

Seminar 9: Counts – Methods - Lessons II

Chair: Freek Spinnewijn, BE

Volker Busch-Geertsema and Thorsten Heien, DE: The First Nation-Wide Survey on Street Homelessness and Hidden Homelessness in Germany



Prof. Dr. Volker Busch-Geertsema has studied social sciences at the University of Bremen and is a senior research fellow and board member at the Association for Innovative Social Research and Social Planning (GISS, Bremen, Germany). Since 2015 he has been an honorary Professor at Heriot Watt University Edinburgh. He has been a member of the European Observatory on Homelessness since 1995 and since 2009 he is the Coordinator of the Observatory and member of the editorial team of the European Journal of Homelessness. He has conducted a number of extensive research projects on different aspects of homelessness in Germany, Europe and further abroad.

Thorsten Heien studied sociology and economics with a focus on survey methods and statistics, followed by a doctorate on the cross-cultural comparison of attitudes towards the welfare state in 2002 (University of Bielefeld). He's the head of Kantar's social policy research unit in Germany since 2015 including consultancy for other top-tier clients and projects like the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) or the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP). Further areas of expertise are survey methodology (sampling, multi-mode designs, hard-to-survey populations, biomarkers, record linkage) and data science (multivariate analysis, missing value imputation, micro simulation, tax modelling).



A new law in Germany foresees regular point-in time registrations (count and demographic details) of homeless people in shelters, hostels and other types of temporary accommodation (every end of January, starting with 31st of January 2022) by the national office of statistics.

In addition, the national extent of other groups of homeless people (following the ETHOS Light definition) is to be documented. A consortium of GISS and Kantar Public has been commissioned by national government to conduct a survey based on a representative sample of homeless people who are sleeping on the street or in some type of informal sheltering structure or who are temporarily sharing with friends and relatives because they have no permanent home of their own (hidden homelessness). The survey will be conducted in the first week of February 2022. A similar survey will have been conducted by GISS in North Rhine-Westphalia in July 2021.

The presentation will report on both studies, but will focus mainly on the national survey on hidden homelessness and street homelessness, as this will be the first time in Europe to explore the extent of these two specific groups on a national level using a random-probability based sample and short questionnaires. In a country with an infrastructure like Germany the approach is driven by the strong conviction that most members of the two target groups will be in contact with some sort of social service. But often low threshold services and services not directly focussing on homeless people (food banks, services for drug consumers, specific services for women and young people, for migrants etc.) and specific services such as outreach teams are here relevant and will be included in the sampling process.

The presentation will inform about the approach in detail and about the experiences with the “pilot” in North Rhine-Westphalia.

Mauro Striano, Nicolas Horvat, BE: The Progress of Homelessness in Brussels over the Last 12 Years

Join us on zoom / WORKSUP



Mauro Striano works for Bruss'help as a researcher. Prior to Bruss'help, he worked for 9 years as migration policy officer at FEANTSA. He studied European Politics and European Law on migration and asylum.

Nicolas Horvat works for Bruss'help as a researcher and coordinates the Brussels homeless count. The first homeless count report he coordinated was carried out in 2020. He studied sociology. Bruss'help is a public law association mandated to coordinate emergency assistance and integration measures for homeless people in the Brussels Capital Region.

During the last homeless count carried out by Bruss'help, a total of 5,313 homeless or poorly housed people were counted in Brussels, including 719 sleeping rough, 1,306 in emergency shelters and 622 accommodated in services – mainly hotels - put in place during the COVID crisis. Compared to 2018, 1,153 additional people (+ 27.7%) were identified, all categories combined. This increase is particularly pronounced for people accommodated in emergency services (+ 102.3%). Since the first homeless count in 2008, the total number of people has more than tripled. The COVID 19 pandemic has contributed to this increase, in particular by worsening the conditions of the most precarious homeless people. Behind these figures there is a variety of profiles, needs and backgrounds that require individualized support and tailored solutions.

The research, which builds on data periodically collected since 2008 through street counts and data communicated by homeless services, aims at providing an overview of the progress of homelessness in Brussels over the last 12 years. It also intends to explain two main assessments that stem from this overview: the first concerns the steep increase, within the homeless population, from 29.2% to 49.8% of the people included in the ETHOS categories 1 and 2 – the roofless; the second relates to the intensification of the use of emergency solutions in dealing with homelessness. Moreover, within the framework of the 12-year overview of homelessness in Brussels, the research takes stock of the recent health crisis and of its impact on the homelessness sector. Finally, the following hypothesis that might explain the increase of homelessness will be explored: the growing precariousness of the working class, the lack of affordable housing, and the strict management of migratory flows depriving a growing number of European and third-country nationals of their residence rights.