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ENUMERATION OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

**Counting homeless people in the 2010 census round:
use of enumeration and register-based methods**

Note by the Mutual Progress on Homelessness through Advancing and Strengthening
Information Systems Project¹

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This paper focuses on two main issues. First, the paper reviews the plans being made by Offices of National Statistics (ONS) to count homeless people in 2011. Second, the paper considers the issues involved in using population registers to enumerate homeless people for those countries which have employed register based methods.

¹ Mutual Progress on Homelessness through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems (MPHASIS) aims to improve capacity of member states in data collection on homelessness. This paper is based on research conducted in the framework of the MPHASIS project and on research conducted by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA). Both are supported financially by the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity. The contents of the paper do not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of the European Commission.

2. The European Union (EU) regulation on population and housing censuses states that all countries are to collect data on “housing arrangements”, which according to the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Recommendations include people who have no usual place of residence (thereby explicitly including homeless people. Some countries have clear intentions for enumerating homeless people, whereas other countries are still looking into different possibilities. The paper describes these methods based on a postal survey conducted by European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) in 2008.

3. A number of countries in Europe use register-based systems of population census rather than the traditional survey enumeration approaches, while others (e.g. France) are moving to mixed approaches. In theory, it ought to be possible in register-based systems to identify people who do not have an address in the (linked) property database. This will include people who live in non-conventional dwellings, collective living dwellings or who do not link to any address.

4. In the framework of the MPHASIS project research was carried out on the issue of data collection on the homeless with register-based census approaches using Germany and Slovenia as case studies. The evidence of the MPHASIS research identifies a number of key issues involved in obtaining a count of homeless people. One key issue is the extent to which homeless persons are included in the population register (e.g. with a national identity number). Furthermore, the acceptance and use of a proxy address for people without a usual place of residence and the extent to which homeless institutions can be distinguished in the property registers from other forms of collective living situations are relevant issues in order to allow statistical analysis of the homeless population. Thus, not all homeless people are included in the population register and, where they are included; it is not always possible to identify them for statistical purposes.

5. In our conclusions we emphasise that further efforts should be undertaken to fully identify homeless accommodation and to cover all homeless people staying there or having a postal address at a support agency. It is important not only to include homeless persons in the census but also identify them as homeless, so that information is made available on the number of those homeless persons covered by the census. Census information is a key source of information on homeless people living temporarily with family and friends.

6. In July 2008, the EU adopted a legally-binding regulation on population and housing censuses which provides for the holding of Population and Housing Censuses in all EU member states in 2011². The regulation provides for the collection of data on “housing arrangements”. The CES Recommendations define housing arrangements as “the type of housing where a person is a usual resident at the time of the census – this covers all persons who are usual residents in different types of living quarters, or who do not have a usual residence and stay temporarily in living quarters, or are roofless persons sleeping rough or in emergency shelters when the census

² Regulation (EC) No 763/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 July 2008 on population and housing censuses, in: Official Journal of the European Union, L 218/14 (13.8.2008):<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:218:0014:0020:EN:PDF>

was taken.”³ This paper considers some of the issues involved in counting the homeless in the census year.

II. DEFINING HOMELESSNESS

7. In its Recommendations for the Censuses of Population and Housing, the CES identifies homeless people under two broad groups:

- (a) Primary homelessness (or rooflessness). This category includes persons living in the streets without a shelter that would fall within the scope of living quarters;
- (b) Secondary homelessness. This category may include persons with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodations (including dwellings, shelters and institutions for the homeless or other living quarters). This category includes persons living in private dwellings but reporting ‘no usual address’ on their census form.

8. The CES acknowledges that the above approach does not provide a full definition of the ‘homeless’.

9. The recent study on measuring homelessness published by Directorate-General (DG) for Employment and Social Affairs⁴ specifies a six-fold definition of homelessness. Figure 1 compares these definitions. Since the harmonised definition provided in the Measuring Homelessness Study (2007) provides a more disaggregated classification of “secondary homelessness”, this approach will be used in this paper to consider the measurement of homelessness provided by different census methods.

³ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (2006) *Conference of European Statisticians Principles and Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing*. New York and Geneva (UN) <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2007.06.census2.htm>

⁴ Edgar, W., Harrison, M., Watson, P., and Busch-Geertsema, V. (2007) *Measurement of homelessness at European Union Level*, Study conducted for the European Commission (Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunity), Dundee/Brussels (European Communities): http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/2007/study_homelessness_en.pdf

Figure 1. The CES Recommended Definition and the Measuring Homeless Study Definition

Operational Category	Measuring Homeless Study 2007	CES Recommendations 2006
1	People living rough	Primary Homeless
2	People in emergency accommodation	Secondary Homeless
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	
4	People living in institutions (due to be released but no home to go to)	
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	

III. DATA COLLECTION APPROACHES

10. The EU Regulation allows Member States to base population and housing statistics on different data collection methods. Three broad approaches can be identified which include countries using traditional enumeration survey methods of data collection, countries using register-based methods of data collation and countries using a combination of approaches. Figure 2 suggests that 12 countries are employing traditional enumeration techniques, a further 12 are utilising register-based methods or some combination of register and surveys and that 1 country has adopted a rolling census approach.

Figure 2. Census data collection approaches for 2011

CENSUS APPROACH 2011	COUNTRIES
Conventional census	Greece, Italy, Portugal, Ireland, United Kingdom, Poland, Czech Republic, Estonia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania
Register-based census	Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Austria
Combination of register-based census and conventional census	Belgium, Latvia, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Spain
Combination of register-based census and sample survey	Netherlands
Rolling census	France

11. The different methods of census data collection used will inevitably determine the nature of the enumeration strategies targeting homeless people on census night. The following sections consider the issues involved and the arrangements being considered in the conventional enumeration methods and those involving register based approaches. The evidence for this is drawn from two main sources. Following the publication of the EU census regulation, FEANTSA conducted a consultation of national statistical offices on the enumeration of

homeless people on census night⁵. The MPHASIS project has included research on the issues of data collection on the homeless in countries with register-based census approaches using Germany and Slovenia as case studies.

12. The survey conducted by FEANTSA suggests that three broad categories of approach can be identified including countries using traditional enumeration approaches with co-operation from homeless services, countries intending to draw information from their registers and countries which intend to use register plus support from homeless services.

Figure 3. Approaches to count the homeless during the census 2011

Homeless enumerated through traditional methods and cooperation with homeless services		Homeless enumerated as part of a register	Homeless enumerated through register and homeless services	
Czech Republic	Italy	Austria	Belgium	Latvia
England	Lithuania	Denmark	Estonia	Slovenia
France	Luxembourg	Finland	Spain	Germany
Hungary	Poland	Netherlands		
Ireland	Portugal	Sweden		

Source: FEANTSA survey of census offices.

IV. COUNTING THE HOMELESS IN CONVENTIONAL CENSUS ENUMERATION

13. The FEANTSA survey identified that some countries have clear intentions for enumerating homeless people through a combination of methods, whereas other countries are still looking into different possibilities. This section takes a closer look at these methods in countries using conventional enumeration surveys for the census in 2011.

14. Countries using the conventional census enumeration approach intend to work closely with service providers to enumerate the primary homeless population (mainly through hiring special enumerators who are familiar with the homeless population), to enumerate the secondary homeless population living in emergency and transitional accommodation (mainly through use of databases of homeless services) or both.

15. Information on the strategies being adopted to count the *primary homeless* is available for only a small number of countries – the remainder having no clearly articulated plan at this stage. The United Kingdom and France have conducted pilot surveys to test methodologies. In the United Kingdom (England), special arrangements are being made with housing organisations and local authorities to devise a strategy to count the homeless which will be tested in a pre-

⁵ FEANTSA (2008) *2011 Round of Population and Housing Censuses. FEANTSA Recommendations for the Enumeration of Homeless People on Census Night*. Brussels (FEANTSA, November 2008): <http://www.feantsa.org/code/EN/theme.asp?ID=4>

Census rehearsal in a number of local authority areas in March and October 2009. Census staff will also accompany local authority officials in their own field activities to count homeless people in a programme leading up to the 2011 Census. In France, where a rolling census is conducted, people sleeping rough and persons usually living in mobile homes are enumerated by municipalities in the first two days of the census surveys. A methodological pilot survey of rough sleepers in the city of Toulouse took place, in January 2009, in order to prepare the methods to be adopted for the 2012 national homelessness survey, to ensure the maximum coverage of rough sleepers.

16. A pilot population and accommodation census was conducted in Lithuania in September 2008. However, it is not clear to what extent people “with no usual place of residence” were covered in the pilot census. In the Czech Republic, the National Statistical Office hopes to cooperate with homeless agencies to conduct a street count where these people usually concentrate.

17. In Ireland, census enumerators are expected to ‘count’ all persons in their area including those who are sleeping rough on the night of the census. However, it is unclear what methodology is adopted to identify these people. Currently, persons sleeping rough are enumerated on the census household form (i.e. the form used for private households) and are thus categorised as ‘persons living in non-conventional dwellings’ in the census outputs. Therefore, currently the data is not categorised in such a way that a total number of ‘people who have no usual place of residence’ can be calculated.

18. Within the CES definition of the ‘*secondary homeless*’ population some countries are taking steps to identify databases of homeless shelters and emergency accommodation and are co-operating with the agencies running these services to enumerate people on census night. However, it is not always possible to ensure that homeless people living in these institutions can be distinguished from people living in other forms of collective living situation.

19. In the Czech Republic, homeless people will be identified as a special category and, in accordance with the CES Recommendations (para. 162 g), their place of enumeration will be taken as their place of usual residence in order to enumerate a total usually resident population for each locality/territorial unit.

20. In France, homeless people accommodated in collective shelters or hostels are surveyed through a separate annual survey of all forms of “collective accommodation”. Only homeless people in emergency shelters can be distinguished in the results of the collective accommodation survey. Homeless people in long-stay hostels are in the same category as people in other kinds of long-stay accommodation, not intended for the homeless, and thus can not be separately identified as homeless people. Homeless people in hotel rooms (if on a permanent basis) or in apartments by the non-governmental organizations (NGO) or other agencies are surveyed during the conventional dwellings enumeration (i.e. in the dwelling census). In this situation it is also not possible to distinguish them from other households in the resulting data.

21. In Ireland, the census in 2006 collected information on people living in - *conventional dwellings, other housing units and collective living quarters (including shelters)*. The ‘shelter’ category includes accommodation for homeless people.

22. In Portugal, the Institute for Social Security is committed to send the Statistical Office a list of shelters to ensure homeless services are included in the census.

V. COUNTING THE HOMELESS USING REGISTER BASED APPROACHES

23. A register is defined in the CES Census Recommendations as a systematic collection of *unit-level data* organized in such a way that *updating* is possible. As a rule, a register will contain information on a complete group of units, a *target population* (e.g. persons, buildings, firms). These units are defined by a precise set of rules (e.g. *resident population in a country*). A key requirement is that each unit in the register can always be uniquely identified. This is normally achieved by using a system of *identification codes*, but identification is also possible without such a code if sufficient information on the units is available (for persons: name, address, date of birth etc).

24. The particular advantage of register-based statistics is that they in principle provide total coverage. By using registers it is possible to produce more detailed statistics than by using sample surveys, for instance statistics for small areas and for very detailed classifications.

25. The evidence of the MPHASIS research project identifies a number of issues involved in obtaining a count of homeless people. Three issues can be mentioned here. First, is the extent to which homeless people have a national identity number to allow for their inclusion in the population register. Second, there is the issue of the acceptance and use of a proxy address for people without a usual place of residence. Third, is the extent to which homeless institutions can be distinguished in the property registers from other forms of collective living situations in order to allow statistical analysis of the homeless population. Thus, not all homeless people are included in the population register and, where they are included; it is not always possible to identify them for statistical purposes.

26. In some countries, people without a usual place of residence can ask for a contact or postal address to be established with the social insurance institution (Austria), municipality (Finland) or an agency which provides social support for homeless people (Slovenia). In this situation, people who are included in the register in this way can be counted as people with no usual place of residence. It is uncertain what proportion of people with no usual place of residence register in this manner. Filipovic Hrast⁶, suggests that, in Slovenia, homeless people could be identified from registers but only if the addresses are clearly identified as part of service provision for homeless people.

27. In some countries using register based-statistics, inhabitants of collective living quarters are exempt from the register method and covered separately by a survey. This is the case for example in Germany, where people living at such “special addresses” are counted in the more

⁶ Filipovič Hrast, M. (2009) Use of Population Register Data for Quantifying Certain Subgroups of Homeless People. Census 2011 in Slovenia (paper for MPHASIS project). Ljubljana

“traditional” way by interviews of the inhabitants themselves or of directors of the specific institutions, including “fictitious (postal) addresses” of social services⁷.

28. The methodological problem in both cases consists of getting as complete a list as possible of all relevant organizations and (for recording and evaluation of the data) of separating provision for the homeless from other institutional provision and regular housing. The use of unique identifiers can help to exclude counting the same persons twice.

29. People living in non-conventional dwellings are as a rule covered by the census. In register based censuses people have to be registered at these dwellings with their permanent address in order to be covered by the census. It might be an additional problem to clarify who, of those living there, are really living in garages, huts, shacks or caravans “due to a lack of housing”.

30. Figure 4 summarises the main issues in counting different categories of (primary and secondary) homeless people using register based methods. This suggests that registers need to be supplemented by survey approaches if a clearer statistical picture of homelessness is to be derived. It also identifies the need to distinguish different types of collective living situation such that homeless accommodation situations can be distinguished. This, of course, also assumes that the property register is a complete list of collective living situations in each of the disaggregated types of accommodation.

Figure 4. Identifying the operational categories of homeless people in register-based census approaches

Measuring Homeless Study (2007) Operational Categories		Register Based Census
1	People living rough	Only covered when registered at support organisation
2	People in emergency accommodation	Can be covered if addresses of such places are identified and inhabitants are either registered there or counted separately
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	
4	People living in institutions (due to be released, but no home to go to)	In most countries no information is available
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	Covered if persons are registered there with permanent address
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	Will be particularly difficult to cover in register based census. Only those will be covered who have their postal address registered with a support agency

⁷ Gerull, S. (2009) Census 2011 in Germany. The Use of Population Register Data for Quantifying Certain Subgroups of Homeless People (paper for MPHASIS project). Berlin

VI. CONCLUSION

31. This brief review of plans to comply with the CES recommendations to count all people including the homeless raises a number of key issues which should be considered by relevant agencies prior to the 2011 Census.

32. 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.

33. The FEANTSA survey suggests that enumeration procedures for the primary homeless are still not specified by many census offices. To count this group of people requires procedures to allow the identification of places where people live in external spaces. This is well understood in empirical research on homelessness and documented procedures are available. Apart from the few countries who have already conducted such surveys in previous censuses there is little evidence that these procedures are understood or are being implemented in the planning of the 2011 Census.

34. This brief review has identified several key issues concerning the enumeration of the secondary homeless population. First, it appears that in many countries it is only those staying in emergency shelters that will be classified as homeless. According to the CES recommended definition those staying in longer stay temporary accommodation or homeless hostels for less than a year should be counted as not having a usual place of residence and hence to be homeless. However, the database of collective living institutions often does not distinguish homeless accommodation from other forms of accommodation (e.g. for the elderly or other groups) and hence it is not possible to produce aggregate statistics on the homeless as a group.

35. Secondly, people living temporarily with family and friends who have no usual place of residence are a key component of the homeless population. The Census provides the one occasion when it is possible to provide a baseline figure for this group. It is important to ensure that enumeration methods using the census household form and register based approaches can adequately identify this group.

36. Our review has raised a number of questions regarding the procedures in register based census systems. The identification of homeless accommodation in property registers should be possible using a typology of accommodation. This could be implemented with limited resource implications. Since the procedures for developing register based systems are varied there is a need for further research on the ability of registers to count difficult to reach groups such as the homeless.
