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COUNTING THE HOMELESS – IMPROVING THE BASIS FOR PLANNING ASSISTANCE

VIENNA, 12-13 NOVEMBER 2009

SYNTHESIS REPORT

Counting the Homeless – Improving the Basis for Planning Assistance

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Summary

This Peer Review has a key aim to assist the City of Vienna to improve its capacity to monitor homelessness as a basis to improve the planning of policy and services that are provided by the City. In Austria, the *Länder* are responsible for distributing funds and services to the homeless. Vienna is unique in being both a *Land* and a municipality (with a population of 1.7 million). An important contextual issue is that Vienna has the largest level of social housing provision in Europe. While the right to subsidised accommodation is means tested, in fact over 90% of the population qualifies. An important feature of housing policy is that tenants have very strong legal protection against unjustified eviction. The Vienna Social Fund is responsible for assistance to the homeless and controls social services. The *Soziale Schiene* was established within the municipal housing association to offer affordable self-contained flats for homeless or 'at risk' clients.

In the course of the reorganisation of the Viennese social sector, the Department of Supported Housing was transferred to the Vienna Social Fund. This reorganisation generated the need and the demand for a uniform standard of documentation. This was the background and the starting point for adapting the documentation of the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless. The staff section Reporting and Development of the Vienna Social Fund developed the basic dataset of the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless and defined it as the standard documentation. Under the authority of the Viennese Social Welfare Act, the Counselling Service of Viennese Assistance to the Homeless can collect all the items of the basic dataset. The comprehensive dataset enables the social situation of homeless persons to be described and the effects of the support measures to be presented. The results of the data evaluation are published in the annual report of the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless.

Eight countries were involved in the Peer Review representing four distinct welfare regimes: the Nordic regime (Denmark, Norway and Sweden), the Continental regime (Germany, Luxembourg), the Mediterranean regime (Italy) and Eastern Europe (Hungary, Slovenia). This report outlines the diversity of experience across these countries in collecting data on homelessness

and using that data to implement policies and plan services. All the Nordic countries have national homeless strategies and clear responsibility for the monitoring and implementation of those strategies including responsibility for data collection. In those countries (such as Germany and Austria) with a federal structure of government, the federal government has no competence in relation to homelessness and hence there is no possibility of a national level system of data collection. While regional and local systems are implemented there is a wide diversity in practice. Italy, in common with some other Mediterranean countries, has begun to establish systems for data collection based on national level research. In Eastern Europe, homelessness as a policy issue has emerged slowly since transition in 1990. Systems of data collection are still focused on the municipal level and are often dependent upon action by NGOs.

This Peer Review raised issues in relation to the development of homeless strategies, data collection and planning services. The Viennese practice reflects the interaction that exists between clarity of strategic goals and evidence based policies. The planning process started by setting the objective of independent and self-determined living for all clients. However, specific policies rely upon evidence to establish the implementation strategy and monitor progress in relation to key client groups and/or targets. Thus, for example, evidence on levels of evictions underpinned the prevention strategy of the VSF and FAWOS. Evidence provided by some of the Peer Review countries (especially those from the Nordic region) demonstrate the manner in which national homelessness strategies provide clear targets which are monitored against action by local authorities who are responsible for implementation.

The seminar discussion identified the importance to establishing clear and, at the same time, realistic time-scales for policy implementation and evaluation. Evidence showed that countries adopt different time-scales but it was clear from seminar discussion that short time-scales are often unrealistic — however, the funding commitments that longer time-scales require may be difficult to sustain politically.

An important contextual component of the Viennese approach is the ability of the City to afford access to housing in order to address the needs of

homeless people due to the extensive social housing stock and the nature of the public financing (supply-side subsidies) and almost universal right to subsidised accommodation.

Three key components for effective data collection are raised in the context of this Peer Review: management responsibility, definition of homelessness, established information systems which are kept under review. In Vienna the VSF controls social services and is responsible for the Assistance Program for the homeless, thus providing clear responsibility for action and coordination of data collection systems. In order to collect information in an effective manner and to allow coordination of action between key stakeholders there has to be a clear understanding of the phenomenon of homelessness. This means that there must be both an operational definition of homelessness which is accepted and understood for data collection purposes and also that the nature of the data to be collected is operationally defined. The ETHOS typology provides a framework within which an agreed definition can be determined. However, equally important is the need to determine the data items to be collected for each client and the data definition schedule for these items is accepted as a uniform standard. The VSF has approached this and allows for a unified system of data collection to be implemented.

One aim of this Peer Review was to establish, not only the issues involved in data collection, but also the issues involved in using data for social planning and to ensure that services met clients' needs. The description of the role of the Counselling Centre for the Homeless (bzWO) emphasised the need for client related evaluation as well as system-related evaluation if needs oriented services are to be planned efficiently. At the system level there is a need to understand the extent, causes of homelessness and the (changing) profile of homeless people. This in turn requires both client level data and continuous recording systems. At the client level case management information is needed in sufficient detail (and in quantitative terms) to allow for outcome measurement and evaluation. Client level information requires systems capable of capturing client data at relevant stages in the process of service provision and re-housing. This requires client identifiers that facilitate integration of data systems while, at the same time, protecting the

anonymity of the individual and adhering to the highest standards of data protection.

The (almost unique) situation of the VSF and the *Soziale Schiene* allows Vienna an enviable ability to integrate the provision of housing and support and thus to plan services in a coordinated manner that addresses identified needs. Such coordinated action is feasible in a municipal authority where responsibility for housing and social support is embodied in a single authority. Nevertheless, such an approach requires established procedures, protocols and decision-making structures to link information systems and service allocation procedures both at the client level and at the system level. In this context there are generic lessons to be learnt from Vienna even if the organisational and service provision is not replicated elsewhere.

A.   Purpose of the Peer Review

The EU **Progr**amme for **E**mployment and **S**ocial **S**olidarity — PROGRESS has a number of key objectives, one of which is to help key social actors to build up their capacity and to promote innovative approaches. This programme works alongside the EU's political process of exchange and mutual learning between countries on social issues — the Social OMC. Homelessness has been identified as a key issue for European analysis and exchange.

This Peer Review has a key aim to assist the City of Vienna to improve its capacity to monitor homelessness as a basis to improve the planning of policy and services that are provided by the City. In this respect, this Peer Review is different in that it is focused on a problem, rather than a best practice. The aim is to examine the methods used by the City of Vienna to collect data on homelessness and how this information can be better used to plan services to prevent homelessness and meet the needs of homeless people. Through mutual exchange of experiences between the countries involved in the Peer Review it is hoped to identify some of the key lessons to be learnt in relation to good practice on data collection and planning of services.

B. The Austrian Context

Austrian federal housing policy is embodied in three main laws: The Austrian Tenancy Act (*Mietrechtsgesetz*), Law of Condominiums (*Wohnungseigentumsgesetz*), and Limited Profit Housing Act (*Wohnungsgemeinnützigkeitsgesetz*). The *Länder* are responsible for regional planning, distributing funds and services to the homeless, while communities/municipalities apply building law. Vienna is unique in being both a *Land* and a municipality. Assistance for the homeless is the exclusive responsibility of the nine *Länder*, with different legal provisions, programmes and services. The federal state cooperates with them, for example, on research and monitoring.

In Austria, the problem of homelessness and poor housing exists, but to a lesser extent than in some other countries, because of the instruments that have been applied. The main features of housing policy that contribute to the prevention of homelessness and housing exclusion include:

- 70% of residential building is supported by public resources. This has an impact on the cost of housing in general, and means that the commercial market is not the main player.

- The limited-profit 'third sector' (building associations) plays an important role since it is more flexible than state-owned firms and behaves in a more socially responsible way than the private sector.

- Social housing is higher than the EU average, largely due to the high level of provision in Vienna.

- Personal housing subsidies ease the financial stress for many households.

- Protection from eviction.

Public financing and related legal obligations on recipients have a strong influence on the housing market. Subsidised loans and annuities cover 70% of new dwellings. Maximum rent limits apply to housing covered by public

financial support (*Wohnbauförderung*). However, 80–90% of this funding goes to loans and annuities for building construction and only 10% to rent subsidies. The aim is thus to subsidise new house building — i.e. housing supply. The right to such subsidised accommodation depends on income, but in fact 90% of the population qualifies. The fund is financed by tax revenue of 1%, plus income from loan repayments. An important feature of housing policy is that tenants have very strong legal protection against unjustified eviction.

Vienna has 1.7 million inhabitants and is one of the biggest providers of social housing (city-owned flats) in the world. Social welfare assistance goes to 93,547 people on low incomes, at a cost of €277 million. There are 3,767 beds for homeless people. The 3,767 places include 1,234 beds in transitional accommodation, 292 in night shelters and 267 mother-child facilities. The take-up rate is 96%, and 70% of clients are men. The programme employs 500 staff, and has a budget of €37.9 million.

Until the 1980s, the housing department in Vienna took responsibility for assistance to the homeless, offering everybody a bed in a dormitory. The 1990s brought a radical change of strategy, including cooperation with NGOs, day-care centres, outreach work and mobile medical services. The *Soziale Schiene* was established within the municipal housing association to offer affordable, self-contained flats for homeless or 'at risk' clients. In 2008 there were 4,500 applications to the *Soziale Schiene* for social housing, leading to 1,881 tenancy agreements, but some 2,000 unsuccessful households. A homelessness prevention system was launched in 1996 through FAWOS (People's Aid Vienna Centre for Secure Tenancy), offering advice and counselling to avoid eviction, which has proved very successful. While a lot of money is spent on prevention, which saves more households, increasing expenditure is a problem.

The Vienna Social Fund (VSF) is responsible for assistance to the homeless. Data available on those seeking assistance under the homelessness programme shows that: 40% of applicants have been evicted; more than 50% have been living with family or friends; 29% became homeless following a divorce or separation and 23% are (mainly) young people who have never had a home of their own. Less than 10% come directly from the streets.

Social Planning Approaches

The approach to social planning was presented in two contrasting situations — the rural area of Upper Austria (a *Land* of 1.4 million people) and the city of Vienna (population 1.7 million).

In *Upper Austria* the Social Programme began in 2003. This programme sets down the instruments for social planning under which the province is divided into six planning regions. One organisation is responsible for the preparation of a comprehensive report for each planning region which is submitted to the Department of Social Affairs in April each year. The report covers the number of people threatened and affected by homelessness, socio-demographic data, and specifies the needs and measures to be taken.

On the basis of this data, a professional committee (*Fachgremium*) prepares a single consolidated report for Upper Austria, which must include concrete implementation measures for a period of up to six years. The Department of Social Affairs heads the committee, which includes representatives from all nine service providers, as well as homeless people, public administration, and experts as required. It consults with the federal government on all matters relating to homeless people, and meets at least once a year in May. Information in the report goes to the political adviser in charge, and is used for updating the Social Programme.

In *Vienna* the VSF controls social services. The planning process started by setting the objective: of self-determined living. Since 2000, strategy has been based on the principle that people in need should have the right to self-determination, leading to formulation of the Viennese Assistance Programme for the homeless, with a package of measures to promote reintegration, and to stabilise people's health and social situation.

Stakeholders from the private and non-statutory welfare sectors provide services to homeless people. Funds are supplied in two ways: subsidies to service providers or direct payments to supported people. The Counselling Centre for the Homeless (bzWO) was set up in 2008 to verify who was eligible for support and allocate needs-oriented services. The case management system assesses services and objectives. A client-related evaluation takes

place for every individual, while system-related evaluation helps in planning and modifying services. The counselling centre collects data in a number of fields, including personal information, history, current accommodation situation and reason for homelessness, education, debts, health, psychosocial situation and ability to live independently.

In the course of the reorganisation of the Viennese social sector, the Department of Supported Housing was transferred to the Vienna Social Fund in July 2004. The concentration of several fields of the social sector under one roof generated the need and the demand for a uniform standard of documentation. This was the background and the starting point for adapting the documentation of the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless. For this reason, in autumn 2004, the staff section Reporting and Development of the Vienna Social Fund developed the basic dataset of the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless on the basis of the existing questionnaire and defined it as the standard documentation of the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless. In the course of its case management procedure and authorisation of services according to the Viennese Social Welfare Act, the Counselling Service of Viennese Assistance to the Homeless can collect all the items of the basic dataset. The comprehensive dataset enables the social situation of homeless persons to be described and the effects of the support measures to be presented. The results of the data evaluation are published in the annual report of the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless.

C.   The European Context

EU-level Initiatives Linked to the Issue of Measuring Homelessness

A number of recent EU-level initiatives are relevant to the topic of this Peer Review. The most pertinent are briefly described below.

ETHOS (Edgar and Meert, 2005)

The ETHOS typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion has become the basis for the discussion of the definition of homelessness for policy purposes as well as for data collection purposes in a number of countries across Europe. The definition is translated into all European languages and can be downloaded from the Feantsa website (www.feantsa.org).

Measuring Homeless Study (Edgar et al, 2007)

This report, commissioned by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities reviewed the methods of data collection on homelessness in Europe. The report sets out a methodology for developing a homeless monitoring information system and makes a number of recommendations to the EC and national governments[1].

MPHASIS Project (2007–2009)[2]

This project, funded under PROGRESS, is entitled Mutual Progress on Homelessness Through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems. The main objective is to improve the capacity for monitoring information on homelessness and housing exclusion in 20 European countries on the basis of the recommendations of the previous EU study on Measurement of Homelessness (Edgar et al, 2007). This is undertaken through transnational exchange and is supported by action-oriented research which will directly feed into the European and national discussions on monitoring homelessness within MPHASIS.

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1   The report can be downloaded from: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/homelessness_en.htm

2   http://www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/

Census Regulations for 2011

According to the 2008 EU Regulation on population and housing censuses, EU countries are required to count homeless people in the next Census. Countries are free to choose the appropriate method of census-taking among a list of alternative approaches. There is a combination of methods including traditional enumeration surveys and register based systems and there is debate on the efficiency of each (Edgar and Busch-Geertsema, 2009).

Social Services of General Interest (Prometheus Project)

This project aims to develop, validate and pilot the cross-sectoral and trans-national application of a quality assurance system for social services. The project addresses the various aspects of quality including measurement (indicators).

Indicators Sub-Group (Housing Indicators — overcrowding, deprivation)

The Indicators Sub-Group of the Social Protection Committee has recently agreed a set of secondary indicators in the field of housing which have relevance to homelessness (see Appendix 1 for a list of the indicators adopted in June 2009).

Defining Homelessness and Housing Exclusion

One of the key issues raised in the documents prepared by the Vienna City hosts and during discussion in the seminar, was the fact that there is no agreed or official definition of homelessness and housing exclusion in Austria. This section presents the European discussion on this issue.

Although the understanding of homelessness varies between countries in Europe and changes over time, it is possible to identify the diverse living situations of people in a consistent manner. The European Conference of Statisticians (UNECE/EUROSTAT, 2006) makes a distinction between conventional dwellings, collective living quarters and other housing units or non-conventional dwellings (p. 23). However, while we can define and agree upon a typology of living situations and these can be reasonably consistently

applied between countries, it is more difficult to define what is meant by homelessness. This is, in part, because the phenomenon of homelessness can be constructed from different policy perspectives. Thus it affects people who are vulnerable in the housing market (and can not access decent or affordable housing). However, it also affects people who live in institutions as a result of government policies (e.g. as a result of a lack of investment in community mental health services). It can also be understood to refer to people who require the support of social services. Hence it may be understood as a housing issue or a social welfare issue and it also has implications for health policies and judiciary policies.

It is also difficult to count the number of homeless people since people change their living situations over time in response to changes in personal circumstances and to government actions. Equally, if the intention is to monitor the impact of policy it is sometimes necessary to count people who are no longer homeless as a result of the implementation of a particular policy initiative (e.g. investment in supported accommodation).

Hence it is possible to have a broad definition which reflects the process of homelessness as people move between different living situations. The ETHOS typology developed by FEANTSA represents such a typology of homelessness and housing exclusion. Equally it is possible to draw upon a more narrow definition of homelessness which may be essential to allow regular and consistent data collection to be undertaken. This is particularly important where the aim is to provide a comparative measure of homelessness. The research on Measuring Homelessness (Edgar et al, 2007) identified a narrow definition that may be more suited to data collection purposes (see Figure 1).

An initial step in the process of improving data collection on homelessness is to consider and adapt this definition in the national (or regional) context. It is important that the broad concepts of the definition are understood and that the conceptual basis of the construction of the definition which reflects the process of homelessness and housing exclusion is considered. It is also necessary to ensure that the operational nomenclature and terminology reflects the national policy domains. Finally, it is important that the definition is adopted by all the main relevant stakeholders. This will include all the

key Ministries of government (at national or regional level). Good practice suggests that Ministries responsible for housing, social services, health, employment, the penal system and immigration may all have a role to play. It will also include the major service providers especially those whose primary funding involves public expenditure or regulation.

EU Study Recommendations

The need and the demand for a uniform standard of documentation which is demonstrated by the actions of the Vienna Social Fund in this Peer Review, highlights three important issues that are reflected in the recommendations of the EU Study (Edgar et al, 2007). These are summarised below.

Data Items and Core Variables

A key action in planning and implementing a data collection system is the decision about what information is to be collected and how the data items are defined. Furthermore, in order to make meaningful comparisons between different sets of client data, on the local, regional, national and international level, it is essential to agree on a certain minimum of variables which are collected in the same way. The EU Study (Edgar et al 2007) proposed core and non-core variables which could be collected across Europe. The distinction between core and non-core variables arises because organisations have different data needs for case management dependent upon the services they provide. However, for policy evaluation and comparison between organisations it is important to have harmonised definitions. The EU study defined core variables which should be defined in a standard manner and non-core variables which can allow more flexible definitions between datasets. Following research in the frame of the Mphasis project, the authors have revised the definition of these core variables (see Figure 2).

In autumn 2004, the Reporting and Development section of the Vienna Social Fund developed the basic dataset of the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless on the basis of the existing questionnaire and defined it as the standard documentation of the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless. The counselling centre collects data in a number of fields, including personal

Figure 1   **Harmonised Definition of Homelessness**

Operational Category		Living Situation		Definition
1	People living rough	1	Public space / external space	Living in the streets or public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight Shelters	People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homeless Hostels	Where the period of stay is less than one year [3]
		4	Temporary Accommodation	
		5	Transitional Supported Accommodation	
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation	
4	People living in institutions	7	Health care institutions	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing
		8	Penal institutions	No housing available prior to release
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9	Mobile homes	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence
		10	Non-conventional building	
		11	Temporary structure	
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	12	Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence

Source: Edgar et al, 2007

3   The period of one year is chosen to allow consistency with UNECE/EUROSTAT Census recommendations

information, history, current accommodation situation and reason for homelessness, education, debts, health, psychosocial situation and ability to live independently.

Technical Issues

The EU study on measuring homelessness (Edgar et al, 2007) argues that the information recorded by service providers about their clients is not effectively employed for policy development and monitoring. The study discusses different approaches that have been adopted to implement electronic systems including systems imposed by funding agencies and systems developed by homeless federations; in both cases examples of PC-based and on-line systems are identified. The Mphasis Project undertook research to pilot an existing system (LINK client register system) in other countries (Sweden and Hungary) to evaluate the issues involved in such knowledge transfer.

It has been described above how, following the transfer of the Department of Supported Accommodation into the Vienna Social Fund in 2004, there has been directed action to establish a uniform documentation system for the Vienna Assistance to the Homeless program. Whereas up to now the social statistical data have been forwarded directly by the facilities to the Vienna Social Fund in anonymous form, as of now the basic dataset can be compiled directly and centrally by the Counselling Service of Viennese Assistance to the Homeless. This means that a standard approach to data collection is adopted collating client-level data and using a single software system which can be centrally managed by the Counselling Service.

Management Issues

The EU Study (2007) makes a number of recommendations in relation to the management of database systems in order to ensure their effective implementation and guarantee the level of quality of the data. These issues rely upon central responsibility for data collection which, as we have described above, is identified clearly in Vienna. This central agency needs to be responsible for a range of tasks including —

1   the establishment and review of the uniform data schedule;

2   the maintenance of software systems;

3   the determination of protocols to ensure data validation and quality;

4   the adherence of data protection protocols;

5   training and support for users of the system;

6   data analysis and reporting.

The Reporting and Development section of the Vienna Social Fund developed the basic dataset of the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless and defined it as the standard documentation of the Viennese Assistance to the Homeless. The basic dataset can be compiled directly and centrally by the Counselling Service of Viennese Assistance to the Homeless. In the course of its case management procedure and authorisation of services according to the Viennese Social Welfare Act, the Counselling Service of Viennese Assistance to the Homeless can collect all the items of the basic dataset.

Monitoring homelessness in the Peer Review Countries

The Nordic Countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden)

All the Nordic countries have national homeless strategies and clear responsibility for the monitoring and implementation of those strategies (including responsibility for data collection). It has also been a long-standing approach in the Nordic countries to establish a register based system of population and housing for the census (UNECE, 2007). However, there appears to be some difficulty in obtaining information on homeless people from such registers. Each Nordic country has undertaken national surveys of homelessness and, although the approach has differed, there are broad similarities. All the countries have a specific operational definition of homelessness for the purpose of the survey.

Figure 2 Core Variables

Variable	CORE
Demographic Characteristics: Age and Gender	
Age	Date of birth
Sex	Male/Female
Nationality / Migration background	
Nationality (Country of citizenship)	national; non-national (national of other EU-Member State; national of non EU country)
Country of birth	Native-born; foreign-born (born in another EU member State; born in non-EU country)
Household / family characteristics	

Household structure/ living situation	- One-person households
	- Multi-person households:
	    - Lone parent living with child(ren) aged less than 25
	    - Couple living without child(ren) aged less than 25
	    - Couple living with child(ren) aged less than 25
	    - Other type of household

Housing characteristics	
Previous accommodation, night before entering service and current accommodation situation (at date of counting)	Living Rough (public space / external space) In emergency accommodation (overnight shelters) In accommodation for the homeless (homeless hostels, temporary accommodation, transitional supported accommodation) Living in crisis shelter for domestic violence Living in institutions (health care, prison, child care) Living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing (mobile homes, non-standard building, temporary structure) Sharing with friends or relatives (due to homelessness) Homeless and living in other types of accommodation Not homeless
Duration of (current) homelessness	Less than 2 months; 2 to under 6 months; 6 months to under 1 year ; 1 to under 2 years; 2 to under 5 years; 5 years and longer
Reasons for Homelessness	
Reason(s) for last period of homelessness as defined by the homeless person (several answers possible)	Landlord Action (eviction) / Mortgage repossession End of contract / unfit housing / lack of housing Relationship breakdown / family conflict / death Loss of job / unemployment Violence Personal (support needs / addiction / health) Financial (debt) Discharge from institution / armed forces Immigration Force majeur (fire, flood etc). Other reasons

Source: Busch-Geertsema and Edgar, 2009

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 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.

The Danish homelessness count is based on a definition of homelessness which is modelled on selected categories of the ETHOS-definition adapted to the Danish national context. 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.

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.

By permission from data authorities personal numbers (unique identifiers) are provided and a control for double counts is carried out. 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 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. 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.

Sweden

NBHW had a commission from the government to do a mapping of the scale of homelessness in Sweden (NBHW, 2005). The mapping was to be designed as to allow comparisons with results from previous mappings carried out 1993 and 1999. The national strategy in Sweden is based on the mapping carried out in 2005 and the experience from the previous work to combat homelessness, on national level as well as on local level. In February 2007, the government presented for the first time a national strategy for counteracting homelessness, called *Homelessness — multiple faces, multiple responsibilities.*

The National Board of Health and Welfare was given the commission by the government to lead and coordinate a national work to counteract homelessness and exclusion from the housing market. The work is to be carried out in consultation with the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, the Swedish Enforcement Authority, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. Together, these entities make up the national steering group for the homelessness strategy. An external reference group is also affiliated with the assignment. Among others, user organisations are included in this group.

The strategy comprises the period 2007–2009. Four objectives have been pointed out:

- Everyone shall be guaranteed a roof over his/her head and be offered further co-ordinated action based on the needs of the individual.

- There shall be a reduction in the number of women and men who are in prison or at a treatment unit, or have supported accommodation and who do not have any housing before being discharged or released.

- Entry into the ordinary housing market shall be facilitated for women and men who are in temporary and transitional, supported accommodation, provided by the social services or others.

- The number of evictions *shall decrease and no children shall be evicted.*

As part of the homelessness strategy, the government commissioned the National Board of Health and Welfare to present a proposal for a plan on how the extent and character of homelessness can be monitored continuously. Particular attention is paid to the situation of children and young people. The published monitoring plan (NBHW, 2009) establishes a strategy by which homelessness in Sweden can be systematically monitored over time. The aim of continuously monitoring homelessness is to create the conditions necessary for carrying out an effective work for combating homelessness, and to design measures in order to support homeless people. A monitoring system on a continuous basis also makes it possible to assess the effects of measures that have been taken.

Norway

The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development aims to survey homelessness every second year. The results from the studies are used to formulate policy, including prioritising the funding proposed in connection with the annual national budgets. The job of preventing and combating

homelessness is now embedded as an integral part of the continuous social housing work in the Norwegian State Housing Bank (Husbanken).

In the period 2005–2007 Norway had a national strategy for preventing and combating homelessness, "The pathway to a permanent home". Five ministries were involved in the formulation, content and structure of the strategy. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development was responsible for it and therefore played a leadership role and had coordinating responsibility for the work. The other ministries were the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, Ministry of Children and Equality, Ministry of Health and Care Services and Ministry of Justice. Responsibility for implementing the strategy and the work was primary assigned to the Norwegian State Housing Bank. The local authorities were the primary actors in the work on achieving the strategy's goals while the Norwegian State Housing Bank, as the government's coordinator, was the body that administered most of the funding. The local authorities could apply for various funding from the Norwegian State Housing Bank such as competence grants, housing grants, housing benefit and start loans. The local authorities could also apply for funds related to supervisory services in housing for the homeless and substance abusers. This scheme is administered by the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation (NAV).

The strategy involved five concrete national targets:

- Number of eviction petitions shall be reduced by 50 per cent and the number of evictions by 30 per cent.

- No one shall have to spend time in temporary housing upon release from prison.

- No one shall have to seek temporary housing upon discharge from an institution.

- No one shall be offered overnight shelters without a quality agreement.

- No one shall stay more than three months in temporary housing.

Monitoring of the strategy is conducted using the national homelessness surveys and the Municipal-State-Reporting system (KOSTRA), which is a national information system that provides control information about local authority activities. The eviction targets were the only ones that were directly measurable. Numbers and reporting via KOSTRA are currently not suitable for assessing concrete goal attainment.

The Continental Countries (Germany, Luxembourg)

In those countries with a federal structure of government, the federal government has no competences in relation to housing or homelessness. Hence there is no possibility of a national level system of data collection on homelessness. In these countries there have been initiatives at regional (and municipal) level to survey homelessness.

Germany

Assistance for the homeless is based largely on the federal-law provisions contained in Books II and XII of the Social Code. These are given concrete form via implementation provisions at *Land* level (Book XII of the Social Code) or via instructions emanating from the Federal Employment Agency (Book II of the Social Code). On this basis, the concrete activities and strategies are then developed and implemented by the local authorities as the competent executive authorities.

The definition of homelessness relates to housing emergencies which encompass three main target groups: individuals who are at imminent risk of homelessness, Individuals who are currently affected by homelessness, individuals who for other reasons live in unacceptable circumstances. This definition has been refined and fleshed out in several studies.

Data are collected at different levels because of the graded assistance system. The surveys carried out by local authorities are based partly on statutory provisions of administrative law. These surveys are implemented on a regular basis, but not in all Federal *Länder* and not on the same scale. The independent welfare associations collect information in their facilities concerning the individuals who have sought help there on the basis of a

differentiated specialist dataset which has been developed over time and coordinated with the local authorities' national associations. These data are aggregated in the facilities and summarised and published at federal level for all the associations by the Federal Association for Help to the Homeless (BAGW).

Luxembourg

Until recently, there were few statistics on the number of homeless available in Luxembourg. The Ministry for the Family and Integration consequently commissioned CEPS/INSTEAD to conduct a survey so as determine the number — as well as to describe the socio-demographic characteristics — of the persons concerned. The brief for the study was to prepare:

- a definition of homelessness and a methodology to quantify and analyse homelessness in the specific context of Luxembourg;

- a collection of reliable data through a survey conducted in accordance with the definition and methodology referred to under (a);

- a database on homelessness in Luxembourg;

- appropriate indicators;

- an analysis of the survey results.

The study used the ETHOS definition and a methodology comprised of face-to-face interviews of all the users of homeless facilities during one week (February 6th to 12th 2006). On the whole, 41 structures out of 43 which correspond to the criteria took part in this survey.

In addition to this national survey, two important client recording systems operate. The Ministry of Equality of Chances (MEGA) on one hand and the Ministry of Health (MS), in collaboration with the Public's Health Research Centre (CRP — *Santé*), on the other, have developed tools to measure two phenomena. The MEGA collects data on the users of women's shelter accommodation officially agreed by the MEGA and the MS collects data to observe the evolution of drug-addiction.

The Mediterranean Countries (Italy)

In Italy, homelessness has become a focus of interest for policy-makers only in recent years. As a consequence information on homelessness is limited and systems of data collection are under-developed and local in scope. There is no national data on homelessness, apart from that collected in 2000 by a quantitative survey undertaken by CIES (*Commissione di indagine sull'esclusione sociale*) through the Fondazione Zancan.

However, in 2008, the Welfare Ministry (*Salute, Lavoro e Politiche Sociali*), the Italian National Statistical Institute, the Italian Federation of the organisms for homeless persons (Fio.PSD) and the Italian Caritas made a formal agreement in order to realise a research project on the condition of people living in extreme poverty and to draw a depth picture of homelessness, the status and profiles of homeless people and the formal and informal services, both public and private, in the country with specific reference to the homeless persons needs. The results dissemination and the main publications will be ready by December 2010. This study represents the first experience about the homelessness involving an official national statistical body (ISTAT) and commissioned by a national level public authority.

The choice of a definition of homelessness may go from a definition strictly referring to the lack of a house, so that the housing deprivation becomes the main factor for the homelessness condition, to a definition focused on the lack of social relations, so that the lecture key of the phenomenon refers to the concepts of deprivation and social exclusion. As a starting point the national study identified the following definition:

> the person who suffers a condition of housing hardship, resulting in the impossibility/incapacity of independently finding or maintaining a house in strict meaning

It includes:

- persons living in public spaces (streets, barracks, abandoned cars, caravans, warehouses);

- persons living in a night shelter and/or obliged to spend several hours during the day in a public space;

- persons living in hostels for homeless without any temporary house or accommodation;

- persons living in accommodation provided by the social support system (for singles, couples or groups of homeless)-

It excludes:

- persons living in overcrowding;

- persons receiving hospitality from friends or relatives;

- persons living in illegally occupied accommodation or in structured camps in the cities

The research project objectives require three operational steps:

1. **a census of the services** which the homeless people can contact in the territorial areas of interest;

2. **a survey on the services** counted at point 1 (or a selection of them);

3. **a sample survey on homeless persons** to be conducted at the services (or starting from them) included in the survey at point 2.

The Central and East European Countries (Hungary and Slovenia)

Homelessness as a policy issue has emerged slowly since the transition in 1990. Membership of the EU (in 2004 and 2007) has stimulated consideration of both policy development and data collection through initiatives such as the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (now the National Strategy Reports on social protection and social inclusion — NSRSPSIs) and the Peer Review process. The development of NGO capacity in the provision of services to homeless people has taken time to develop (see Hradecký, 2007; Filipovic, Somogyi and Teller, 2009). Despite this NGOs have, in many

EU-10 countries, been instrumental in data collection surveys of street homelessness and in the development of client registers of service users (especially in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland). Legislation in all the new member states requires organisations offering social services to the homeless to be registered with the state in order to be eligible for public funding. This provides a mechanism for obtaining information on a large percentage of service provision and capacity and provides a basis for the collation of information on clients if governments made this a condition of funding.

Hungary

Homelessness issues are the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour coordinating social services and benefits. Its activities embrace the drafting/preparation of the legal regulations determining the operating conditions of the institutional system for homeless people, and in addition it makes proposals to the Government in relation to the orientation of development and measures to be taken. Under the commission of the Ministry, certain programmes are frequently implemented by two public foundations being active in the field of services to homeless people: Public Foundation for Homeless People and "Solidarity" Public Foundation for the Houseless and Homeless in Budapest. Programmes implemented by non-governmental organisations are monitored by the Ministry.

In Hungary, the *Act III of 1993 on social administration and social services* has been in effect for 16 years, and it states that

> "(1) *homeless people shall be persons without any registered place of residence, except for persons whose registered places of residence are accommodation for homeless people*",

and

> "(2) *any person shall be deemed to be homeless who spends nights in public areas or premises not designed for housing purposes*".

In the light of these two definitions, the persons concerned may receive all the financial benefits and social services that are regulated by the Act, and

also provided to other people in need. The status of homelessness as defined by the above-referenced Act is also considered in the provision of healthcare and free healthcare services.

In Hungary, in order to operate social services for the homeless, providers must obtain permission from the local municipality or the Social and Child Protection Administration. This regulation also includes the use of mandatory documentation systems. The government specifies the subject of the National Statistical Programme for Data Collection (NSPDC). The Central Statistical Offices collates the data for publication in the Social Statistics Yearbook. This provides stock data on the number of staff, capacity, features of services and come of the characteristics of clients using services.

There are no coordinated, regular official data collection systems on the clients of homeless care service providers in Hungary. The relevant laws outline the client data to be registered and on the other hand, there are limitations on the collection and management of data, due to the strict data privacy act. The individual service operators do collect data on their clients, but these are never collated by for any official purpose.

To fill this gap, a working group, named "3rd February" started working in Budapest in 1998. The working group consisting of a few independent experts and social workers is an independent voluntary research team which collects a complete range of data for its research purposes from the clients of the homeless care service providers on 3rd February each year from Budapest only.

For a period, a National Professional Council for Homelessness was established as an advisory body to the Minister for Social Affairs. This Council consisted of 12 elected members representing the homeless care organisations, the Ministry Commissioner and the responsible Ministry department, and permanent (national methodology) and occasional invited persons depending on the given subject. In 2008 a Homelessness Strategy was established, based on the research findings of the "3rd February working group" and the needs emerging from the regional expert consultations and the long debates.

Slovenia

Responsibility lies with the Ministry for Work, Family and Social Affairs. Data collection on any issues of housing exclusion (i.e. on any of the categories of ETHOS) is very limited or almost non-existent. Even more, there seems to be no debate on the need for this data and consequently issues of measurement are not present in the public or professional debate. An additional problem is the very limited view on the homeless issue. Namely, the homeless in Slovenia are often seen as the very narrow group of people that sleep in the streets or use the homeless shelters. Other types of houseless are not viewed as "strictly" homeless (e.g. women in shelters, young in emergency accommodation). The various shelters that offer accommodation to different groups (victims of violence, young, drug users and homeless) are not seen as part of the homelessness issue. Therefore, there is no vision of combining the data from these various fields.

The official data on all of the categories of roofless and homeless is rather scarce. Especially for the roofless there is no official dataset. The most comprehensive overview of the roofless situation is the database of the Social protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, where the services for homeless (funded by the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs and local authorities) and the number of users are reported. The data collection is also limited to the level of services (lists of shelters, NGOs), and is not on the level of users. Therefore, no personal information on the users of various homeless services can be obtained, or their movements in space and among different services.

D. Issues for Data Collection and Service Planning

This section identifies a summary of issues raised by review of the processes described in the Peer Review documentation and presentation. It reflects the reaction of peer countries in the seminar discussion as captured in the minutes of the meeting. The issues are not intended to be comprehensive but rather aim to identify aspects of practice which other countries can adopt if their systems of data collection are to be effective and are to inform practice in order to prevent homelessness and ensure effective outcomes for clients.

Strategy

The Viennese practice reflects the interaction that exists between clarity of strategic goals and evidence based policies. The planning process started by setting the objective of independent and self-determined living for all clients. However, specific policies rely upon evidence to establish the implementation strategy and monitor progress in relation to key client groups and/or targets. Thus, for example, evidence on levels of evictions underpinned the prevention strategy of the VSF and FAWOS. Equally, the Social Programme in Upper Austria establishes the instruments of social planning and presents an annual action plan or report which links the needs and measures to evidence on the nature of homelessness. This is similar to local homelessness action plans prepared in countries as diverse as Ireland and Portugal. Evidence provided by some of the peer countries (especially those from the Nordic region) demonstrate the manner in which national homelessness strategies provide clear targets which are monitored against action by local authorities who are responsible for implementation.

The seminar discussion identified the importance to establishing clear and, at the same time, realistic time-scales for policy implementation and evaluation. For example, the professional committee (*Fachgremium*) prepares a single consolidated report for Upper Austria, which must include concrete implementation measures for a period of up to six years.

Other countries adopt different time-scales but it was clear from seminar discussion that short time-scales are often unrealistic — however, the funding commitments that longer time-scales require may be difficult to sustain politically.

An important contextual component of the Viennese approach is the ability of the City to afford access to housing in order to address the needs of homeless people due to the extensive social housing stock and the nature of the public financing (supply-side subsidies) and almost universal right to subsidised accommodation. Hence the establishment of *Soziale Schiene* within the municipal housing association to offer affordable housing for homeless and at risk groups is a key element contributing to the ability to plan for and implement policies to address the needs of homeless people.

Data Collection

The key components for effective data collection are well documented (see Edgar e al 2007 and the discussion above). Three issues may be mentioned in the context of this Peer Review: management responsibility, definition of homelessness, established information systems which are kept under review.

In Vienna the VSF controls social services and is responsible for the Assistance Program for the homeless, thus providing clear responsibility for action and coordination of data collection systems. The VSF has therefore been able to establish a uniform standard of documentation. The Counselling Service of the VSF can collect all the items of the basic dataset and analysis and reporting of the information is also under their control.

In order to collect information in an effective manner and to allow coordination of action between key stakeholders there has to be a clear understanding of the phenomenon of homelessness. This means that there must be both an operational definition of homelessness which is accepted and understood for data collection purposes and also that the nature of the data to be collected is operationally defined. The ETHOS typology provides a framework within which an agreed definition can be determined. However,

equally important is the need to determine the data items to be collected for each client and the data definition schedule for these items is accepted as a uniform standard. The VSF has approached this and allows for a unified system of data collection to be implemented.

Planning systems

One aim of this Peer Review was to establish, not only the issues involved in data collection, but also the issues involved in using data for social planning and to ensure that services met clients' needs. The seminar discussion confirmed that effective data collection systems are only worthwhile if they result in improved services and more effective action to prevent or combat homelessness. The description of the role of the Counselling Centre for the Homeless (bzWO) emphasised the need for client related evaluation as well as system-related evaluation if needs oriented services are to be planned efficiently.

This approach implies two levels of analysis and monitoring. At the system level there is a need to understand the extent, causes of homelessness and the (changing) profile of homeless people. This in turn requires both client level data and continuous recording systems. At the client level case management information is needed in sufficient detail (and in quantitative terms) to allow for outcome measurement and evaluation. Client level information requires systems capable of capturing client data at relevant stages in the process of service provision and re-housing. This requires client identifiers that facilitate integration of data systems while, at the same time, protecting the anonymity of the individual and adhering to the highest standards of data protection.

The (almost unique) situation of the VSF and the *Soziale Schiene* allows Vienna an enviable ability to integrate the provision of housing and support and thus to plan services in a coordinated manner that addresses identified needs. Such coordinated action is feasible in a municipal authority where responsibility for housing and social support is embodied in a single authority. Nevertheless, such an approach requires established procedures, protocols and decision-making structures to link information systems and

service allocation procedures both at the client level and at the system level. In this context there are generic lessons to be learnt from Vienna even if the organisational and service provision is not replicated elsewhere.

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Appendix 1 — Set of EU indicators adopted in the field of housing

	Dimension	Title and definition	Breakdowns	Comment
Secondary indicator	Housing costs	Housing costs overburden rate Percentage of the population living in a household where total housing costs (net of housing allowances) represent more than 40% of the total disposable household income (net of housing allowances)	sex, age (0–17; 18–64; 65+); income quintiles, poor/non-poor; tenure status (4 categories: full ownership, owner still paying mortgage; tenants at market price; tenants at subsidised price or rent free), degree of urbanisation, household type.	Housing costs include mortgage interest payments (net of any tax relief) for owners and rent payments, gross of housing benefits for renters, housing benefits for rent free households. They also include structural insurance, mandatory services and charges (sewage removal, refuse removal, etc.), regular maintenance and repairs, taxes, and the cost of utilities (water, electricity, gas and heating). They do not include capital repayment for mortgage holders. Housing allowances include rent benefits[4] and benefits to owner-occupiers[5]

4   Rent benefit: a current means-tested transfer granted by public authority to tenants, temporarily or on a long-term basis, to help them with rent costs.

5   Benefit to owner occupier: a means-tested transfer by public authority to owner-occupiers to alleviate their current housing costs; in practice, often help with mortgage reimbursements.

	Dimension	Title and definition	Breakdowns	Comment
Secondary indicator	Overcrowding	Overcrowding rate Percentage of people living in an overcrowded household [6] - All households - excluding single households.	sex, age (0–17; 18–64; 65+); income quintiles, poor/ non-poor; tenure status (4 categories: full ownership, owner still paying mortgage; tenants at market price; tenants at subsidised price or rent free); degree of urbanisation; household type	The person is considered as living in an overcrowded household if the household doesn't have at its disposal at least: - one room for the household; - one room for each couple; - one room for each single person aged 18+; - one room — for two single people of the same sex between 12 and 17 years of age; - one room — for each single person of different sex between 12 and 17 years of age; - one room — for two people under 12 years of age.

6 The calculation includes single households and considers them as deprived if they live in a studio with a bedroom not separated from the living room. This calculation based on all households should systematically be used if the overcrowding criteria is analysed together with other housing quality criteria.

	Dimension	Title and definition	Breakdowns	Comment
Context information	Housing deprivation	Housing deprivation by item Percentage of the population deprived of each housing deprivation item, and by number of items	sex, age (0–17; 18–64; 65+); income quintiles, poor/non-poor; tenure status (4 categories: full ownership, owner still paying mortgage; tenants at market price; tenants at subsidised price or rent free); degree of urbanisation; household type	The following housing deprivation items are considered - leaking roof, damp walls/floors/fundations, or rot in window frames or floors - no bath or shower in the dwelling - no indoor flushing toilet for the sole use of the household - dwelling too dark
Context information	Housing cost	Share of housing costs in total disposable household income Median of the distribution among individuals of the share of housing costs (net of housing allowances) in total disposable income (net of housing allowances) - median for the total population + - median for people at-risk-of poverty	sex, age (0–17; 18–64; 65+); income quintiles, tenure status (4 categories: full ownership, owner still paying mortgage; tenants at market price; tenants at subsidised price or rent free), degree of urbanisation, household type.	

Counting the homeless - improving the basis for planning assistance

Host country: **Austria**

Peer countries: **Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden**

Homelessness is perhaps the most acute expression of poverty and the European Parliament has called for an end to 'street homelessness' in the EU by 2015.

However, there is a lack of knowledge about the causes of homelessness and the actual numbers of people sleeping rough, and this prevents policymakers from developing efficient strategies to overcome the problem.

In the City of Vienna, where reintegrating the homeless through housing programmes has been a priority for the past 20 years, the need to gather empirical data on homelessness has been singled out as a cornerstone for introducing efficient, needs-oriented measures to assist those affected.

The availability of both quantitative and qualitative data on homelessness would enable the City to adapt and improve local social planning in line with needs and, ultimately, to better integrate the homeless into the regular housing market.

The difficulty in gathering data on homelessness is largely due to the fact that, up until now, the phenomenon has rarely been fully researched and definitions of the term vary widely across the EU. In this regard alone, the exchange of experience among Member States could prove useful in developing a common methodology.