

# National strategy and monitoring of homelessness in Denmark

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## 1. Monitoring homelessness in Denmark

Homelessness in Denmark is monitored since 2007 through national homelessness counts and since 1999 through a national client registration system on homeless hostels run by local authorities under § 110 in the Social Service Act. The national homelessness count has been carried out in 2007 and 2009 and another count is planned for in 2011 as part of the monitoring of the national strategy on homelessness. The homelessness count gives a stock number of homelessness during the count week, whereas the client registration system on homeless hostels gives both stock and flow figures published in annual statistics. The homeless count covers categories such as rough sleepers, emergency night shelters, hostel users and those staying temporarily with family and friends, whereas the client registration system only covers hostel users.

### 1.1 The ETHOS definition and the Danish definition of homelessness.

The Danish homelessness count is based on a definition of homelessness which is modelled on selected categories of the EHTOS-definition adapted to the Danish national context. The EHTOS definition has been chosen as a starting point for the Danish definition as the ETHOS definition provides a clear housing based definition of homelessness and at the same time provides a clear framework for the operationalisation of homelessness into a range of sub-categories. The operational categories used in the Danish definition are:

- Rough sleepers;
- Users of emergency night shelters;
- Hostel users;
- Sleeping in hotels due to homelessness;
- Temporarily with family and friends;
- Transitional housing;
- Institutional release from prisons;
- Institutional release from hospitals/treatment centres.

### 1.2 Organisation and methodology of national count

The homelessness counts have been commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior and Social Affairs and carried out by The Danish National Centre for Social Research (Benjaminsen & Christensen 2007, Benjaminsen 2009). The count is based on a survey to social services and local authorities who are likely to be in contact with or aware of people experiencing homelessness. The local actors are asked to fill out a two page questionnaire for each homeless

person they are in contact with or aware of is homeless during the count week. The count week for both counts was week 6 in February. By permission from data authorities personal numbers (unique identifiers) are provided where possible, and a control for double counts is carried out.

A key challenge in carrying out the count is to ensure that local actors participate in the count in order to achieve a high response rate and thereby data and figures of a high validity. Generally almost all large actors such as municipal social offices and homeless hostels participate in the count, but there are locally some social services such as drop-in cafes etc. who have not participated for instance due to resources as the count requires time used for filling out the questionnaires or because of reasons of anonymity of users.

### **1.3 Using the counts as input for strategy formulation and monitoring of outcome on aggregate level**

The findings of the first national counts was used as general input in the work of formulating and implementing the first national strategy from 2008-2011. For instance the count made figures available on the number of rough sleepers and young homeless people, and on institutional release without a housing solution, which are some main areas of intervention under the national strategy (elaborated in section 2).

The count also provides figures for each municipality and more detailed figures have been made available for the municipalities involved in the national strategy and other municipalities upon request. Besides the specifics of the homelessness situation also key background variables (age, gender, ethnicity etc., and characteristics such as mental illness, substance use etc. is covered in the individual questionnaires and more detailed profiles of the homelessness population has been made available to municipalities involved in the strategy.

The national counts are used as part of the monitoring of the national strategy. The national count was repeated in 2009 setting the baseline for aggregate measurement of the effects of the national strategy, and the count is planned to be repeated in 2011 to measure the effect of the strategy on aggregate (national and municipal) level.

## **2. National strategy, planning and evaluation**

The first national homelessness strategy has been adopted for 2008 to 2011. This has followed a longer trend of initiatives of developing more targeted interventions for the marginalised groups mainly through the use of central government programmes, implemented on municipal level. The interventions for socially vulnerable groups are generally anchored in the Social Service Act which specifies detailed types of interventions such as homeless hostels, supported accommodation, social contact persons, support in housing, social drop-in-cafes etc.

## 2.1 The Danish national strategy

The Danish national strategy to reduce the number of homeless people has defined four objectives:

- 1) The number of homeless people sleeping in the streets must be reduced.
- 2) For young homeless people (below 24 years) better options than placement in a homeless hostel have to be given.
- 3) The average time spent in a homeless hostel must be reduced to 3-4 months for people who are ready to move to a dwelling with necessary support.
- 4) Solutions for housing problems have to be made prior to release from prison and treatment centres.

The Danish government has set aside funding (500 mill. DKK/approx. 65 mill. € over a 4 year period 2008-2011) for the implementation of the strategy. The main part of the funding is distributed to selected municipalities with the largest homeless populations on the basis of negotiations between central government and municipalities. Another part of the funding is reserved for initiatives in other municipalities.

Each municipal council in the selected municipalities adapts a municipal action plan including specific goals in order to reduce homelessness in the municipality within one or more of the four objectives. Interventions are designed to match the four objectives. The interventions generally extend existing municipal services bringing in knowledge from international research etc. on what interventions work best.

The Danish national strategy will be evaluated in 2012. The government will seek to implement the developed methods to reduce street homelessness to all municipalities so the goal in the EU declaration can be met. However total eradication of street homelessness can hardly be achieved but there should only be a very low number of street sleepers and outreach efforts should reduce the time where people are sleeping rough. The Government's efforts in this field will amongst other sources be inspired by best practices in the EU as presented e.g. at Peer Reviews as the current one in Vienna.

## 2.2 Monitoring the strategy on aggregate level

The strategy both involves monitoring on aggregate level in terms of monitoring of the development of homelessness on national and municipal level and monitoring on individual level in terms of documentation of the effectiveness of methods developed.

The national homelessness count sets a baseline for the national strategy and will be repeated in 2011. Also data from the national client registration system in § 110 homeless hostels are used to give information on length of stays in shelters and the number of young people staying in shelters. An overview of monitoring is given in figure 1.

**Figure 1**

Strategy Aims/Objectives	Targets/Indicators
Overall reducing the level of homelessness	National counts 2009 and 2011
Specific targets:	
1) The number of homeless people sleeping in the streets must be reduced.	Number of rough sleepers (National count)
2) For young homeless people (below 24 years) better options than placement in a homeless hostel have to be given.	Number of young people staying in homeless hostels (Annual statistics of Social appeals board and national count)
	Length of stays in homeless hostels (Annual statistics of Social appeals board)
3) The average time spent in a homeless hostel must be reduced to 3-4 months for people who are ready to move to a dwelling with necessary support.	Homelessness due to institutional release (National count)
4) Solutions for housing problems have to be made prior to release from prison and treatment centres.	

### 2.3 Effectiveness of interventions

An important part of the strategy is that methods have to be developed and tested by the public authorities and suppliers of services. An aim is to develop methods with documentation of their effectiveness. The initiatives should take a point of departure in existing knowledge of interventions in the field of homelessness.

The housing first principle has been set as a leading principle of the interventions which should aim to establish both housing solutions and the necessary social support. Both support in housing and specialised supported housing are among initiatives which can be established under the programme. Experience from a project called 'The good release' already carried through concerning release from prisons has been included into the programme and municipalities have been required to use this model when they establish interventions to alleviate homelessness following release from prison. Furthermore also experience from projects concerning improving procedures of social and psychiatric diagnostic evaluation and assessment for homeless clients has been included as prioritised interventions under the programme.

Though monitoring on individual level of those who receive interventions established under the strategy the ambition is to obtain documentation for the effectiveness of specific interventions such as critical time intervention, case management and assertive community treatment, interventions whose effectiveness has already been documented in international research

literature (see e.g. Nelson & Aubry 2007; Coldwell & Bendner, 2007). In this way the strategy also aims to test the usefulness of these interventions in a Danish context.

## Literature

Benjaminsen, L. & I. Christensen (2007): Hjemløshed I Danmark. National kortlægning 2007. [Homelessness in Denmark. National count 2007] Copenhagen: SFI.

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