

## Seminar 1: Data Collection Methodologies I (Room: TBD) - Chair: Lars Benjaminsen, DK

### Philipp Schnell, AT: Strategies for Measuring Homelessness in a Federally Organized State – the Case of Austria

The federally organized state of Austria consists of nine federal provinces with their own social security laws and distinct networks of organizations providing services for people experiencing homelessness. The federalization of the administrative landscape results in vastly different approaches for tackling the issue of homelessness and increased complexity in quantifying its extent and profile at the national level. For this purpose, we investigated existing data sources for measuring different forms of homelessness along the ETHOS Light typology at state, federal province, and municipal/organizational level. We explored additional data sources and data gathering techniques to create insights on certain subpopulations and sociodemographic groups that are particularly at risk or under-researched. The aim was to design a measurement approach to be rolled out in all Austrian provinces and present a unified framework for data collection and analysis.

As a result, we propose three models for measuring the extent and profile of homelessness in Austria: a centralized approach, collecting data directly from social service organizations; a de-centralized approach involving governments of federal provinces; and a de-centralized approach with partial rollout in some federal provinces. Combining data sources on national, federal province, and municipal/organizational level, we present three solutions for a multi-scale, multi-method approach maximizing coverage of participating provinces and ETHOS Light categories. Also, we want to outline relevant policy dimensions that inform an efficient data collection process and provide the necessary basis for political decision-making. Reuniting the advantages of different measurement techniques, we aim to overcome the fragmentation of the Austrian social welfare system, while providing data for a hands-on strategy to combat homelessness in all Austrian provinces and social strata.



*Philipp Schnell is a postdoctoral researcher at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, where he recently conducted a feasibility study for designing a nationwide system for collecting data on homelessness and precarious housing, commissioned by the Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs. He previously published work on the lifeworlds of persons experiencing homelessness in Vienna and explored novel approaches for studying urban transformation and urban lived experience, including their effects on social space. Currently, Philipp is working on a study on life-trajectories of formerly homeless persons in permanent housing and a multi-method, multi-scale model for measuring homelessness across ETHOS Light categories in Austria.*

### Evelien Demaerschalk, Nana Mertens, Koen Hermans, BE: Integrating a Street Count and Extensive Service-based Homelessness Count

To provide local and regional governments with concrete tools in the fight against homelessness, LUCAS KU Leuven developed a methodology for an extensive service-based homelessness count. The point in time count is a ten-month process involving intensive collaboration with local services that have (in)direct contact with homeless people. From 2020 to 2023, 14 point-in-time counts took place in cities and regions in Flanders and 10 in Wallonia.

In 2023 a first homelessness count was organized in Antwerp, the largest city in Flanders. For the first time, we set up a street count in addition to the extensive service-based count. After a briefing, 63 practitioners walked in groups of 2 to 4 people through 25 zones. They counted people sleeping rough from 11 PM to midnight and completed a concise questionnaire. In order to verify whether someone had already been counted in the extensive service-based count, the counters asked awake individuals if they were willing to provide their anonymous ID.

We present how a street count and extensive service-based count can coexist and complement each other in a large city like Antwerp. Our results indicate that a portion of the street sleepers are known to services. They were already included in the extensive service-based count. Another group of persons counted in the street count, had not yet been in contact with the organizations participating in the count. This number of individuals could be added to the results of the extensive service based count. However, the extensive service-based count led to a higher number of persons sleeping rough compared to the street count. We will discuss the implications of this result.



*Evelien Demaerschalk is a researcher at LUCAS, Center for Care Research and Consultancy. Her work focuses on the care and support for vulnerable and underserved populations in society. Currently she is involved in the development and organization of local and regional homelessness counts in Belgium and Europe.*



*Nana Mertens is a researcher at LUCAS, Center for Care Research and Consultancy, KU Leuven. She works on the research topics of care and support for vulnerable and underserved populations in society. In recent years, she has focused on the development and organization of local and regional homelessness counts in Belgium and Europe.*

*Koen Hermans, Belgium is Associate Professor of Social Work and Social Policy at the Centre for Sociological Research, KU Leuven. He is also project leader at LUCAS, Centre for Care Research and Consultancy. His research focuses on the care and support for vulnerable and underserved populations in society, such as homeless persons, persons with disability and youngsters with complex needs. He was the coordinator of the COST Action on 'Measuring homelessness in Europe' (2016-2020). In Belgium, he is responsible for the development and organization of local and regional homelessness counts*