

Seminar 2: Counts – Methods – Lessons I

Chair: Lars Benjaminsen, DK

Koen Hermans, BE: Counting Homelessness in Belgium: Local Counts as an Advocacy Strategy



Prof. dr. Koen Hermans is Project Leader at LUCAS, Centre for Care Research and Consultancy, KU Leuven. He is also Assistant Professor 'Social Policy and Social Work' at the Centre for Sociological Research, KU Leuven. His research focuses on homelessness, the care and support of vulnerable groups and social work theories. He is the chair of the COST Action 15218 'Measuring homelessness in Europe (2016-2020)' and the Treasurer of the European Social Work Research Association.

Since in Belgium no common monitoring strategy is available we organised in October 2020, , based on the Norwegian and Danish methodology of national homelessness counts, four local counts, in four cities (Leuven, Gent, Liège, Arlon) and 1 province (Limburg). We present the methodology (the operationalisation of ETHOS light, the cooperation with a broad array of services, the questionnaire, procedure for double counting, privacy of the counted persons) and the main results of Leuven, Ghent and Limburg. Staying temporarily with friends is the largest group among the different ETHOS-categories. We also counted a large number of children in both locations, but they are almost not at all in the streets or in night shelters. In Ghent, 1 out of 3 of the counted adults are undocumented migrants. Concerning youth homelessness, youngsters who have been formerly in youth care, are only a minority. These local counts are also used as a leverage to challenge the regional and national authorities to collect homelessness figures more regularly. In the last part of the presentation, we also identify the limitations of these types of counts.

Zuzana Turkovič, Darina Ondrušová, Alena Vachnová, SK: Surveying Families in Housing Need: Lessons Learned from the city of Košice in Slovakia



Zuzana Turkovič is a researcher at the Institute for Labour and Family research in Bratislava, Slovakia, and a Ph.D. student at the Institute of sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. As a researcher, she focuses mainly on research of various aspects of a family such as family structure and dynamics, relationships, and family policy. Over the past year, she has been focusing mainly on the topic of reconciling family and the work-life of parents and has been involved in a housing-first research project with the intent to improve the living conditions of individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Darina Ondrušová is a researcher in the Institute for Labour and Family Research – organisation of the Ministry of Labour (Slovak Republic). Since 2015, she has led the national team of ANED / EDE – European Disability Expertise. In April 2018, she participated in the Peer-review on Work Capacity Assessment and Employment of Persons with Disabilities in Latvia. In 2019, she prepared the Study supporting the Evaluation of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 for Slovakia. In the research of homelessness, in 2016, she coordinated the Homeless City Count in Bratislava, and in 2018, she was a co-author of the Initial document for national strategy on preventing and ending homelessness in the Slovak Republic. Since 2016, she has also participated in the COST Action project CA15128 on Measuring homelessness in Europe.



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Alena Vachnová is a graduate of law, international relations, and PhD. in social work. She has dedicated her career to the development of Eastern Slovakia from various positions in public as well as the nonprofit sector. As a Development Manager of Nadácia DEDO, she focuses on developing affordable housing and complex integrated services to prevent and end homelessness of families and individuals in Košice. Alena is an alumna of the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program 2017-2018 in economic development. As a Fulbright Scholar, she is pursuing the Mid-Career Master in Public Administration degree at Harvard Kennedy School (Edward S. Mason Program).

In Europe, there still have been countries and cities in which family homelessness has been a challenge, both in terms of the lack of data, as well as in the lack of housing-led programmes as a response to ending homelessness. To address this gap, a survey took place in the city of Košice in the last week of May 2021, in which families in housing need were interviewed and registered as potential clients of housing-led projects. Our contribution aims to discuss some methodological aspects and key findings of this research. While families were defined as households with at least one child (no matter whether currently living there or in substitute care), housing need included various living situations in line with the ETHOS typology – being roofless, houseless, in insecure or inadequate housing, or combination of these situations. For this purpose, families in homeless shelters were interviewed, as well as families in segregated unfit housing settlements or other settings. The questionnaire has covered areas such as family structure, history of housing need, current living conditions, economic activity, and health status. Altogether, 310 families took part in the survey.

Concerning the methodological challenges, these were especially related to:

- the fact that the research was a point-in-time survey,
- it had two somewhat contradictory purposes – registration for housing programmes and the housing need survey,
- it aimed to cover various quite different living situations.

Lessons learned will be summarised from addressing these challenges.