The nature of the data collected is explored in detail in section 7.

## 6.2 Counting homeless people in accommodation based services, emergency shelters and temporary accommodation

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The counts of homeless people living within or using homelessness services which were undertaken for the 2011 census used a much wider range of methodologies than were employed to count or estimate the number of people who were living rough. The table below gives an overview of the main findings from the ten countries where counts were undertaken in different types of services and facilities.

There were important differences centred on the extent to which the ten countries had followed the distinction between primary and secondary homelessness recommended by EU regulation. Overall, all ten countries undertook some kind of count of primary homeless people living and/or using facilities of different types. On the other hand, only six out of the ten countries undertook a count of secondary homeless people (living in temporary accommodation). The following sections provide a detailed discussion of the counts undertaken in the facilities and services used by primary homeless people and by secondary homeless people.

### Notes for Table 6.1

- (1) included women's shelters;
- (2) but counted as homeless, not primary homeless;
- (3) but using a different methodology than for rough sleepers;
- (4) all counted as living in communal facilities;
- (5) There was an enumeration of people living in communal establishments (accommodation) for homeless people which was likely to have included some people living rough, but this group was defined and enumerated as 'usually resident' in these services and therefore as 'homeless' not as rough sleepers;
- (6) mainly day centres;
- (7) (Some other service provision was involved in the enumeration of people sleeping rough, but the extent to which this occurred and what services were involved was not documented. Involvement of a wider range of services appears to have happened in London. However, the basic methodology of conducting a count among daycentre users and asking staff to identify habitual/frequent rough sleepers was the core approach;
- (8) Only some forms of temporary accommodation were included, i.e. communal and congregate temporary accommodation (including accommodation based homelessness services) which was designed/designated as specifically for "homeless people".

Table 6.1: Count in homelessness services and accommodation

Count in facilities		Primary homeless people				Types of services visited		Secondary homeless people	
Countries	Count in emergency accommodation and homeless shelters	Asked other agencies providing emergency accommodation and/or other services to undertake a count	Undertook a count using day services, food distribution services and/or medical services	Types of services visited	Count in temporary accommodation	Other methods			
CZE	Yes (1)	No	No	Emergency shelters, day centres and social work services	No	No			
FRA	Yes (2)	Yes	No	Emergency shelters	Yes	Homeless Survey			
HUN	Yes	Yes	No	Emergency shelters, Outreach or mobile support services, Health service providers (in-patient only), Service for people with problematic drug/alcohol use (in-patient only) and Prisons	No	No			
IRL	Yes (3)	No	No	Emergency shelters, Service for people with problematic drug/alcohol use, prisons (4)	Yes	No			
ITL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Emergency shelters, day centres, Services providing food for homeless people, services providing clothing and social work services	No	No			
LIT	Yes	No	Yes	Emergency shelters, day centres, Services providing food for homeless people, Service for people with problematic drug/alcohol use	Yes	No			
POL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Day centres, Services providing food for homeless people and other types of services	Yes	No			
POR	No	Yes	No	Emergency shelters	No	No			
SPA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Emergency shelters, day centres, Services providing food for homeless people, services providing clothing and social work services	Yes	Estimated population of secondary homeless people based on administrative data from services			
UK	No (5)	No	Yes (6)	Emergency shelters, day centres and other forms of service(7).	Yes (8)	No			

### 6.2.1 Counting primary homeless people staying in homelessness services and temporary accommodation

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The most common type of count undertaken during the 2011 census was the counting of primary homeless people living in emergency accommodation and homeless shelters or using other services such as food distribution services. By this, it is meant those living rough who also occasionally use shelters or other services, and who are counted in these facilities.

In some countries (France, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Spain) a count of primary homeless people living in emergency accommodation was carried out using a mixed approach: either directly employing census enumerators or through NGOs, other agencies or services providing emergency accommodation. In France people living rough were interviewed in a special data gathering called the HMSA operation, with special census enumerators. In Spain these counts were undertaken in 2012 in the context of a sample survey based on a selection of homeless services, and a selection of users, within selected services in towns with a population of over 20000. There will be estimates of rough sleepers made from the survey of services.

In three other countries (Czech Republic, Ireland and Lithuania) census enumerators carried out a count of primary homeless people living in emergency accommodation and homeless shelters.

In Portugal the count in facilities was always undertaken directly by the NGOs or in the few cases where census officers were present (e.g. one shelter in Lisbon), the application of the questionnaires was always carried out with the mediation of the service provider's workers.

In five out of the ten countries (Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Spain and the UK) the census undertook a count of people living rough/primary homeless people using day services, food distribution services and/or medical services.

Emergency shelters were the most common type of services visited by enumerators or asked to provide data on primary homeless people for the 2011 census. To some extent, those people who are in emergency shelters or other forms of accommodation based homelessness services are not literally 'primary' homeless because they are not on the street when they are living in these services. However, research in the EU and elsewhere suggests that it is a misrepresentation to think of street homelessness in terms of people who are habitually living outside. Work in Scotland evaluating the 'rough sleepers initiative' suggested that people who *permanently* live outside are very much the exception, and that people living rough are actually a group who are not in stable accommodation, but who instead move in and out of emergency accommodation on a regular basis, on the streets one

night and in an emergency shelter bed the following night, perhaps returning to the streets a night or two after that (Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2005). Large scale, robust longitudinal research in the USA has suggested that chronically homeless people (with the highest needs) are actually characterised by sustained and repeated stays in emergency accommodation, rather than 'permanently' living on the streets (Culhane and Kuhn, 1998). It is therefore common practice to study street homelessness/people living rough by including people in emergency accommodation who are relatively likely to have been on the street and also to return to the street. Like the UK, Poland had attempted to differentiate between those people who were literally living rough and those homeless people who were in some form of accommodation when the census was taken.

Day centres were the second most common type of services visited. They are referred to by six out of the ten countries that undertook counts of people in homelessness services. Services providing food, social work services and services for people with problematic drug/alcohol use are also referred to in some countries.

#### **6.2.1.1 Methods employed in counting primary homeless people using homelessness services, facilities and temporary accommodation in different countries**

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Detailed information was collected from the respondents on the methods that were employed in different countries. The amount of information provided varied, but it is possible to say something about how data were collected on primary homeless people staying in accommodation based homeless services and temporary accommodation in different countries.

In the Czech Republic, the census took place in a total of 317 facilities, i.e. sites in which homelessness services were based, which collectively provided 377 services (i.e. some facilities/buildings were home to multiple homelessness services). These Czech services could be divided roughly into four groups –homeless shelters (approx. 65%), night shelters (approx. 16%), half-way houses or transitional accommodation (approx. 14%) and day centres (approx. 5%). Women's refuges/shelters were included in the emergency accommodation count. Facilities where the census was undertaken were named in cooperation with Association of Asylum<sup>8</sup> Shelters (SAD) and Association of Social Services Providers (APSS). The census enumerators undertook the count on March 25<sup>th</sup> 2011 and according to the national expert, the census enumerators involved in the count of the facilities were members of the SAD and the APSS.

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<sup>8</sup> The term 'asylum' does not refer to services for immigrants seeking asylum in this instance.

In France, a count took place in accommodation based homelessness services, facilities and in some forms of temporary accommodation (including homeless people resident in hotels with support from NGOs). However, as noted above, no distinction was made between primary and secondary homelessness. Individuals counted in emergency shelters were therefore counted as 'homeless' but not as 'primary' homeless. This count, which took place in emergency shelters, is the responsibility of the National Institute of Statistics (INSEE). INSEE is responsible for the organisation, preparation, data collection and control of the count and it is completed by a special data gathering survey within the census: the HMSA (habitations mobiles et sans-abri), which is the responsibility of the municipalities with the assistance of INSEE. According to the national expert, the enumerators involved in the HMSA data gathering received special training (for example on how to address homeless people). The data collected by the census on people living in collective emergency accommodation is not grouped with other data; contrary to what happens to data collected on people living in collective long-term shelters or supported housing for homeless people, which are grouped with other data on people living in collective long-term situations.

In Hungary, for the first time in 2011, the census collected data on primary homeless people living in accommodation based services and other facilities for homeless people. The focus was on the homelessness services with five or more clients. Thus, in theory, people residing in homeless services that provided overnight or emergency shelter for five or more persons on the night of 1<sup>st</sup> October 2011 were enumerated (either by staff working there or by external enumerators). However, according to the Hungarian experts, data collection encountered logistical problems and there are doubts as to whether all the services that should have been included actually took part. There was evidence that some Hungarian emergency shelters never received the census institutional questionnaires<sup>9</sup>.

In Ireland, all the homeless people in communal facilities on the night of the census were counted. The manager/owner of a communal facility was required to identify the purpose of a communal facility or accommodation based service. The manager/owner then identified all individuals residing in the communal facility on the night of the census and those individuals were required to fill in a shortened version of the general census form. This shortened form contains data on age, gender, family, religion, nationality, ethnicity, health status, and employment status. In advance of

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<sup>9</sup> In the Hungarian Census, in case the persons did not live in an independent regular home, but in an institution, the "housing questionnaire" was replaced by an "institutional questionnaire" containing data provided by the given institution the person lived in. Thus, all institutions providing services coupled with accommodation or lodging, were requested to fill in a questionnaire about the services they provided and the number of beds they offered to clients, for example the elderly or homeless.

the night of the census, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) attempted to identify all communal facilities, in conjunction with NGOs that were used for the purpose of providing accommodation to homeless households. Thus, in theory all communal homeless services should have been identified as such in the census form and detailed information on each individual in the facility should have been collected.

In Italy, the count in homeless facilities and accommodation based services followed a two-fold strategy depending on the number of people registered as using each NGO service. If the number of people registered was lower than 200, then personalised questionnaires were sent for the service provider to distribute; when there were more than 200 homeless people using a service, the service provider could agree with the municipality census office (UCC) either to directly receive the questionnaires or to receive a visit from UCC interviewers who would carry out the collection of data.

In Lithuania, primary homeless persons were counted in the day services, food distribution services, emergency shelters and services for people with problematic drug/alcohol use. These services were identified by the coordinators from municipalities which were responsible for preparing the lists of different places where homeless people usually spent their time during the day and delivering those details to the census office. The gathering of data in the facilities usually had the direct cooperation of its staff members. According to the national expert in Lithuania, homeless shelters typically had a procedure whereby *“one of the staff members was specifically instructed how to fill the questionnaire and [who] helped to enumerate homeless people”*.

In Poland, information on the implementation of the census count was limited and it was not clear how closely NGOs and the census takers had worked together across different regions. According to the Polish national expert it was not possible *“to assess how often recommended coalitions were formed, and how often the function of the municipal census office was undertaken by the local government office responsible for the implementation of the census at the local level”*. This may have had an impact on the extent to which homelessness services were incorporated into the enumeration process across different locations in Poland, as less cooperation in some areas may have resulted in less coverage of homelessness services. According to the information provided, homeless people living in shelters were counted through the same methodology applied to other collective accommodation facilities, i.e. the manager of the facility filled in a questionnaire (web application) on the basis of available data and “enumerators only carried out face-to-face interviews with primary homeless persons”.

In Portugal, primary homeless people were counted in facilities and accommodation based services falling under the census definition adopted by the Portuguese National Statistical Office:

*Anyone is considered homeless who despite being sheltered at a night shelter is forced to spend several hours of the day in a public space. In the latter situation, we include anyone who despite being able to have dinner or to have a place to sleep in a night shelter is obliged to get out the following morning.* (Questionnaire response)

The identification of these facilities and accommodation based services for homeless people in Portugal was prepared by the Instituto da Segurança Social (Institute for Social Security) identifying the shelters that fit into the NSI definition. The central office for the census provided this list to the respective local teams. The census local officers liaised with the responsible persons within each service provider in order to explain the process of filling in the questionnaires, and specified which homeless people should complete a questionnaire (those sleeping over on the night of the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> March). The questionnaires were handed over and the information was collected directly by the service providers' workers and then collected by the census officers at a later date. In one case – at Lisbon's biggest homeless shelter – the procedure was slightly different; the questionnaires were administered by the census officers in close cooperation with the shelters' workers who would explain the exercise to the homeless people and forward them to the different officers to fill in the questionnaire. It is also important to note that the emergency/night shelters included in the list provided by the Instituto da Segurança Social (Social Security Institute) had a cooperation protocol with the social security agency, which identified those services as 'temporary shelter'. This means that shelters with the same characteristics, but which did not have that protocol were not covered by the census. It is not possible to know if and how many are missing since there is no centralised information on this in Portugal. It should also be noted that some local homelessness units were reported by the national expert to be more active than others in their cooperation with the census officers and even sought to identify night shelters not included in the list sent by the central office, but which fell into the category of homelessness services as defined by the census. In the city of Porto, for example, the local unit working with the homeless population directly provided NSI officers with a list of additional night shelters. These local differences were not recorded by the INE central office, which has no information on the actual implementation at the local level.

In Spain, the INE 2012 Survey on Homeless Persons will conduct a sample survey based on a selection of homeless services, and a selection of users, within selected services, in 2012. This sample survey will include centres of homelessness service provision, which have been classified according to size, taking into

account the number and type of services offered. The centres of service provision in which the interviews will take place will be selected with criteria which allow equal probability in proportion to the number of services they offer, after having been put in order by the province in which they are located to guarantee correct representation of the Spanish regions. Based on the size and weight of the sample, each selected centre will correspond to a proportionate number of interviews. Overall, the questionnaires will include the same questions used in the Survey on Homeless Persons that the INE conducted in 2005, plus some new questions on discrimination and in relation to justice. Estimates of rough sleepers will be made from the survey in facilities for the homeless.

In the UK there was an enumeration of people living rough who were present in day centre<sup>10</sup> services on the Census Day. People living rough were identified through consultation with day centre managers who were asked to point out those individuals who they *regarded* as habitually or repeatedly living rough. There was not a precise definition of what constituted a 'genuine' rough sleeper but the adopted approach assumed that such an individual was recognisable to service providers. Enumerators were told to locate and make contact with day centre services in the areas they were covering, to visit those day centres and to distribute census questionnaires to the people living rough who were using those day centres. An element of 'local variation' was reported by the main census office (Office for National Statistics). Some enumerators chose to involve more service providers working with people living rough, which meant some other forms of homelessness service sometimes helped with the count of people living rough, particularly within London. No listing of which services were involved in each part of the UK exists. The underlying logic of this approach was an attempt to produce a separate enumeration of people who were literally roofless on the Census dDay – an approach that mirrored the approach taken in Poland, which also sought to distinguish between homeless people living in some form of service and those who were literally roofless on Census Day. Limitations with this approach included day centre provision being focused on population centres, the reliance on NGO interpretation as to who was a 'rough sleeper' and only visiting services used by people living rough (some of which may have been missed) rather than attempting a wider count.

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<sup>10</sup> A day centre service refers to a fixed site service that provides food, sometimes a safe place to drink alcohol away from the streets, support with accessing health services (and/or direct provision of health services, usually via a nurse or nurse practitioner, i.e. a nurse qualified to prescribe drugs or sometimes a General Practitioner, i.e. a community based doctor funded through the National Health Service), access to education, training and support in securing employment, drug and alcohol services (almost exclusively working to a harm reduction/minimization model).

Emergency (direct access) accommodation, night shelters, hostels and other accommodation based services were also visited by enumerators on Census Day in the UK. However, despite the fact that the residents of any accommodation based service or facility identified as being for homeless people by local authorities (municipalities) and cooperating NGOs were counted as 'homeless people', the standard census return was used. This meant that no data were collected on whether or not someone residing in a homelessness service on Census Day had recently slept rough or habitually slept rough. Given that people living rough rarely stay outside all the time, this probably led to an under-representation of the primary homeless population of the UK, as any primary homeless people in accommodation based services and facilities for homeless people on Census Day would have (in effect) been recorded as people habitually resident in those places.

### 6.2.2 Count in facilities – Secondary homeless people

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As noted, only six out of the ten countries that undertook a count of homeless people in facilities and accommodation based services also attempted to count secondary homeless people living in temporary accommodation.<sup>11</sup> These were France, Ireland, Lithuania, Poland, Spain and the UK. In all the countries this count took place in communal facilities and the homeless people present/residing there on the Census Day/Night were asked to fill in the census form (often a shortened or adapted version). The identification of these communal facilities had usually been undertaken in advance by a joint cooperative effort between the Central Statistics Office and local NGOs and/or municipal services (e.g. Ireland and the UK). Within Poland, shelters for homeless people can be identified because they are designated with an identification code, which is only applied to homelessness shelters.

There was considerable variation amongst the countries regarding the detail of the information provided on these specific counts. The following section gives a brief overview of the available information on each country.

In France, no definition of secondary homeless was employed in the census, but there was a definition of 'sans domicile' which included people living rough and people sleeping in a place including a homeless shelter (long or short stay) and also a flat or a hotel bed in which they depended on an NGO for support. According to the French expert, homeless people living in collective accommodation filled in the

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<sup>11</sup> As noted above, Germany used a registration approach but also undertook a count of those persons living in communal facilities for homeless persons. The procedure was similar as described below for France and Ireland, but numbers will not be published and instead subsumed under the total number of people living in communal accommodation.

census questionnaires, which were then collected by the census enumerators. The data from homeless people living in flats or hotels who were depending on an NGO were collected together within the general census enumeration.

In Ireland, the procedure undertaken regarding secondary homeless people in temporary accommodation was exactly the same as described above with regards to the counting of people in communal facilities. All secondary homeless people staying in communal facilities providing accommodation to homeless households were counted on the night of the census and data was gathered through the application of a shortened version of the general census form.

In Lithuania, although there is no separate category of secondary homeless people, all homeless persons staying/living in temporary accommodation, defined as an institution of 'temporary residence' (a homeless shelter), were enumerated for the 2011 census. Someone from each institution's staff received specific instructions regarding the completion of the questionnaire and then helped residents to complete it.

In Poland, secondary homeless people were enumerated in the collective facilities they were living in and the census data was recorded by the facility's owner, administrator or manager, using a web-based application. These communal facilities comprise only shelters and similar arrangements for the homeless. According to the national expert, in the facilities for the homeless, the data from all residents – regardless of the duration of their stay – had to be collected.

In Spain, although there was no explicit distinction between primary and secondary homelessness, secondary homeless people could be indirectly identified in the definition, which will be used in the forthcoming 2012 survey. The methodology explained in the above section will be also used for obtaining data on "secondary homeless people". That said, the scope of the survey consists of homeless people, 18 years old or older, living in towns of over 20 000 inhabitants, so the exercise will be a statistical projection rather than a census of secondary homeless people.

In the UK, only forms of temporary accommodation that were explicitly identified as services for homeless people were included, i.e. both emergency and medium-stay communal and congregate temporary accommodation (including specialist accommodation based services, e.g. for homeless young people, homeless former offenders, homeless people with problematic drug and alcohol use and intensive services for chronically homeless people). According to the national expert, the same methodology was used as that which was employed for other "communal establishments", such as nursing homes, military barracks or student accommodation, though visits to homelessness accommodation were conducted as close to Census Day as possible. Enumerators identified a specific address or establishment as being for homeless people and then distributed the standard census return

among the residents. An individual who was a resident in 'homelessness accommodation' could be identified as a person living at an address providing temporary accommodation for homeless people and therefore as a "homeless person". According to the main UK census office (ONS), not all 'homeless' communal establishments may have been correctly identified as such, but an attempt was made to create and then verify a list with local service providers and the municipality (local authority) in each region. The manager of each communal establishment was also given a 'tick-box' questionnaire, which simply counted the residents on that day and which also identified the type of communal establishment it was (a cross-check with the list of establishment types with which ONS was working). Enumerators were told to locate and make contact with temporary accommodation services for 'homeless people' in the areas they were covering, and to visit and to distribute census questionnaires to the homeless people who were residing there.

There were some limitations with the approach adopted in the UK. The lack of data by which to identify primary from secondary homeless people has already been noted and, again, while some care was taken, some homelessness services may have been missed and homeless people in services not identified as 'homelessness' services (e.g. specialist accommodation for former offenders, people with problematic drug use, people with mental health problems and refuges and supported housing for women at risk of gender based violence) would also have been missed. Homelessness services are also concentrated in population centres. The operation of the homelessness laws in the UK requires local authorities (municipalities) to provide temporary accommodation until a settled home can be secured to households found to be homeless and in priority need (requiring assistance). While some use is made of accommodation based services, this legal duty to provide temporary accommodation is often discharged by municipalities making temporary use of ordinary private rented or social rented housing. There was no provision in the census to determine if the tenant in such housing was someone who was legally defined as homeless and only temporarily a resident in that housing while they awaited a settled home.

### **6.3 Cooperation with NGOs and other homelessness service providers**

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There is evidence of cooperation with homelessness service providers in all countries where the 2011 census conducted enumeration of homeless people. However, the actual scope of that involvement varied among the different countries and the level of information on what had actually happened at local level was sometimes not extensive.

Overall, it is possible to identify countries where there is evidence of an NGO's involvement during both the preparation and implementation phases (Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Spain and the UK) and countries where such involvement seems to have occurred only during the preparation stage (France), or only during the implementation stage (Italy).

The most common type of cooperation between national statistical offices and NGOs and other service providers during the census preparation stage centred on: the identification/mapping of places where rough sleepers usually gather; the listing of facilities (e.g. accommodation based services and day centres) where homeless people lived or were present during the day; the updating of existing maps or lists of facilities; the organisation of joint meetings for discussing methodology and logistics (e.g. how to collect the data, how to approach the services). Some examples of these different types of involvement in the countries under analysis are given below:

*The staff of NGOs and other service providers working with homeless people helped to create the lists of places where homeless people (usually primary homeless people) were staying or gathering to spend their time. (Lithuania; Questionnaire response)*

*Update or create municipal maps of "uninhabitable" places where homeless people stay (...) updated information on collective accommodation facilities providing assistance to the homeless. (Poland; Questionnaire response)*

*(...) the Data Sub-Group of the National Homelessness Consultative Committee met with the Central Statistics Office to discuss how best to collect the data (...)* (Ireland; Questionnaire response)

The involvement of NGOs and other service providers occurred both at the national level (through specific working groups or NGO umbrella organisations) and at the local level, between the municipal/regional statistical offices and service providers. During the implementation phase of the 2011 census, several countries reported different levels of cooperation from service providers, ranging from the direct involvement of workers in the enumeration of homeless people and in delivering/filling in the questionnaires (Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Portugal, UK) to the facilitation of the questionnaires' application (Portugal, Spain).

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## 7. Data Collected and Expected

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As we have described in the previous sections, there was considerable variation amongst the countries in how homelessness was defined and counted. Particular differences centred on whether a distinction between primary and secondary homeless was applied and whether and how counts of these two groups of homeless people were carried out. In this section, we describe which data have been collected and will be expected, focusing specifically on whether separate data for primary and secondary homelessness will be available (Table 7.1).

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**Table 7.1: Expected data on homelessness from the 2011 census**

	No data on homelessness collected in census	Data collected but no intention to publish separate results on homelessness	Separate data on primary homelessness	Separate data on secondary homelessness	Combined data on primary and secondary homelessness
<b>Countries with register-based census</b>					
Denmark	X				
Germany		X			
Netherlands	X				
Slovenia	X				
Sweden	X				
<b>Countries with non-register-based census</b>					
Czech Republic			X		
France			X		
Hungary		X			
Ireland			X	X	
Italy					X
Lithuania					X
Poland			X	X	
Portugal			X		
Spain					X
UK		X			

Source: Questionnaire responses

## 7.1 Expected data

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In some countries with a register-based census, homelessness was generally not covered in the census and no data on homelessness will be available. However, it should be noted that in both Denmark and Sweden, extensive national counts of homelessness was carried out in 2011, though not as a part of the census.

Amongst the countries with a non-register-based census, there is variation to the extent in which data on primary and secondary homelessness will be available. In Ireland separate data will be available on both primary and secondary homelessness. However, as previously mentioned, a count of rough sleepers was only carried out in Dublin. Also in Poland data will be available separately for both groups. In France data on part of the 'sans domicile' population will also be available. This group includes rough sleepers and those sleeping in emergency shelters. Those homeless people sleeping in a long-stay shelter are enumerated but counts of this population will not be published separately from other long term collective accommodation, though the census office is presently working on a more detailed classification. Homeless people sleeping in a hotel or a flat were enumerated but counts will not be published separately from those of people sleeping in other hotels, or people living in other flats.

In the Italian census there was no distinction between primary and secondary homelessness and only data comprising both groups together will be available. Also in Lithuania, there was no distinction between primary and secondary homelessness and the data on homelessness will comprise both groups. In Spain, the adopted definition makes a distinction between several subgroups amongst the homeless, but the data are collected through a sample survey in facilities and will be a statistical projection rather than an actual national census. In addition, homeless people in Spain will all be defined and counted as one group, with no distinction being made between primary and secondary homelessness along the lines recommended in EU regulation. The proportion of people living on the streets in Spain will be estimated based on the data from the survey of homelessness services.

In both the Czech Republic and Portugal there will only be data available on primary homelessness in both countries counted through facilities. In the Czech Republic secondary homeless people were also counted at their place of accommodation, but will be included in the total population by place of residence.

In the UK no separate data will be available on homelessness as the ONS (The Office for National Statistics) reported that there are no plans for specific outputs on homeless people. The plan is to release general data on people living in communal establishments, not broken down in a way that would identify homeless people. However, it should be noted, that the data collection for the UK census has been designed in such a way that some data on homelessness can be extracted. Also in Hungary, there are no plans to publish specific data on homelessness, and data will probably only be available in more general volumes about social stratification and demography, though there would appear to be the potential to produce separate releases of census data focused specifically on homeless people.

## **7.2 Quality of homelessness data**

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The respondents were also asked to assess the quality of statistical data on the size, location and characteristics of the homeless population in their country prior to the census and to assess to what extent data on homelessness from the 2011 census was anticipated to change the quality of statistical data on the size, location and characteristics of the homeless population in their country.

In some of the countries with a register-based census, and where no data on homelessness has been collected, the quality of data on homelessness was considered to be already adequate. In the Netherlands, the Dutch Federation of Shelters has been collecting data on clients of service providers for more than a decade. Yearly data on homelessness and provided care are available through The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, and the Federation of Shelters. The gaps in the data are considered to be about the rough sleepers, people in insufficient housing and people living in other institutions than shelters.

In Sweden there were national counts of homelessness in 1993, 1999 and 2005, and the assessment of the importance of the census data for Sweden is in a context in which the national count of homelessness is carried out by the National Board of Health and Welfare. According to the national expert, homeless people have to be known by authorities or NGOs to be included in the count, but it is estimated only to be a small number which falls outside the coverage of this survey.

In Denmark, data on homelessness is already considered to be extensive as national counts of homelessness were carried out in 2007, 2009, and 2011 and as there is a national client registration system covering almost all homeless shelters in Denmark, providing data for comprehensive annual statistics.

However, in the other two countries with a register-based census, and with no data on homelessness collected as part of the census (Germany and Slovenia), existing data were assessed as being limited. In Slovenia, there is no explicit official definition of homeless people, and there are no comprehensive or consistent data on homelessness. As mentioned earlier, there was a group of homeless people counted in the census as part of the people who had their permanent residence registered at the local centres for social work, but this category does not include only homeless people and nor all the homeless. In Germany, only one regional state, North Rhine-Westphalia, is regularly collecting data on homelessness each year (at a given day, 30<sup>th</sup> of June), whereas none of the other 15 regional states, nor the national government collects data on homelessness on an empirically valid basis.

In some countries the census is expected to enhance the understanding of homelessness, compared to existing knowledge. In Ireland, data has been collected every three years on a national basis since 1991 on households registered as homeless with local housing authorities and a count of rough sleepers takes place twice a year in Dublin. Still, the census data are expected to enhance the quality of data. Since the completion of the questionnaires, a special section from the 2011 census on housing and homelessness was published by the Central Statistics Office in the autumn of 2012. The report gives statistics for the homeless population and separate figures are given for rough sleepers and homeless persons in accommodation. Detailed statistics are also given on demographic variables and other characteristics such as economic status, and general health.

In the Czech Republic there was no attempt prior to the census to survey the number of homeless people in the whole country. There were only occasional local attempts to count homeless people in larger cities mostly led by municipalities in cooperation with service providers. The data from the census is expected to enhance the understanding of homelessness as the census will give the first official number of homeless people in the Czech Republic, which can also serve as a starting point for further research to quantify the number of homeless people.

In Lithuania, data on homelessness had previously been collected in the population census in 2001. It is however expected, that the 2011 census will enhance the understanding of homelessness because of a more comprehensive definition of homelessness than in the 2001 census.

However, there are also countries where the data collection in the 2011 census is not expected to make a significant difference to the understanding of homelessness. The national expert assesses that the census data will not make a significant difference to the understanding of homelessness, as not all homeless people are expected to be surveyed by the census and as there are relatively few questions. More information is expected from the National Homelessness Survey, a sample

survey, conducted by INSEE (The National Institute of Statistics) every ten years. However, the data are only on a national level and there is a need for data on a regional and local level (only the Paris urban area can be examined separately in this survey). In Italy, data existing prior to the census was relatively old, and the nature of homelessness can be expected to have changed. However, the national respondent does not assess the data from the 2011 census to make any significant difference to the understanding of homelessness due to the complexity of the phenomenon relative to the data that are going to be available from the census.

In Spain the Homeless People Survey has not been repeated on an individual level since 2005, and existing data are as such relatively old, though a survey on the level of services has been collected more or less biannually since 2003. The national correspondent predicts that the 2012 survey will be important as a tool to compare the evolution or changes in the living conditions of homeless people, as both the survey in 2012 and the previous survey in 2005 include questions about the origins and causes of homelessness, but at the same time the Spanish data will also not constitute a census of homelessness, but instead only a large-sample survey from which projections about the actual extent of homelessness will be made.

In Portugal, the existing data on homelessness – both that collected from the organisations working in the field and from the very few surveys which were made – has given an understanding of the main characteristics of the homeless population and identified the territories where homeless people are concentrated. However, establishing the size of the homeless population has been difficult. The only national survey held before the census was the Institute for Social Security national survey on rough sleepers in 2005 and doubts were raised about the figures which were then reported. All the other available administrative data do not allow for a rigorous estimate of the size of the homeless population. At the local level, since the launching of the national homelessness strategy, many municipalities in Portugal have established local homelessness units which have implemented more or less sophisticated information systems which have improved the local knowledge on the size, nature and location of the homeless population.

According to the Portuguese respondent, the collection of data on homelessness by the census was an important step forward since it allowed a national coverage of the homeless population which until now had been absent from the previous censuses. However, the fact that the census only included the coverage of homeless people living rough or those in night shelters means that the information collected will probably not bring many improvements as regards the understanding of the nature of homelessness. The questionnaire itself was relatively limited in terms of the demographic data collected. The major improvement to be expected is regards the information it might provide on the extent of rooflessness.

In the UK, quarterly statistical returns on the operation of the homelessness legislation and associated returns on homelessness prevention service activity only provide crude 'headcount' data. The numbers of households and basic data are listed according to their characteristics and reasons for their homelessness, with the data on preventative service activity being particularly limited and doing little more than recording how many households received a specific type of preventative intervention. Actual numbers of homeless people cannot be determined from these returns, because they do not take into account the double counting of households making repeat approaches to services for assistance under the homelessness legislation or making repeated use of preventative services. Nor do they make any count of those homeless people who do not even approach services. There is also a quarterly return giving a count of the households accepted as statutorily homeless who are awaiting housing in temporary housing or accommodation, listing the type of temporary accommodation being used.

In the UK, data are also collected on housing support services for homeless and potentially homeless people. This centres on mobile support services, including tenancy sustainment and resettlement services and accommodation based services (including hostels, direct access/ night shelters/ emergency shelters and supported communal/congregate housing for homeless people), but these are confined to England at national level, with no equivalent databases existing for Wales, Northern Ireland or Scotland. These data report the characteristics of households using these services over the course of each financial year and cover both short and long term services. From these data it is possible to ascertain the level of service use by households and individuals who are primarily identified as homeless people *and* those people and households who are primarily identified as having another support need (e.g. at risk of gender based violence, severe mental illness, former offender), but who are also 'homeless' (up to three forms of need in addition to primary need can be recorded). In addition, in London, there is a shared database called CHAIN that covers most of the services working with people living rough and the street-using population, which enables the longitudinal tracking of people using these services while they remain in contact with those services (including people living rough). Again, these data are a measure of service activity, not a population count. In England, the government recently ceased to fund the collection of data on homelessness services and other forms of housing support, but most municipalities have continued to collect and aggregate the data for strategic purposes. There are also currently extensive data on social housing lets, which include information about whether a household was statutorily or non-statutorily homeless, household composition, ethnicity, religion, economic status and support needs (including all welfare benefits being claimed), which enable a detailed examination of the characteristics of homeless households receiving social housing lets.

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All four UK countries have periodically attempted street counts of people living rough. These counts are never more than partial and widely regarded by homelessness researchers and homelessness service providers as inaccurate. This mistrust of street counts as a methodology was reinforced when considerable inaccuracies were found in the street counts of homeless people attempted for the 2001 census.

According to the UK respondent, the data from the UK census will – assuming they are eventually released – provide a broad snapshot of those living rough and the use of homelessness services that is UK-wide, which gives a broad indication of the levels and disposition of homelessness and the characteristics of homeless people. This is something that it is difficult to do on a UK-wide basis, because administrative data are not collected in a consistent format. However, the coverage of the census and the methodological limitations means this will be a partial picture. It will continue to be the case that the actual size and composition of the UK homeless population is not being accurately recorded, both in terms of providing robust data based on the operational and legal definitions of homelessness used in the UK and in terms of providing robust data on the extent or characteristics of populations within different ETHOS categorisations of homelessness and housing need.

In Hungary there is no official data collection on homelessness. However, there is unofficial data collection on homelessness – carried out annually by the February 3<sup>rd</sup> Group (a group of professionals, working for service-provider organisations). This data collection tries to reach homeless people through service providers, with the participation of service providers being voluntary. This does not collect data about all homeless people, but in fact only those in touch with certain services (night shelters, hostels, outreach teams). Day centres are not included (to avoid double counting). There have been two attempts to enumerate rough sleepers in Budapest (once in 2005 and in 2008), but the counts did not provide a complete coverage. They served as a basis for forming a statistical estimate, purely on the number of rough sleepers. There will be detailed data about homeless services: what facilities there are, how many people share a room and so forth.

According to the Hungarian respondent, it is unlikely that there will be specific data about homeless service users published from the census results, and therefore also unlikely that the data collected by the census will improve understanding about homelessness. At the same time there are challenges to the reliability of data. Due to the political climate in Hungary (where living rough is an offence by law, and people found committing the offence of living rough can be punished by fines and /or imprisonment), some outreach services decided not to help reach those living rough in their area. Those enumerators who were not familiar with where those living rough congregate might not have found them or contacted them. Furthermore, not all service-users were reported to be covered by the census. Some hostels and

night shelters were not approached by the local authority to participate (thus people sleeping in those were left out); as delivering accommodation services for the homeless in the capital of Hungary is the responsibility of the City of Budapest and not that of the districts, some districts might not know (all) service providers in their area. In theory, enumerators visited all those who were sleeping in a given service on the night of 1<sup>st</sup> October 2011. However, not everyone could be reached or wished to take part in the census (although enumerators often visited larger shelters and hostels several times after that night to be able to talk to everyone).

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## 8. Assessment of the Census by NGOs

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In the 15 countries covered by the study national respondents were asked to collect the views of NGOs or other agencies providing services to homeless people on the 2011 census. The first major difference in the answers given to this question relates to the different approach to counting homeless people in the census, referred to in section 4 on the one hand as countries with a register-based census and, on the other hand, as countries where the census is not register-based.

Among the former, the information provided on this particular issue is, as expected, very limited and in two cases (Denmark and Sweden) the response given relates not to the 2011 population census, but rather to the specific national homelessness count or census. In both countries, the views of the NGOs approached are generally very positive, particularly in relation to the coverage and regularity of the counts undertaken.

In the other three countries in the group (Germany, the Netherlands and Slovenia) the assessment made is more negative, highlighting limitations related to the census' potential to provide an accurate representation of homelessness and the limited resources available for the statistical operation.

On the side of the countries where the census is not register-based it was possible to identify some trends in the answers given by the ten countries under analysis. The first major conclusion from the answers provided is the presence of a positive assessment from those countries where national statistical offices were dealing with homelessness for the first time in the 2011 censuses. Such was the case of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Portugal. In all these countries there are explicit references to the importance of this "first time statistical approach to homelessness", even though the reasons presented were relatively different from country to country (e.g. statistical recognition, data comprehensiveness, data representativeness, level of coverage). In Spain, stakeholders value the official nature of the census data collection.

*It is for the first time in the Czech and Czechoslovak history, when the statistics recognises homeless people in our country. (Czech Republic; Questionnaire response)*

*The NGOs contacted have mainly valued the fact that the census will provide a national coverage of the homeless population (...)(Portugal; Questionnaire response)*

*Data from the Population and Housing Census and from the Homeless People Survey are important for NGOs because they are the official source of information (...)(Spain; Questionnaire response)*

Other positive aspects mentioned relate to the improvement of homelessness definitions and methodological aspects (e.g. questionnaires' design, enumeration methods).

The assessment of the census also includes the identification of some constraints in the different national contexts, namely as regards three major areas: data quality, coverage of the homeless population and fieldwork related problems.

Data quality concerns included comparability problems in relation to existing homelessness counts, accuracy problems and the use of the data collected. The use of restricted definitions of homelessness – often compared to ETHOS – and the persistence of 'hidden' groups of homeless people not covered by the Census was also mentioned in the responses given by the experts as regards the coverage of the homeless population. Fieldwork related problems included the lack of preparation/training of census enumerators and the difficulty to reach certain groups of the 'less visible' homeless population.

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## 9. Discussion

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This final section of the report discusses some of the implications of the main findings. The section is divided into three subsections, the first of which explores the recognition of homelessness as a social problem and how homeless people are regarded relative to the other members of society. The second part of this section critically assesses the approaches that have been taken to understand the nature, distribution and extent of homelessness in different EU member states. Finally, this section of the report explores the key lessons from the findings and considers how the enumeration and estimate of the needs, characteristics, experiences, numbers and spatial distribution of homeless people might be better understood in order to inform national and regional homelessness strategies and the design and displacement of services that both prevent and rapidly tackle homelessness.

### 9.1 The representation of homeless people

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In some respects the results of this study are disappointing. Sustained efforts to develop shared measures of homelessness at EU level, including the development of ETHOS, ETHOS Light and the MPHASIS programme, which are summarised in Section 3, eventually produced only very limited EU level guidance on how the 2011 censuses should define, enumerate or estimate homelessness. In turn, it is clear from this research that even this limited regulation was only implemented by a small number of countries and appears to have not been referred to by the census offices of many countries. What this means is that the hope of a 2011 census-based EU-wide figure for homelessness, which uses a consistent definition, is not a realistic one.

One possibility for the 2011 censuses was that there would at least be a basic count/estimation of what the EU regulations termed 'primary homelessness', i.e. those individuals in ETHOS categories 1.2 and 2.1 of people living rough and in nightshelters/ emergency accommodation. There is evidence, both from this exercise and from previous explorations of the measurement of homelessness, that EU member states all tend to agree that people within these populations are 'homeless'. Yet while there was, at least in the broad sense, some consistency in terms of all the countries regarding 'primary homelessness' as *being* homelessness (though rarely using that term for it) some of them simply opted not to measure it, or measured it in such a way that the count or estimate of primary homeless people was subsumed into a larger and more broadly defined population of people living in communal settings and

accommodation based services. What this meant was that while there was the *potential* to develop an EU level count or estimate of primary homelessness for 2011, inconsistencies in measurement mean that this number cannot now be produced.

Differences in policy, culture and even the basic conceptualisation of what homelessness is become more marked once the focus moves away from people living rough and in emergency accommodation. British, Danish and Swedish conceptualisations of what a state of 'homelessness' is, for example, while not wholly consistent with one another, are far broader in how they define a situation of 'homelessness' than the definitions used in some other countries. More generally, views and regulations on what constitutes adequate housing, which in turn relate to how a state of 'homelessness' is defined, are often more generous in countries in the North and West of the EU. Difficulties in arriving at a shared definition of other forms of homelessness always meant that it would be more of a challenge to arrive at a comparable figure for secondary homelessness across the EU. Here, the lack of reference to the definition of homelessness in EU regulation for the 2011 censuses becomes more important, because a shared definition of something like 'secondary' homelessness had to be imposed on the various member states with their inconsistent definitions of wider homelessness, in order to get a comparable figure. The lack of reference to the EU regulation really limits what can be produced from the results of the 2011 censuses on secondary homelessness. Nevertheless, this is again one part of the problem, because there are not only inconsistencies in what was measured, there are also gaps in data where certain population groups in some countries have simply not been counted or estimated.

Homeless people are therefore not well represented in the censuses of 2011 and we will remain unclear about their numbers, needs, characteristics, experiences and their physical location across the EU as a whole. Within some countries, data on homelessness will be partial and sometimes highly limited. There will not be an EU-wide figure on homelessness in 2011 and homeless people will not have been counted in the same way as the rest of the EU's population in many member states and on occasion, they will not have been counted or estimated at all.

It is also worth bearing in mind what the motivations of the census offices are in counting homeless people. The objective of a census is to learn about the entire population and the inclusion of homeless people within the 2011 censuses was motivated primarily by the objective to better understand the overall demography of each country and not to better understand homelessness.

Despite the limitations with what the 2011 censuses will tell us overall, there are some positive aspects to what this research has found. The first of these centres on how rich the data of some countries is on homelessness, from which we can learn a lot about the needs, characteristics and experiences of homeless people,

their routes into homelessness and their exits from homelessness. These data can be cross compared – at least to some extent – and inform both our general understanding of homelessness, the design of preventative services and the design of services to quickly end homelessness once it occurs. Extensive data exists in Denmark which has the potential to enhance EU-wide understanding of homelessness and there is extensive survey data in France, Sweden, Spain and the annual 3<sup>rd</sup> February count in Hungary for example. Extensive data from service providers exists in England (though it is not organised at national level in the other UK nations) and in the Netherlands.

There are limits in what any such comparative analysis might show. It is arguable that some of the countries with the best data on homelessness are also those in which homelessness does not exist on the scale found in less economically prosperous EU member states. Comparisons between say Denmark and England would be comparisons of societies where sustained 'structural' homelessness, i.e. poor people without support needs, whose homelessness is associated with constricting labour markets and poor supply of affordable housing, is probably *less* common than structural homelessness in some parts of the East and South of the EU, linked to better welfare systems and stronger labour markets (Stephens *et al*, 2010). Sustained homelessness in societies like Denmark and England may be more commonly associated with welfare system failures, with relatively more 'chronically' or 'multiply excluded' people within the homeless population compared to what are basically poor people facing hard times who have become homeless (Culhane and Kuhn, 1998; Meert, 2005; Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2011). Yet while comparisons between comparably data rich countries may have some limits, this does not invalidate the potential usefulness of such work. Comparably data rich countries are also not always that similar; Denmark and Spain, for example might be productively compared.

The 2011 censuses will also enhance the data on homelessness in some countries. Counts and estimates may in some respects be limited and incomplete, but they are nevertheless useful in enhancing understanding of homelessness. As was reported by the experts in the Czech Republic and Portugal, getting homelessness measured within the 2011 censuses was an important step forward in itself. The 2011 censuses were the first time any attempt had been made to measure homelessness in some societies. There is a longstanding evidence gap – particularly with respect to statistical data – on homelessness in parts of the South and East of the EU, and where the 2011 censuses are producing more systematic data, or indeed the first data, on homelessness, this can only be beneficial in enhancing our understanding. In addition, the data collected for the 2011 censuses in comparably data rich countries such as France and the UK still has utility, even if it does not

encompass all elements of the homeless population. There may again be challenges in using some of these census data, not least in getting some countries like Hungary and the UK to release the data they have collected.

Yet while there is data on homelessness and still the potential to cross-compare and learn from that data, a key finding of this research has to be that an opportunity has been missed with the 2011 censuses. There has been a failure to coordinate, a failure to refer to regulation and guidance and a neglect of homeless people within the conduct of the 2011 censuses by some countries.

## 9.2 The measurement of homelessness

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A key finding of the research is that there is a fundamental difficulty in using register-based methodologies that attempt to count populations without a fixed address or who move frequently. This is a general methodological flaw that is not confined to the enumeration or estimate of homeless people, as poverty and social marginalisation is often associated with residential *instability* and living in 'non-conventional' shelter, not just among homeless people, but also among other groups such as Roma or recently arrived migrants or other vulnerable groups such as people with problematic drug use or severe mental illness (Burrows, 1997b; Meert and Bourgeois, 2005). Any system that counts people where they live will have difficulties with people who move around a lot and anyone living anywhere that is not an 'official' (an administratively recognised) address.

While register-based systems that are organised around an address may have limits, there is more scope to employ population tracking systems that work by using service contacts or other recorded activity by an individual, or using some combination of individual level data (e.g. from health, welfare and other services) with address data. It is possible to contemplate – at least in theory – the large scale merging of administrative data to count and to track homeless populations, especially in those countries with relatively extensive welfare systems with multiple regional or national level administrative databases (Pleace and Bretherton, 2006). There are some examples of such data sharing, such as within the G4 cities' Self-Sufficiency Matrix database used in the Netherlands, though data merging without informed consent is not permitted under legislation in some other countries like the UK, which forms a potentially significant obstacle.

Data merging to try to count homeless people does not appear to have been attempted in register-based censuses in 2011. Instead what has happened is either the undertaking of a separate survey-based exercise to count homeless people (as in Denmark, Sweden and Spain), or a broad, undifferentiated, count of everyone living in communal accommodation (as in Germany) or little or no effort being made to

count homeless people within the census (Netherlands and Slovenia). The attraction of register-based censuses from an administrative perspective is obvious; if all your population are registered on a continually updated population database for tax, welfare and other purposes, this is both highly convenient and enables you to effectively take a census whenever you like. The difficulty is with those populations which are not on the grid that can be seen by population registers and databases, because additional effort and resources will be needed to find and count those populations, like homeless people, who are 'off grid'. Register-based censuses may always need to do more work on basic enumeration and perhaps – at least to some extent – have to run discrete, focused exercises, in order to count homeless populations.

The measurement of homeless people in countries that were not using register-based systems was in some respects more thorough than in register-based countries. In these countries, an effort had to be made to gather data from the general population and while it is not possible to draw a firm conclusion about why they tended to make more effort to measure homelessness, it may have been related to the 2011 censuses being specific exercises designed to undertake population counts. These countries were not consistent, indeed only Poland appears to have made any effort to follow the EU regulations with respect to producing figures on both primary and secondary homelessness, but all had made some effort to count homelessness.

The methodologies employed by countries which were not using register-based systems were variable. Street counts continued to be widely used. The criticisms of this methodology range from it only covering one night, not covering all areas, not finding any person living rough who remains hidden for reasons of safety, not necessarily being able to disentangle street-using from street residing populations, not controlling for the tendency of people living rough to be on the street one night, but in a shelter the next, then back on the street, and further criticisms of the methodology just generally being rather imprecise are longstanding. As noted, following a perceived failure of street counts in 2001, the UK census office abandoned the approach for the 2011 census, though the position in the UK is not consistent as central government still uses street counts to assess numbers of people living rough in England<sup>12</sup>. In the US, a move towards using censuses of people using homelessness services was also driven by the perceived inaccuracy of street counts (Burt, 2001).

Street counts do however generate some information on the visible extent of people living rough and can, when repeated, tell us something about trends over time. The information is limited to one part of a much larger population that either allows itself

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingresearch/housingstatistics/housingstatisticsby/roughsleepingcounts/>

to be seen, or happens to be seen by enumerators, but street counts do illustrate if a problem is present and are, arguably, a 'canary' indicator in the sense that if homeless people are present on the street at all, let alone in increasing numbers, it is indicative of housing and welfare system failure and quite possibly an indicator of more widespread problems. Escalations in street homelessness can be associated with significant rises in other forms of homelessness, for example in the UK during the 1980s (Anderson, 1993).

There have been attempts to improve the street count methodology and as evidenced by this research, it is common to draw on local knowledge to try to target those areas where people living rough are thought to congregate. Risks still remain that people will be missed and that the local knowledge referred to may not be complete or indeed accurate. Other attempts at innovation have included controversial techniques like 'capture-recapture' which are actually designed to estimate animal populations in the wild (Fisher *et al*, 1994), yet while some successes have been claimed, there are both conceptual and ethical questions about applying a technique that is basically designed to count antelopes to understand the much more complex population distributions exhibited by human beings (Williams, 2010).

Attempts to supplement or bypass the use of street counts, both in terms of the 2011 censuses and also in terms of attempts to survey and count homeless people more generally, have focused on the use of surveys targeted on service provision. This was the basic approach in several countries, either in terms of what the census enumeration attempted to do or where additional data collection on homelessness was targeted, for example in Spain. The strengths of this approach are obvious, homeless people need services, beds, food, resources and support in order to survive, so targeting those services does give one access to the homeless population.

The criticisms of this approach are threefold. First, defining what provision is regarded as a 'homelessness' service is not necessarily unproblematic, for example supported housing for former offenders or drug users, or women at risk of gender based violence, may not be a 'homeless' service but it may contain many people at risk of homelessness or who have recently been homeless. Second, not everyone who is homeless will be in homelessness services on a given day or night and there may be a tendency for some high need groups to avoid all but the lowest threshold services and/or encounter barriers to entering some homelessness services, for example due to presenting challenging or anti-social behaviour. Third, American research has reported that cross-sectional or single day surveys of homelessness services appear to be *inherently* inaccurate because people with high support needs tend to stay much longer in emergency shelters and other accommodation based services for homeless people than homeless people with lower support needs. Someone with high needs might occupy a bed in an emergency shelter for

200 nights in a year, compared to those with lower needs who stay perhaps a few nights altogether. This pattern in the use of homelessness services means that people with higher support needs are more likely to be in a service when a count or survey is undertaken. This can lead to an overrepresentation of people with high support needs and is a powerful argument for using longitudinal surveys, monitoring populations over time, and understanding the numbers, needs, experiences and characteristics of homeless people (Wong, 1997).

The common difficulty that these various methods all wrestle with is the tendency of homelessness to be in varying degrees mobile, because something or someone that does not stay in one place but moves around is inherently more difficult to count. There is also another potential difficulty, which centres on what may be the *transient* nature of much homelessness. The evidence here is North American and all sorts of caveats centred on the radically different political, cultural, social and economic context in which US homelessness occurs, including the far more constricted welfare systems than in much of the EU (Busch-Geertsema *et al*, 2010). However, there are hints that the pattern suggested by the US research of a large, structurally homeless population with low support needs – basically poor people who have fallen on hard times – existing alongside a much smaller, high need group of chronically homeless/multiply excluded homeless people, is also present in Belgium, France and the UK (Meert and Bourgeois, 2005; Brousse, 2009; Pleace *et al*, 2008).

This larger 'structural' element of the homeless population, poor people with low support needs, tends to be *transitional* which makes it far harder to count than a population which remains in a steady state. The reason for this is that this transitional population appears to self-exit from homelessness. The exits that transitionally homeless people make from homelessness may not always be sustained and these exits may be from a situation of homelessness into one of housing exclusion, but there does appear to be a considerable group of people who become homeless and cease to be homeless within a fairly short amount of time (Culhane and Kuhn, 1998). People's circumstances change constantly, an unmarried unemployed person found by one census may be married and working when the next census is taken, but homelessness may not be experienced for long by some groups, perhaps even by the *majority* of people who become homeless, and that limits the ability of existing census methodologies to capture its full extent.

### 9.3 Counting homelessness

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There are three difficulties in counting homeless people. The first is that some homeless people do not necessarily live in accessible or officially recognised places, creating some difficulties for register-based systems that centre on a physical address and also limiting the coverage of non-register based systems which might well not attempt to count groups like people living in derelict buildings or those who are living outside but are hidden from view. The second is that some homeless people can be very 'mobile', in the sense that they may not remain in any one accommodation setting on a continual basis. For example, while remaining in the same geographical area, a homeless person may move between several precarious or temporary accommodation settings, over a relatively short amount of time, being in emergency accommodation one night, on a friend's floor another night, or on the street for a third night. This creates difficulties for register based systems and can limit the effectiveness of other methodologies, for example a census on a given night focused on homelessness services will probably miss at least some of the people who habitually use those services. Thirdly, homelessness is a transitional state for at least some people, meaning it will not be detected unless it is occurring when a census is taking place.

The obvious recommendations are those which centre on improvement of data collection on homeless people. Clearly a specific effort to enumerate the people using homelessness services, record the same range of data on those people as on the general population to allow comparison and the careful publication of clearly demarcated data on homeless people is desirable. Without such data, it is not merely a question of there being limits to our understanding of what the nature, distribution and – by extension – the solutions to homelessness are across the EU. We are also in a situation where we lack basic data about a profound and now resurgent social problem that represents a fundamental failure across European society. There is a case for a shared definition, for an agreed consistent methodology and for ensuring that everyone counts homelessness in the same way, assuming there will be another attempt at a census in 2021. Work on promoting the coherent, coordinated collection of basic data on homelessness should begin now.

This said, there are inherent limits to the census as a source of data on homelessness. The great potential strength lies in cross comparison of the nature and extent of homelessness across the EU, but censuses are very far apart and collect only limited data. As already noted, we must also bear in mind that the primary purpose of a census is to understand the overall demography of a country and that any concern with homelessness is only ever within the context of that primary goal. The censuses cannot be relied upon as a sufficient data source on homelessness, even if the collection of data is subject to considerable improvement, more detailed and

more current data will always be necessary in order to plan policy, develop strategy, inform commissioning and assess service effectiveness. Here, there is a case for exploring some element of harmonisation and perhaps too for making the case for modifications to administrative systems and survey methodologies – perhaps confined to a few variables to create a minimum common data set – that would allow the major administrative databases and surveys on homelessness that exist in the EU to sometimes be employed for comparative analysis. There is also a need for repeated, consistent data collection on homelessness in order to understand how the homeless population is changing, because it is only through trend data that we know, for example, about the greater representation of women, young people and drug users among some primary homeless populations that has occurred in the last 20 years and a corresponding fall in the numbers of early and late middle aged men presenting with problematic alcohol use. The repeated surveys of homeless people in countries like Denmark, Finland, France and Sweden are good examples of this form of data collection. This would of course be difficult to achieve, because it would potentially involve getting many agencies to agree with one another and the establishment of shared protocols around data sharing for comparative work, but this is not a reason not to attempt greater cohesion in data collection on homelessness across EU member states. As a starting point, simply sharing methods of data collection on homelessness may facilitate dialogue and possibly lead to the beginnings of some joint working.

The other possibility to consider is the modification of the census questionnaire for the general population. There have been attempts in surveys to explore the prevalence of homelessness through asking the general population if they have ever been homeless, lived rough or had experiences of housing exclusion as well as asking about their current circumstances (Brousse, 2009; Burrows, 1997a). This approach may be the only way in which to get at least some understanding of transient experiences of homelessness, because it will allow people to provide data on any history of homelessness. In addition, simply asking the question as to whether or not someone is homeless at the point the census is taken will overcome a wave of methodological difficulties around defining homelessness in terms of the type of accommodation someone is occupying or not occupying. These two additions, asking a question on whether someone is currently homeless and whether they have ever been homeless, would probably give a far greater insight into the scale and nature of homelessness in the EU than can be generated by specific, discrete attempts at measuring homelessness.

There are two difficulties with exploring the use of questions on current and previous experience of homelessness. The first is that the tendency to use register-based systems to undertake censuses is only likely to become more widespread. In the current recession, questions are being asked about the utility and cost of

questionnaire based censuses. Other cheaper alternatives, such as smaller, targeted surveys and large scale longitudinal studies that track a population sample over time are arguably more useful in terms of the more extensive data they yield and are sufficiently statistically representative of the population to underpin policy decisions. A general population survey on health can tell one a great deal more than a few general questions in a census questionnaire. The second difficulty is that, if one sought to better understand homelessness either through adding questions to census questionnaires (where these are still used) or to other general and specific surveys of the population, some work would be needed to arrive at a widely accepted and validated set of one, two or three questions on homelessness. A key issue here is obviously to get different countries to agree to a set 'definition' of homelessness. This is not necessarily very easy to do, considering the variations in definitions of 'secondary' forms of homelessness that exist. Nevertheless, the extent of data on the prevalence of homelessness and the characteristics of people who experience it, which might be produced by widespread use of questions such as this one, does make the pursuit of more widespread and consistent data collection on the experience of homelessness well worth considering.

*Have you ever in the last 2/5/10 years experienced one of the following situations?*

- *Had to 'sleep rough'/live on the streets*
- *Had to stay with friends, relatives or other people because you didn't have anywhere else to live*
- *Had to stay in emergency or temporary accommodation because you didn't have anywhere else to live (e.g. night shelter, women's shelter/refuge, hostel or hotel for homeless people, etc.)*
- *Had to stay in some other form of insecure accommodation (e.g. under threat of eviction, under threat of domestic violence, with no legal rights etc)*
- *None of these*

This does not invalidate the use of specific surveys or data collection exercises on homelessness, as without visits to homelessness services and attempts to establish the scale and nature of the population living rough the picture of homelessness would be incomplete. Nevertheless, asking the general population of the EU whether it is homeless or has been homeless would cast a far wider net and give a much better picture of the extent of homelessness across Europe.

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## 11. List of National Experts

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- relaying the views of the stakeholders and society at large.

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# Counting Homeless People in the 2011 Housing and Population Census

The 2011 censuses conducted across the EU were subject to regulation that required the counting or estimation of 'primary' and 'secondary' homeless people. The report looks at the extent to which 15 EU member states followed the regulations on homelessness in undertaking their 2011 censuses, exploring how homelessness was defined, counted and estimated in the 15 countries. The report then moves on to critically assess the coverage of homelessness in the 2011 censuses in these 15 countries. The report finds that while the 2011 census marked a significant improvement in homelessness data available in some countries, in others it represented a missed opportunity and that accurate, comparable data that will give a true insight into the scale and nature of homelessness across the EU remain an elusive goal. The report is the second in a series from the European Observatory of Homelessness (EOH) which explores pan-European issues in homelessness through a questionnaire-based approach employing a group of national experts.

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