

# BRIEF 2

## EU HOMELESSNESS COUNTS KU Leuven and partners

35 cities across 21 EU countries  
(2025)

# ID CARD



## PROJECT TITLE.

European Homelessness Counts

## MAIN OBJECTIVE.

Producing comparable evidence on the extent and profile of homelessness, in order to support, on the one hand, local and national policy developments, but also to feed the EU level policy progress.

## TARGET AUDIENCE.

Relevance to those working on homelessness across the EU, but particularly local, regional and national policymakers who enumerate homelessness and create responding policies.

## IN NUMBERS.

# 15

**cities** in 10 EU Member States carried out counts in line with the project methodology in 2024.

# 35

**cities** in 2025 across 21 EU Member States will carry out counts under the project methodology, including 10 capital cities.

# 1 in 3

**people** counted was sleeping rough in Ljubljana's and Kosice's first homelessness count.

## SUMMARY.

The European Homelessness Count develops a modular, city-level methodology to produce comparable homelessness data across Europe. Combining headcounts, administrative data, and surveys aligned with ETHOS Light, the project balances local ownership with standardisation. It supports evidence-based policymaking, promotes efforts to explore more hidden forms of homelessness, and fosters cross-city learning, aiming to improve responses and resource allocation for people experiencing homelessness.



**Prof. Koen Hermans**  
KU Leuven  
[koen.hermans@kuleuven.be](mailto:koen.hermans@kuleuven.be)

**Nóra Teller, PhD**  
European Observatory on Homelessness  
Metropolitan Research Institute  
[teller@mri.hu](mailto:teller@mri.hu)



<https://www.kuleuven.be/lucas/en/eu-homelessness-counts>

# Project description

## Building a European Framework for Homelessness Data

The European Homelessness Counts project aims to improve the comparability of homelessness data across Europe by implementing a modular, city-level methodology. In Year 1, 15 cities across 10 EU countries participated; in Year 2, the project expands to 35 cities in 21 countries. Led by KU Leuven with city partners and direct funding from the European Commission (plus city co-funding), it combines administrative data, headcounts, and survey tools to collect robust data aligned with ETHOS Light categories. The modular approach balances standardisation with local ownership, allowing cities to adapt methods while contributing to comparable EU-level data.

Preliminary findings indicate significant variation in homelessness prevalence and profile characteristics across cities. Rough sleeping (ETHOS Light 1) remains highly visible in some urban centres, whereas in others, homelessness is more concealed, often manifesting as temporary and makeshift housing arrangements (ETHOS Light 5). The data underscore the necessity of incorporating multiple methodologies to capture the full spectrum of homelessness experiences.

## From Local Action to European Impact

Key strategies included a co-created modular methodology which is feasible and robust across different types of cities and service landscapes, close collaboration of research teams with cities and service providers, training of enumerators, ethical data collection, and engagement with diverse services and levels of administration for data collection and interpretation. Success indicators include scaling up of the methods, increased participation, better data coverage (including hidden homelessness), and uptake of findings in local/national policy. Risks—such as data inconsistency due to local adaptations or limited service infrastructure—are mitigated through harmonised tools.

Ongoing evaluation involves peer exchange, methodological refinement, and qualitative reviews to ensure relevance and impact. Ultimately, the project supports evidence-based policy, better targeting of services, and shared learning across Europe.

More information about the counts project, as well as the Year 1 results for the first 15 cities, can be found via the [project website](#).

## TIMELINE

### 2024

Year 1 of the counts in cities such as Dublin, Catania, Ljubljana, and Košice.

### 2025

Year 2 with the expansion of the project to 35 EU cities.

### Beyond 2025

Aim to establish a robust, scalable EU-wide framework for homelessness data collection.

# Inspiration note

## A Transformative Approach to Measuring Homelessness

The European Homelessness Count is an innovative response to one of the most persistent social challenges across Europe. Its ambition—to create a comparable, scalable, and locally owned method for counting homelessness—marks a transformative step toward evidence-based policymaking. With participation from 35 cities across 21 countries by its second year, the project demonstrates the power of collaboration, trust, and shared responsibility between local and EU level actors.

What makes this initiative exceptional is its **modular methodology**, which enables cities to tailor data collection efforts to their local realities while contributing to a unified European framework. By combining headcounts, administrative data, and direct surveys aligned with ETHOS Light categories, the project not only maps visible homelessness, such as rough sleeping, but also captures hidden and institutional forms—often experienced by women and other marginalised groups.

This commitment to **inclusivity and accuracy** is matched by a strong ethical foundation: the approach prioritises consent, GDPR compliance, and the principle of "do no harm" in all data collection. It also tackles the "service statistics paradox" head-on, acknowledging that the availability of services can distort visibility, and provides a mixed-methods solution to correct this bias.

## From Local Capacity to European Solidarity

The project's impact is already visible. In cities with limited previous data, such as Catania, Košice or Ljubljana, the process of conducting a count built capacity, fostered cooperation, and initiated new dialogues around homelessness. Elsewhere, such as in Dublin or Lyon, it has strengthened the use of existing administrative systems and revealed service gaps. Several cities piloted measurement methods to capture new ETHOS Light groups that so far have not been included in local data collection traditions.

The European Homelessness Count is not just a technical exercise—it is a catalyst for change, offering cities the tools to better understand, serve, and advocate for their homeless populations. It presents a replicable, rights-based model that can reshape how Europe responds to homelessness: with evidence, with nuance, and with solidarity.



**Pascal de Decker, PhD**  
Sociologist and urban planner, Social and Political Sciences,  
Emeritus at KU Leuven, Department of Architecture, Belgium

After years of discussions about what homelessness is and even more about the numbers, the ETHOS light has finally found a methodology to count homelessness. To measure is to know. This counting can now be the starting point for a systematic count, a basis on which policy can be developed and a framework for measuring policy effects.