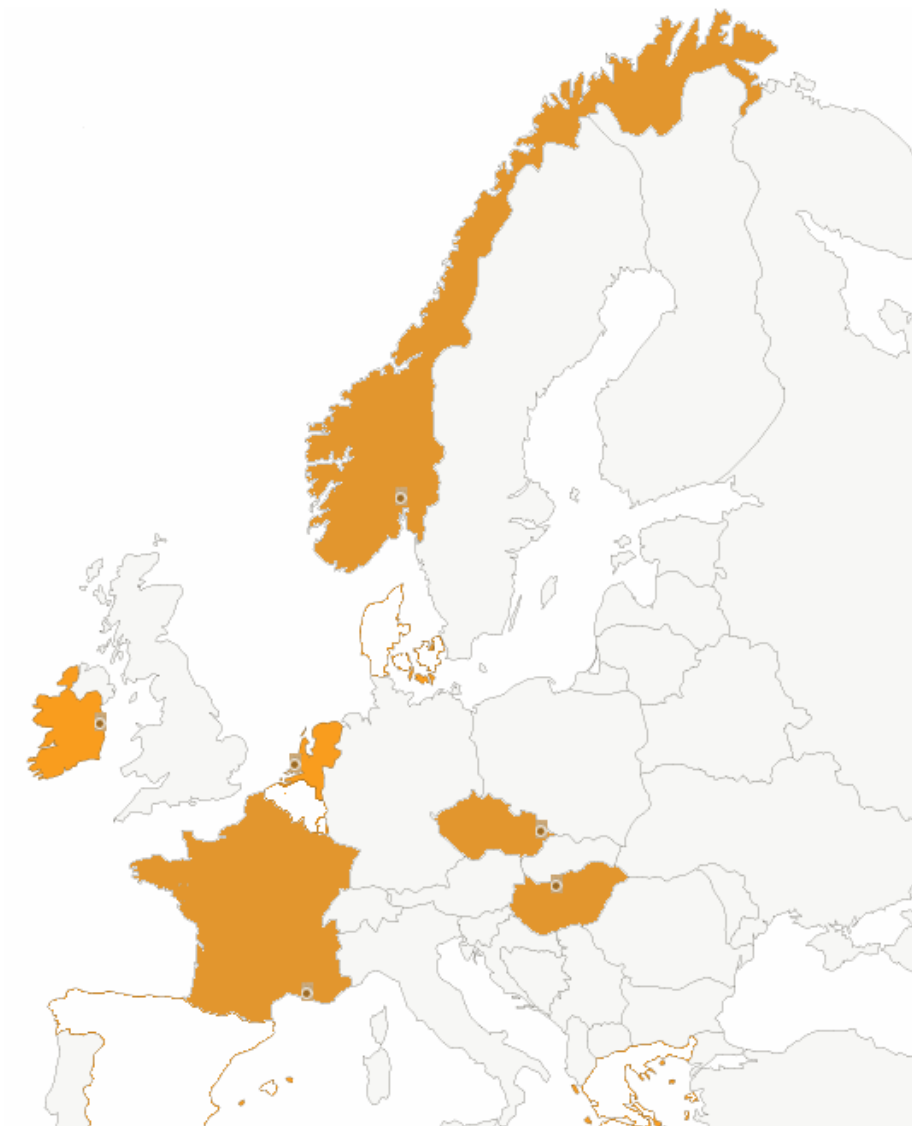


***Comparability of homelessness data collection across the EU
A case study of six European cities***



Contributors

FEANTSA Data Group

This case study was coordinated and written by the Data Group of FEANTSA (the European federation of national organisations working with homeless people – www.feantsa.org). The Data Group of FEANTSA has different tasks and objectives, including monitoring of national and EU statistical developments on homelessness, exchanging good practice on homelessness measurement, and creating links with the academic field as well as with European and International bodies. The Group's mandate is renewed every two years, and working group members are nominated by FEANTSA members.

Group members

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I. Introduction

i. Background

There are increasing calls for comparative quantitative data on homelessness in Europe driven by policy and research needs, but also driven by the EU political agenda. In 2008 and 2010, the European Parliament called on the European Commission and the Council of Ministers to monitor progress on homelessness in Europe, and in March 2010 the European Commission and the Council of Ministers adopted the *Joint Report 2010 on social protection and inclusion* which recommends that all EU countries develop a homelessness strategy (Council, 2010).

The new European Union strategy “Europe2020” has placed tackling poverty and social exclusion at the top of the EU agenda with clear poverty reduction targets and a flagship initiative launched by the European Commission referred to as the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion (Commission, 2010).

Yet the lack of comparable quantitative and qualitative data on homelessness across countries limits the ability of the EU to monitor progress on homelessness. FEANTSA has worked for the last 10 years to improve the comparability of homelessness data in Europe, starting with the adoption of a conceptual framework on homelessness in 2005: ETHOS – European Typology of Homelessness and housing exclusion (FEANTSA, 2005).

Since then, the European Commission has funded two initiatives to improve homelessness measurement at EU level, namely the study “Measuring Homelessness at European Union Level (Edgar et al, 2007)” and the “MPHASIS” project (2008-2009)¹ which recommended a common definition of homelessness as well as a list of statistical variables on homelessness for European data collection purposes.

The need for EU statistics on homelessness (stock, flow, prevalence) has been expressed by various data users and stakeholders, including FEANTSA. EU debates on homelessness measurement have recently been fuelled by the 2011 round of population and housing censuses (which will include the enumeration of homeless people in all 27 countries of the EU), through recommendations in a number of academic reports which recommend different methodologies for measuring homelessness at EU level (Frazer and Marlier 2009, Bradshaw 2010, Busch-Geertsema et al 2010), and through the recently published Policy Recommendations of the Jury of the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness (2011).²

¹ <http://www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/>

² See full recommendations in Annex I

ii. Case study objectives

The FEANTSA Data Group decided to carry out a small case study to test cross-country comparability of homelessness data collection in 6 European cities (Budapest, Dublin, Marseille, Oslo, Ostrava, and The Hague)³ using the MPHASIS core standard variables as a starting point (see methodology below). As data users and producers, the Group wishes to contribute to EU debates on homelessness measurement. More specifically, we hope this case study can:

- **Try to fill a gap in knowledge:** Following the conclusion of the MPHASIS project in 2009, no further initiative has been taken by the European Commission or Eurostat to test the MPHASIS recommendations.
- **Support FEANTSA members**, especially organisations which are trying to implement the core MPHASIS variables in their homelessness systems or surveys, to reflect on the type of homelessness data collected in their countries.
- **Identify some of the barriers to comparability** of homelessness data across countries: We hope that some of the conclusions of this case study will help to shed light on how to break down barriers to collecting robust comparable data on homelessness across EU countries.⁴
- **Give some pointers for future actions and research** on methods to improve cross-country comparability of homelessness data.

What this case study will **not** do is publish figures on homelessness in the 6 cities. There are some basic differences in the data compiled for the case study (see section II for more information), as well as some data gaps, which prevent us from publishing tables with cross-city data.

The case study will look at the comparability of the *process* (variable definitions, methodologies, etc) used to collate the data, and will hence focus on comparing data collection rather than comparing the data itself, with a specific focus on the MPHASIS core variables on homelessness.

The Data Group considers this an essential first step in the development of a Europe-wide monitoring system on homelessness. After this case study, there could be a follow-up initiative to address the issues that have emerged from this exercise.

This report is structured in four sections. An introductory section explains the background, objectives and methodology of the case study. A second section describes the main results of the stocktaking exercise, namely the data available in the 6 cities and some of the challenges in compiling the data according to the methodology agreed. A third section looks at the comparability of the profile data based on the MPHASIS core variables, namely looking at data availability, the variable definitions used, and the comparability of the variables. Finally, a concluding section makes recommendations for future steps to develop homelessness measurement at EU level.

³ Based on the countries represented in the Data Group

⁴ The lessons learnt can be useful for EU comparability, but also serve to improve comparability of data within a single country (where organisations in different cities and regions collect homelessness data in different ways).

iii. Methodology

After discussing crucial differences in homelessness data collection across countries – namely definitions, variables, and data availability - the Group agreed on the following three methodological elements for the case study.

Homelessness definition

For the homelessness definition, the Group chose to use the ETHOS typology of homelessness and housing exclusion as a reference, and namely ETHOS 2.1 and 3.1 as a starting point for this case study for the following reasons:

1. Data availability - There are fewer data gaps for ETHOS 2.1/3.1 than other categories since the data clearly comes from specific homeless services;
2. Institutional comparability - The definition of “Night shelter” (2.1) and “Homeless hostel” (3.1) is more harmonised than the living situations of other ETHOS categories, and hence a good starting point.

Table 1. ETHOS – European typology of homelessness and housing exclusion

	Operational Category	Living Situation	Generic Definition
Conceptual Category	ROOFLESS	1 People Living Rough	1.1 Public space or external space Living in the streets or public spaces, without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters
		2 People in emergency accommodation	2.1 Night shelter People with no usual place of residence who make use of overnight shelter, low threshold shelter
	HOUSELESS	3 People in accommodation for the homeless	3.1 Homeless hostel 3.2 Temporary Accommodation 3.3 Transitional supported accommodation Where the period of stay is intended to be short term
		4 People in Women's Shelter	4.1 Women's shelter accommodation Women accommodated due to experience of domestic violence and where the period of stay is intended to be short term
		5 People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1 Temporary accommodation / reception centres 5.2 Migrant workers accommodation Immigrants in reception or short term accommodation due to their immigrant status
	INSECURE	6 People due to be released from institutions	6.1 Penal institutions 6.2 Medical institutions (*) 6.3 Children's institutions / homes No housing available prior to release Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing No housing identified (e.g by 18th birthday)
		7 People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)	7.1 Residential care for older homeless people 7.2 Supported accommodation for formerly homeless people Long stay accommodation with care for formerly homeless people (normally more than one year)
		8 People living in insecure accommodation	8.1 Temporarily with family/friends 8.2 No legal (sub)tenancy 8.3 Illegal occupation of land Living in conventional housing but not the usual or place of residence due to lack of housing Occupation of dwelling with no legal tenancy Illegal occupation of a dwelling Occupation of land with no legal rights
	INADEQUATE	9 People living under threat of eviction	9.1 Legal orders enforced (rented) 9.2 Re-possession orders (owned) Where orders for eviction are operative Where mortgagee has legal order to re-possess
		10 People living under threat of violence	10.1 Police recorded incidents Where police action is taken to ensure place of safety for victims of domestic violence
		11 People living in temporary / non-conventional structures	11.1 Mobile homes 11.2 Non-conventional building 11.3 Temporary structure Not intended as place of usual residence Makeshift shelter, shack or shanty Semi-permanent structure hut or cabin
		12 People living in unfit housing	12.1 Occupied dwellings unfit for habitation Defined as unfit for habitation by national legislation or building regulations
		13 People living in extreme overcrowding	13.1 Highest national norm of overcrowding Defined as exceeding national density standard for floor-space or useable rooms

Note: Short stay is defined as normally less than one year; Long stay is defined as more than one year.
This definition is compatible with Census definitions as recommended by the UNECE/EUROSTAT report (2006)

Homelessness variables

The MPHASIS 2009 core variables on homelessness were used as a basis for the stocktaking exercise.⁵ The aim of these standard core variables is to allow for the aggregation of local/national data in wider EU categories, and hence to facilitate comparison of the data. They are meant to be consensual and generic while allowing for national differences.

Table 2. MPHASIS core standard variables on homelessness

Variable	Core
Demographic characteristics: Age and Gender	
1. Age	Date of Birth
2. Sex	Male/Female
Nationality/Migration background	
3a. Nationality (Country of Citizenship)	National; Non-national (National of other EU Member State; National of non-EU country)
3b. Country of Birth	Native-born; Foreign-born (Born in other EU Member State; Born in non-EU country)
Household/family characteristics	
4. Household Structure/ Living Situation	-One person households -Multiple-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	
5. 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 (healthcare, prison, childcare) -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
6. 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
7. 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 majeure (fire, flood, etc) -Other reasons

Source: Busch-Geertsema and Edgar (2009)

⁵ The recommended MPHASIS **non-core** variables are also an excellent framework and crucial for collecting information on client support needs (see Annex II). However, due to the limited scope of this case study, we decided to focus on the **core** variables only.

The feasibility of using these proposed core variables for EU data collection purposes was tested during the MPHASIS project (Busch-Geertsema, 2009), and they are also in line with the recommended Eurostat core social variables of age, sex, nationality, country of birth, and household structure (Eurostat, 2007).

This case study looks at all seven MPHASIS variables listed in Table 2. However, for variable no. 5 (previous night accommodation and current accommodation), the Group focused on “previous accommodation” only since “current accommodation” was determined by the choice of ETHOS categories 2.1 (Night shelter) and 3.1 (Homeless hostel) as the target population of the case study.

Geographical level of data: local

The Group focused on local level data (rather than regional or national) due to data availability: many cities in Europe collect data on homelessness to map emerging local social service needs, while only few national governments monitor and measure homelessness in a systematic way (although there is an increasing number of national homelessness data collection systems being set up currently, in line with the MPHASIS project recommendations).

Therefore, the use of local data was not a methodological decision, but rather the decision was based on the current situation and reality of data collection in many EU countries, which the Group had to adapt to.

By using data collected in very different local contexts, this case study will probably lead to a longer list of barriers to comparability than would exist between national data sets, but we hope this will better expose the differences that exist across countries.

The six cities (with populations ranging from 0.32 Million to 1.86 Million inhabitants) were selected by the FEANTSA Data Group members mainly according to data availability. They are of different sizes (sometimes capital cities, and sometimes not), and are situated in different parts of Europe (North, South, East and West), hence representing different cultures and approaches to measuring homelessness.

While Dublin has a statutory duty to develop local homeless action plans (like all Irish local authorities since July 2009) and The Hague, Marseille, and Oslo work in the framework of national homelessness strategy, Budapest and Ostrava tend to work independently from national authorities on homelessness.

On this methodological basis, the FEANTSA Data Group members took stock between July and September 2010 of existing homelessness data in the six cities (see next section II for the results of the stocktaking), and met twice in October 2010 and February 2011 to discuss and compare the data collection systems.

II. Stocktaking exercise

i. Data availability

This section aims to give an overview of the data collated by the FEANTSA Data Group during the stocktaking exercise carried out between July and September 2010.

Table 3. Overview of data availability in the six cities

City	ETHOS	Year	Period	Methodology	Source	MPHASIS variables
Budapest (HU)	2.1/3.1	2009	1 night	Survey (questionnaire to persons)	3 rd February group (group of experts in homeless services)	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7
Dublin (IE)	1 – 4	2008	1 week	Survey (questionnaire to persons)	Homeless Agency (national coordination body)	1, 2, 3a/b, 4, 5, 6
Marseille (FR)	2.1/ 3.1	2009	6 months	Phone interviews	115 emergency phoneline national software of FNARS (national federation of shelters)	1, 2, 3a, 4, 5, 6, 7
Oslo (NO)	2.1/3.1	2008	1 week	Survey (questionnaire to services)	National survey	1, 2, 3b, 4, 6, 7
Ostrava (CZ)	2.1/3.1	2010	1 night	Client registration system	S.A.D. (national federation of shelters)	1, 2, 3a, 4, 5, 6, 7
The Hague (NL)	2.1	2008	1 year	Client registration system	Federatie Opvang (national federation of shelters)	1, 2, 3a, 3b

Budapest (Hungary): Data has been collected in Budapest since 1999 through a 1-night survey (on 3 February of every year) carried out by the ‘3rd of February Working Group’, a voluntary group led by Péter Györi from the Shelter Foundation. Service providers participate in the survey on a voluntary basis, the questionnaires are either filled out by the homeless people themselves, or with the help of support staff, who ask the questions and write down the responses. Analysis of the data is done and published by the 3rd of February Working Group. The annual survey has now spread to 16 other cities and towns in Hungary.

Dublin (Ireland): A periodic assessment on homelessness is carried out every three years to determine the number of people that are experiencing homelessness (over one week) in Dublin. Surveys were carried out in 1999, 2002, 2005 and most recently in 2008. The data used for the case study comes from the 2008 survey which focuses on a wide range of living situations (i.e. sleeping rough, hostel accommodation, private emergency accommodation, transitional accommodation etc.)

Marseille (France): Data for Marseille was extracted from the new system (launched in July 2009) used by the 115 emergency phone line in France. The profile data is collected on a continuous basis, through questions asked to callers, each time they call. The people calling are generally referred to hostels or night shelters, hence covering people in ETHOS 2.1/3.1. However, it only partly covers the homeless services in Marseille since the data is extracted from services managing the emergency phone line and not directly from accommodation services. The data extracted from the 115 system for the purpose of this case study covers a period of 6 months (01/07/09 to 31/12/09), although it is actually possible to extract data that covers a period of a week or a night.

Oslo (Norway): The data for Oslo is from a national survey carried out in 2008 among service providers, criminal services, NGOs and other relevant services for homeless people, during the week of 24-30 November 2008.

Ostrava (Czech Republic): Every year since 2009, a survey of homelessness is carried out by Sdružení Azylových Domů (S.A.D.- National federation of shelters) in the city of Ostrava over one night, using the data of the S.A.D. client registration system. The 2010 homelessness data for Ostrava was collected from nine homeless hostels and four night shelters using the MPHASIS core variables when relevant. Four homeless hostels are for men only, five homeless hostels are for women with children, two night shelters are for men, and two night shelters for women.

The Hague (The Netherlands): In the region of The Hague, seven organisations are involved with homeless people. Three of these organisations are members of the National federation of shelters (Federatie Opvang) and are exporting data to the Federatie Opvang. The data collated for this case study has been extracted from this system, but for one organisation only. For the other two organisations the Federation of Shelters has no isolated data about ETHOS category 3.1, the data is far wider than category 3.1. In conclusion, the figures available for The Hague are not entirely robust, but are good enough to use for comparing the MPHASIS core variables across the 6 cities of the case study.

ii. Challenges

As part of the stocktaking exercise, we have tried to collate information about people in ETHOS categories 2.1 and 3.1 for all six cities (both the number of homeless people and their profiles based on the MPHASIS core variables). This information was used by the Group to compare the process of homelessness data collection, the results of which are highlighted in section III of this case study.

However, before examining the process used for each MPHASIS core variable, we thought it useful to highlight some of the methodological challenges the Group faced in compiling the data during this voluntary exercise.

Target population

The FEANTSA Data Group started by examining existing local data for ETHOS 3.1 People in homeless hostels. However, in the cases of Dublin, Marseille and The Hague, the data collated also covered to a certain extent ETHOS 2.1 (people in night shelters). Since ETHOS 2.1 data was also available for Budapest, Ostrava and Oslo, the reference target population for this case study became both categories ETHOS 2.1 and 3.1.

ETHOS Operational category	Living situation		Generic definition
2. People in emergency accommodation	2.1	Night shelter	People who with no usual place of residence who make use of overnight shelter, low-threshold shelter
3. People in accommodation for the homeless	3.1	Homeless Hostel	Where the period of stay is intended to be short term

For Oslo and Dublin, the data available covered a target population wider than ETHOS 3.1. In the case of Dublin, it was possible to get the number of people in ETHOS 2.1/3.1, but it was not possible to get the characteristics (MPHASIS core variables) of people in ETHOS 2.1/3.1 only, since *Counted In 2008* only provides the core variables data for *all* accommodation types (i.e. aggregate data for those sleeping rough, in hostel accommodation, private emergency accommodation, transitional accommodation etc.). For Oslo, it was possible to get a breakdown of the profile data for ETHOS categories 2.1/3.1.

Homeless services as a data source

As indicated in the 2009 Review of Homelessness Statistics in Europe (Edgar, 2009), the approaches to homelessness data collection vary across countries and according to the homeless population covered.

Table 4. Summary of the main approaches adopted to collect data on homelessness and housing exclusion

Approach	Method	Focus
Surveys (counts)	National counts	ETHOS categories 1,2(3)
	Capital city counts	homeless people
	Local authority surveys (national / regional)	Point-in-time (stock)
Registers	Municipal (client-based)	Homeless services
	Service provider	Social welfare services Profile data
	NGO (client-based)	Prevalence, flow (stock)
Census (market surveys)	Census 2011	All ETHOS categories Point-in-time (stock) Infrequent
	Housing market surveys	
	Housing needs assessments	
	Homeless surveys	

Source: Edgar (2009) p.28

But whether through client registration systems or through surveys, ETHOS 2.1/3.1 data is generally based on contact with homeless services. Even if these services work in different institutional and legal contexts, the definition of services is fairly similar and hence this does not significantly affect comparability of the figures.

Rather what does affect comparability between the figures in the six cities is incomplete coverage of *all* homeless services in a given city. The data for The Hague concerns only part of the target population, since the data comes from only one of seven organisations working with homeless people in The Hague.

The methodology for Marseille being neither based on surveys nor service client registration systems, but on data collected through an emergency phone line (115), means again that there is only partial coverage of homeless services in the city.

Even in cases where the data is complete, we cannot be sure that we have the correct figures. For instance, the extent of double-counting of clients is sometimes unclear; or it is also possible that client files are left in a system while the client has moved on from homeless services.

Another caveat about working with figures based on homeless services relates to the service paradox whereby the greater number of services a city provides, the greater the ETHOS 2.1/3.1 population will be. Having said this, as governments develop and consolidate their homelessness monitoring systems, such issues should no longer exist in the future.

Year and timeframe of data

Data on homelessness is available in all six cities, but not necessarily for the same year. The Group aimed to find data for 2009. However, cities collect data in different ways and at different intervals (sometimes annually, sometimes at greater intervals, and sometimes on a continuous basis). Moreover, the choice of year was also determined by the availability of data on the MPHASIS core variables (in some cases used for the first time only in 2010). Hence data collated for this case study spans three years: 2008, 2009 and 2010.

When collecting homelessness data, it is important to specify whether what is being measured is the stock, flow or prevalence of homelessness – and this is especially important when considering cross-country comparability of data. It is quite clear from both Table 3 (above) and Table 5 (below) that some of the data is prevalence data (over one year, six months or one week) and other data is point-in-time (over one night), which immediately considerably reduces comparability of the homelessness figures in the six cities. With the Federatie Opvang system used in The Hague, it would be impossible to have data for one night only. The group highlighted the importance of the choice of the *time of year* for the data collation since, in most countries, there would be significant differences between the winter and the summer for instance. For this reason, FNARS (the French federation of shelters) organises three flash studies per year at different times to compare the differences in homelessness trends between seasons.

Table 5. Differences in timeframe and year of ETHOS 2.1/3.1 data in five of the six cities

City	Total Population	ETHOS 2.1/3.1 population	Period	Year
Budapest	1.86M	2219	1 night	2009
Dublin	1.18M	617	1 week	2008
Marseille	0.85M	3 577	6 months	2009
Oslo	0.6M	470	1 week	2008
Ostrava	0.32M	273	1 night	2010

These different challenges also illustrate why this case study does not publish tables with cross-city data. However these challenges have not prevented the Data Group from analysing the *process* (variable definitions, challenges, barriers) used to collate the data and the comparability between the different data sets, which is the main focus of this case study and described in detail in the next section.

III. Comparability of MPHASIS core variables

The FEANTSA Data Group is keen to promote the use of the recommended MPHASIS core variables, and wishes therefore to highlight some of the issues they have raised in their discussions and, on this basis, make some recommendations for facilitating the integration of the variables in existing or new homelessness registration systems and surveys.

This section will start by an overview of the data collated in the six cities, and then will briefly examine each of the seven variables, namely looking at data availability, the definitions of variables used (e.g. questions asked), and comparability issues. The results of the 2009 MPHASIS survey on the core variables as well as the Eurostat social variables are taken into account when examining each variable individually (see red and orange boxes).

The profile data collated in the six cities of this case study are generally in line with the recommended MPHASIS core variables, although only the basic core socio-demographic variables of “age” and “sex” are available for all six cities. Data on “household structure” and “duration of homelessness” are available in five cities, while the core variables of “nationality”, “previous accommodation” and “reasons for homelessness” are used in four cities only. Finally, only three cities use the core recommended variable of “country of birth”.

Table 6. MPHASIS core variables used in the six cities

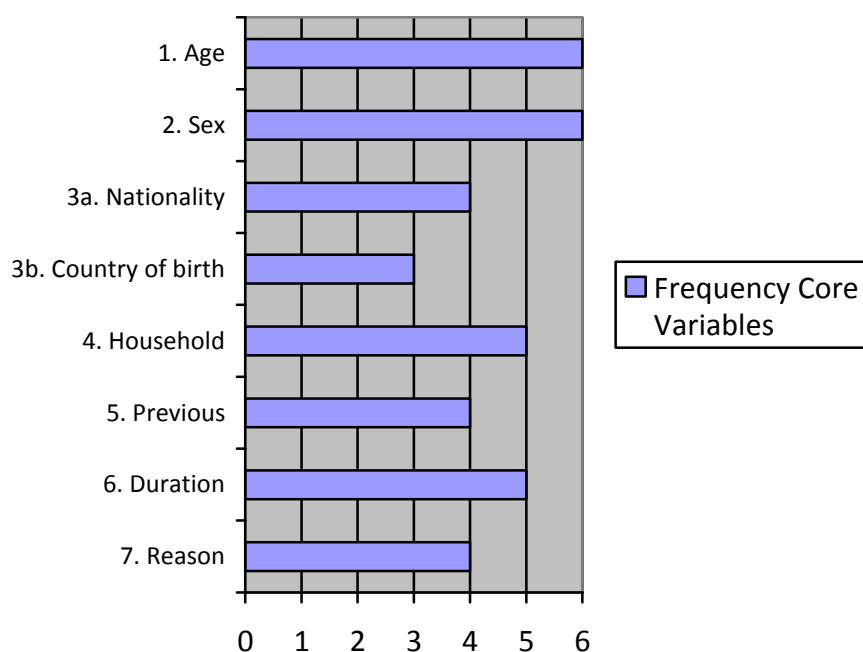


Table 7. MPHASIS core variables used per city

City	Age	Sex	Nat.	Country birth	Household	Previous accommodation	Duration	Reason
Budapest	X	X			X	X	X	X
Dublin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Marseille	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Oslo	X	X		X	X		X	X
Ostrava	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
The Hague	X	X	X	X				

i. Age

Age - MPHASIS survey: Information on age is included in all client registration systems in the survey, but in some cases (20 %) age groupings or just an age (in completed years) is given instead of the date of birth (as proposed by MPHASIS and realised in 80 % of the systems covered). The Eurostat Task Force on Core Social Variables (2007: 23) recommends reporting "age in completed years", which is not a problem when the year of birth is given. Year of birth has the great advantage that current age can be calculated (and updated) on this basis at different times.

Age - Eurostat recommendation: Age in completed years is the age expressed as the number of birthday anniversaries passed on the date of reference, i.e. the age at last birthday. "Age" is a basic parameter in survey data analysis since the differences between the population groups constructed on it are relevant in developing many EU and national public policies and programmes. Also, existing information on the situation of specific age groups (elderly or young people) has important implications for the policies and programmes that are targeted towards these categories of population.

Availability: Data on the core variable "age" was used in all six cities.

Definitions: Similar definitions are used for this variable in all cities, although with some differences (see Table 8 below). In Dublin, Marseille, and Budapest people are asked for their full date of birth. In The Hague only the month and year are collected (not the day), and in Oslo and Ostrava only the *year* of birth is asked. Some Group members commented that from a privacy point of view, it might be best just to collect the year of birth (and not the month and day). Other Group members agreed with this, but also highlighted the fact that the full date of birth was necessary in most cases for creating unique identifiers (this is the case in Dublin where the date of birth is collected to avoid double counting). Generally, the Group agrees that there should be a standard method of recording age, not giving the age but rather the date or year of birth (in accordance with the MPHASIS recommendation).

Table 8. Definitions of core variable AGE in the six cities

City	Definition
Budapest	Date of birth
Dublin	Date of birth
Marseille	Date of birth
Oslo	Year of birth
Ostrava	Year of birth
The Hague	Month and year of birth (not day)

Table 9. Age groupings in the six cities

City	Age groupings
Budapest	<19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70<
Dublin	18-20, 21-25, 26-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65<
Marseille	< 18, 18-24, 25 -39, 40-59, 60 <
Oslo	<24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65<
Ostrava	<20, 20-35, 35-50, 50<
The Hague	<17, 18-24, 25-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-64, 65<

Comparability: As regards the grouping of the data in different age categories (see Table 9), this is different for each of the six cities, in accordance with local policy needs (family life cycle, housing needs, children services, standards, legislation, legal definitions of adult/child, etc). For instance, the choice to include a category of 60-70 in the Budapest data is a conscious decision to emphasise the high proportion of older homeless people in Budapest. In the Netherlands, there are standard age categories used by most organisations but it is possible to create different age groupings from the data of the Federation of shelters.

The Group highlighted the different reference days used for the calculation of the age. In The Hague and Oslo, the age is calculated from the first day of the year of data collection. In Marseille, it is the last day of the year. In the case of Dublin, the age groupings are calculated using the date of the *Counted In* survey as a reference.

A point was made about interpreting the data in Marseille. Data concerning people under 18 in France uses persons (not households) as a unit. However, young people recorded in the local data for Marseille are most often part of wider homeless families.

In terms of the coverage of the younger part of the population, it was also highlighted that the first age grouping in the Dublin data set does not look at people below 18 years since the groupings are based on the *Counted In* survey which is a survey of homeless adults. The first grouping in the Oslo data (<24) does not look at people below the age of 18 either. The group thought it important to recommend the use of a first age grouping in surveys and registers which highlights the differences between homeless adults and young people (in legislation, and access to benefits and services).

The significant differences in age categories makes comparability of the collated data difficult in this case study. However, given that the core variable definitions in all six cities contain minimum year of birth, the data available could fit into different age groupings for the purpose, for instance, of an EU statistical survey on homelessness. The Eurostat report states that "There is no obvious standard age grouping valid for all surveys to be found, as each survey might be interested in different age groups. Age in completed years can be grouped according to needs for statistical analysis of each survey." In EU social surveys, different age groupings have been used for different purposes and analyses.

ii. Sex

Sex -MPHASIS survey: Information on the biological sex of the person is included in all client registration systems and the categories "male/female" are identical everywhere. Following WHO recommendations referred to in the Eurostat report, and the additional advice of Eurostat on this variable (2007: 23) it is concluded that this variable should be called "sex" rather than "gender".

Sex- Eurostat recommendation: This core variable refers to the biological sex of the person and is a standard one in survey and administrative data. According to WHO, "sex" refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women while "gender" refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. Following this description, WHO considers that "male" and "female" are sex categories, while "masculine" and "feminine" are gender categories. The importance of this variable derives from the need for adequate information on the situation of women and men in all policy areas. By studying the gender differences and inequalities it is possible to understand them, and on this basis, make plans, formulate and monitor policies in all spheres of society. Hence, the importance of the variable "sex" which being cross classified with other characteristics of the population provides the basis for evaluating progress towards the complete elimination of still existing gender-based stereotypes.

Availability: Data on the core variable "sex" was available for all six cities.

Definitions: This variable is referred to as "sex" in all cities except for Dublin which uses "gender" instead. In general, people surveyed or interviewed are asked a general question with two options: Male or Female. However in Budapest, no question is asked directly to the person; rather, the person is asked to fill in the form which contains two options.

Table 10. Definition of the core variable SEX in the six cities

City	Definition
Budapest	Male/Female
Dublin	Gender
Marseille	Sex
Oslo	Male/Female
Ostrava	Sex (Male/Female)
The Hague	Male/Female

Comparability: On the whole comparability of the data is high, and the Group has nothing specific to report here. This variable is considered most interesting when cross-referenced with other variables to further explain certain trend differences between women and men.

iii. Nationality and Country of Birth

Nationality - MPHASIS survey: The nationality (country of citizenship) of homeless clients is documented in 80 % of all the client registration systems covered in the survey, but in some countries the categories only differentiate nationals and non-nationals while others distinguish sub-categories for non-nationals (from EU member states, from non EU-countries, sometimes differentiating non-EU countries further; in some cases the legal residence status is recorded as well). A coding which only differentiates between nationals and non-nationals with two sub-categories for the latter ("Nationals of other EU Member States", "National of non EU countries") would be in accordance with the Eurostat recommendations (2007: 24) and is therefore recommended.

Country of birth – MPHASIS survey: Country of birth is recorded in just over half of the client registration systems covered in the survey (12 of 20). A few countries use "native language" or "ethnicity" as indicators for a migration background, but most others do not. Eurostat (2007: 24) recommends including "Country of birth" as a core variable in social statistics and distinguishing between native born and foreign born (and among the latter persons born in other EU Member states and persons born in non-EU countries). It is important to learn more about the section of the homeless population with a migration background and hence the recommendation is to include this variable in those client registration systems which do not currently use it and to use the categories proposed by Eurostat.

Country of citizenship at time of data collection – Eurostat recommendation: Citizenship is defined as the particular legal bond between an individual and his/her State, acquired by birth or naturalisation, whether by declaration, option, marriage or other means according to the national legislation. The information sought is the country of current citizenship of the person concerned. The coding recommended is the following:

1. Nationals
2. Non-nationals
 - Nationals of other EU Member States
 - Nationals of non EU countries

Country of birth – Eurostat recommendation: Country of birth is the country where a person was born, namely the country of usual residence of the mother at the time of the birth. The coding recommended is the following :

1. Native-born
2. Foreign-born
 - Born in another EU Member State
 - Born in a non EU country

Availability: "Nationality" as a core variable is used in four cities, but not in Budapest and Oslo. In Ostrava, this variable is used, but information is only collected on nationals (namely asking if people are Czech or Slovak) and not on non-nationals. In Budapest, nationality is not used in the 3rd February survey, but data on ethnic origin is collected (especially relevant in relation to the homeless Roma population), and data on country of citizenship is in the BMSKZI homelessness information system.

The variable "country of birth" is used in three cities, but not in Budapest, Marseille or Ostrava. However, this variable will be introduced in the French government's new national homelessness registration system called SIAO ("Système Intégré d'Accueil et d'Orientation").

The variables of nationality and country of birth are highly relevant in most cities, but less so in Budapest and Ostrava which have too few homeless migrants for this to be an important question. In Budapest, there are an insignificant proportion of people who are from abroad or who do not have Hungarian citizenship. In Ostrava, country of birth is not used in the homeless services surveyed since only few people from foreign countries use the homeless services. Furthermore, the variable nationality is somewhat sensitive in Ostrava and can only be collected with the client's permission.

In Dublin and The Hague however, country of birth is considered an important variable. In the case of The Hague (and the rest of the Netherlands for that matter), nationality is not considered enough information about the person, and country of birth is considered a complementary variable. Country of birth is important in a Dutch context where many people have two nationalities (e.g. Dutch and Turkish). Moreover, the data for The Hague clearly shows differences between profile data on nationality and country of birth.

In Ireland, country of birth might be relevant to show that there has been a change in the legal status of a person (when comparing this with the answer to the question of nationality).

On the whole, there is general agreement that both are crucial variables for policy-making in the future especially in relation to migration and homelessness, to understand how many migrants use hostels/shelters and what rights they have.

Definitions: The variables nationality and country of *citizenship* are interpreted in the Eurostat report as having the same meaning, and are used interchangeably in the case study cities where these variables are used. However, in Hungary it appears the terms nationality and country of citizenship are seen to be different concepts - there are many ethnic Hungarians in Europe who have Hungarian *nationality* but Romanian/Serbian/Slovak citizenship as they are part of Hungarian minorities living in other neighbouring countries. This distinction might also be an issue in countries like the UK and Spain (e.g. having Catalan nationality but Spanish citizenship, or Scottish nationality but UK citizenship).

As regards the recommended Eurostat/MPHASIS subcategories of non-nationals (EU and non-EU) for both variables, most cities that use the variable use these sub-categories. However, given that these variables are less relevant in a Czech cultural context, the variable nationality used in Ostrava only asks about being Czech or Slovak and does not ask about non-nationals.

Table 11. Definition of the core variable NATIONALITY in the six cities

City	Definition
Budapest	Not asked (but "Country of citizenship" is asked)
Dublin	Citizenship (i.e. Irish citizen, EU citizen, Non-EU citizen)?
Marseille	National, Non-national
Oslo	Not asked
Ostrava	Not asked (but "Country of citizenship" is asked) + Non-nationals not asked
The Hague	National, EU Member State, Non EU country

Table 12. Definition of the core variable COUNTRY OF BIRTH in the six cities

City	Definition
Budapest	Not asked
Dublin	-If not Irish, please state country of origin? -If non-EU please indicate the basis for residence in Ireland (i.e. permission to remain, refugee status, other)?
Marseille	Not asked in the 115 phone line system, but collected by the new SIAO system
Oslo	Place of birth
Ostrava	Not asked
The Hague	Native, EU-Member State, Non EU country

Comparability: On the whole, the concepts of "nationality" and "citizenship" are used in questions for the nationality variable where this variable is used, and are understood to mean the same thing (as indicated in the Eurostat report). However, it is clear that there is some variability in the understanding and interpretation of the terms "nationality" and "country of citizenship", especially in the two Eastern European cities of this case study. Nationality would be understood as referring to the cultural background of the individual, while citizenship would refer to the "host" country (e.g. having Hungarian nationality, and Serbian citizenship). This variable would therefore need further clarification if used for an EU statistical survey on homelessness, as it appears the Eurostat recommended variable does not take these differences into account.

Questions for the variable "country of birth" are asked differently (e.g. "place of birth" in Oslo, "country of origin" in Dublin) and hence could be interpreted quite differently and subjectively. In The Hague, the country of citizenship is asked as well as the country of birth of the client and their parents, and the data available for this case study is merged into the MPHASIS categories. The Eurostat definition of this variable is very clear: "Country of birth is the country where a person was born, namely the country of usual residence of the mother at the time of the birth." We would therefore recommend to use this as a guideline for this variable (which is also in line with the MPHASIS recommendations for this variable).

Issues were raised in relation to the quality of the data on non-nationals – based on experience, Data Group members said that some homeless clients faced with a list of non-EU nationalities (and who do not wish to disclose their real nationality) may tick the first nationality on the list (e.g. Azerbaijan) creating a bias in the data.

iv. Household structure/living situation

Household structure – MPHASIS survey: Three quarters of all client registration systems covered by the survey (15 of 20) record the household structure of their clients, although only 6 out of 20 use the same categories as those proposed for this core variable. In some cases the existing categories can easily be re-grouped and some recording systems provide additional information, e.g. on unaccompanied young people under 18 or on parents who have children currently not living with them. In some registration systems additional information is recorded on whether a woman is pregnant. In some systems the details of every household member are recorded so that the household composition of people accommodated together can be deduced.

After examining the proposed Eurostat definition, the MPHASIS team felt it was necessary to define an age limit for “children” and that the wording of the EU recommended labels might be improved. Category 2.4 was subsumed under 2.5 which could be further differentiated at national level. The result being the following coding:

1. One-person households
2. 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

Household type – Eurostat recommendation: The aim of the core variable on household composition is to collect information about the size and composition of the private household to which the respondent belongs, on the relationships between household members and on the economic activity status of household members of working age. The social situation of an individual is at least in part a reflection of their household arrangements. It can be extremely useful to have information on the dynamics of household structure. [...]The term “couple” includes married couples, registered couples, and couples who live in a consensual union. “Child” refers to a blood, step- or adopted son or daughter (regardless of age and marital status) who has usual residence in the household of at least one of the parents, and who has no partner or own child(ren) in the same household.

Eurostat recommends differentiating households into :

1. One-person households
2. Multi-person households :
 - 2.1 Lone parents with child(ren) aged less than 25
 - 2.2 Couple without child(ren) aged less than 25
 - 2.3 Couple with child(ren) aged less than 25
 - 2.4 Couple or lone parent with child(ren) aged less than 25 and other persons living in household
 - 2.5 Other type of household

Availability: This core variable is used in five cities: Budapest, Dublin, Marseille, Ostrava, and Oslo. In The Hague, local services do not use this variable, and it does not appear in the Federatie Opvang client registration system. With the introduction of individual plans for homeless people in 2006, this has changed the data recording methods. So that the data on the MPHASIS core variables is available on an individual level (collecting information on the different services used by the individual), and hence at a level “higher” than the local service providers. The individual plan developed for each homeless client is often a word document, which cannot be integrated in the Federatie Opvang system. This system is better for service users, but creates new challenges in terms of data collection.

Definitions: Except for the data in Marseille and Ostrava which uses the recommended MPHASIS categories, definitions do differ in terms of the questions asked and the categories put forward. However, as stated in the MPHASIS survey, in most cases the categories can be regrouped according to the recommended categories (see above box on MPHASIS). This would be possible for instance in the case of Dublin and Oslo (see Table 13 below).

The Budapest categories, however, depart significantly from the categories used in other cities. This could be because they were put forward by service users themselves, who would rather identify with the category “roommates in the shelter” than “one-person households”. This effectively means that many people in the Budapest homeless population would appear in the category “other type of household” rather than in “one-person households”. This definition refers to the reality of homeless people living in communities, but is also in line with the census definition of “institutional households” which covers communal establishments such as shelters and temporary accommodation and hence allows for better comparisons between the 3rd February survey and the upcoming census data. Hence only people living in conventional housing can be categorised as one-person households in the Budapest data set.

Another point was made about the category “with a family member” used in Budapest, namely that this question is asked in a completely different way since it is very rare for people to live outdoors with children, and it is impossible for someone to live in a homeless service with children.

Some Group members commented on the collation of data on homeless households with children. In the case of Dublin, it would be hard to capture children under 25 (according to the Eurostat and MPHASIS recommendation), since when people are asked “do you have any dependents” in the *Counted In* survey there is no specific question about the age of the dependents. In France, when a child turns 18, it can choose its type of household (multiple or single).

The inclusion of data on homeless children was generally considered important by the Group given that in most countries, turning 18 or 25 makes quite a difference in terms of the support offered.

Table 13. Definition of the core variable HOUSEHOLDS in the six cities

City	Household structure/living situation
Budapest	Who do you live with from the above? -Room mates at the hostel/shelter -Friends, buddies -I live alone -With a family member (spouse, partner, parents, child) -Other:.....
Dublin	Do you have a partner? Do you have any dependents? -Single Person -Single with child(ren) living with him/her -Single with child(ren) not living with him/her -Couple (no children) -Couple with child(ren) living with them -Couple with child(ren) not living with them
Marseille	Are there other persons with you or are you alone? MPHASIS recommended categories
Oslo	Living situation -Single -Married/Cohabitant -Divorced, relationship breakdown, widow(er) Homeless persons aged under 18 years -With children <18 years -Without children < 18 years
Ostrava	MPHASIS recommended categories
The Hague	Not available

Comparability: Despite differences in questions asked and categories used in data collection at local level, the Group agrees that the suggested MPHASIS core variable offers a useful list of generic categories which should be used for EU statistical analyses on homelessness. It would be important however to interpret the category “other types of household” based on the issues highlighted in the Budapest case (see “roommates in shelter”). Another case which illustrates the need for careful data interpretation is the Marseille data set, where the category “other” in the FNARS system would cover a number of situations including two sisters living together, two friends living together, a couple with children and a grandmother, etc.

Another issue to consider for improving comparability is to consider **when** the question is asked, since people may have a different household situation on arrival and after one month in a homeless hostel. Moreover, household structure will change if a couple has to go to separate hostels. The methodology used to capture this core variable may influence the timing of the question: client recording systems will record the data on arrival at the service, whereas a snapshot survey is likely to record the data at another point in the person’s homelessness cycle, hence providing different results in terms of households.

It must be noted that the issues raised here concerning this variable on households may be very much linked to the nature of the services included in categories ETHOS 2.1 and 3.1 (which are the specific focus of this case study) e.g. if services are specifically for men or women only, if couples can stay together in the services, if people below 18 years of age can stay in these services or not, if parents can be accompanied by their children or if families are separated.

v. Previous accommodation

Availability: This core variable is used in four of the six case study cities (Budapest, Dublin, Marseille, Ostrava). In Budapest, this question has been asked in previous years, but not in the 2009 survey (which is being used as a source for this case study). For The Hague, see comment under “v. Households” about individual-level data. In Oslo, this information is not collected, but is arguably partially covered under the variable “Reasons for homelessness” (see below).

Definitions: In cities where this core variable is used, the questions differ but then they can be matched to the listed MPHASIS categories (which are based on the ETHOS living situations).

There are differences in the timeframe used with the term “previous”. For Ostrava, Marseille and Budapest, the question focuses on the previous *night* before, whereas the Dublin questions asked about “the last seven nights”. Finally, the Budapest question refers to “last *night* and a *year* earlier”. These are in fact two separate questions which aim to find out about the current living situation (last night) and also more background information about the person (a year earlier) to assess the nature of the homelessness (short-term or long-term).

The Group drew attention to the influence the methodology can have on the way this question is asked – for instance, the night before can be asked as the night before entering the service (in the case of client registration systems used by services) or can be asked as the night before the survey (in the case of personal questionnaires for snapshot surveys).

Previous accommodation, night before entering service and current accommodation situation (at date of counting) – MPHASIS survey

Information about previous accommodation (in the night before entering the service) is provided by a clear majority of client registration systems (17 of 20).

The MPHASIS team proposes to use the categories (below) for this core variable as these reflect the different categories of the harmonized definition of the EU Measurement of Homelessness study and allow for the addition of more detailed information at the national level. The proposed categories are:

- 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 (healthcare, prison, childcare)
- 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

Table 14. Definition of the core variable PREVIOUS ACCOMMODATION in the six cities

City	Previous accommodation
Budapest	Two questions are asked for this variable : Where were you last night and a year earlier. However, this question was not asked in the 2009 survey (which was used for this case study).
Dublin	Over the last seven nights, how many nights have you spent: in your current accommodation, in a hostel, in a domestic violence refuge, in a B&B (private emergency), in a friend's house, sleeping rough, sleeping somewhere else, can't remember?
Marseille	Two questions: -What was your housing situation before your first call on 115 -Where do you sleep last night for person who have no solution of housing to their last call on 115
Oslo	Not asked
Ostrava	MPHASIS recommended categories
The Hague	Not available

Comparability: The time dimension in this variable is quite crucial for comparability. The recommended MPHASIS variable looks at the *night* before, which was used in the majority of the organisations surveyed by the MPHASIS team, and indeed three out of four of the cities using the variable refer to the night before (only Dublin refers to the “last seven nights”).

The high percentage of “unknown” (51.5%) in the Marseille data was highlighted by the group, possibly due to language barriers and to the emergency nature of the call from someone who urgently needs a place to stay for the night. Hence, even if the data can be matched to generic EU categories, care should always be taken in interpreting the data.

The Group drew attention to the length of the recommended list of living situations for this variable as potentially leading to situations where only part of the items are used, hence leading to data gaps for EU statistical analyses.

vi. Duration of (current) homelessness

Availability: This variable is used in five of the six case study cities (Budapest, Dublin, Marseille, Oslo, and Ostrava). For The Hague, see comment under “v. Households” regarding individual-level data.

As stated in the MPHASIS survey report, data on the duration of homelessness is increasingly relevant to measure the impact of policies aiming to reduce or end long-term homelessness, or restricting the stay of homeless persons in temporary accommodation to a maximum period.

Furthermore, the use of a unique identifier (date of birth, social security number) is crucial in order to identify “repeat homelessness” (e.g. if the person comes back to the service more than once during one year – then this is considered repeat homelessness).

Duration of (current) homelessness – MPHASIS survey

The variable on duration of the current episode of homelessness is the item which is least commonly used by the registration systems included in the MPHASIS survey. It is still used by a majority, but this majority is relatively small (11 of 20). In some systems the duration of homelessness is defined differently (last settled accommodation).

In addition, most of those systems which include this variable use alternative time periods as answer categories. While some of these categories can easily be aggregated to match those proposed by the study (e.g. combining “5 years to under 10 years” and “10 years and longer” into “more than 5 years”), it seems to be common to divide the period from one to under five years into “1 year to under 2 years” and “2 years to under 5 years” (instead of using “3 years” as the dividing line).

The recommended time groupings to use are therefore the following: 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.

Definitions: The time groupings used in each set of local data are very different from each other, and sometimes quite different to the recommended MPHASIS time periods. The first time option varies from “one day” in Marseille and “less than a week” in Oslo, to “under 6 months” in Dublin and “less than a year” in Budapest. The first time option in the MPHASIS core variable is “less than 2 months” (found in only one of the five cities using the variable - Ostrava).

Just as we found under the variable “household structure”, the definition of this variable is very much linked to the nature of the services provided (hence ETHOS 2.1 and 3.1 in this case study). In the French 115 system, the time groupings (one day, one week, etc) are very much linked to the emergency nature of the system, so the variable is less about duration of homelessness, and more about emergency needs.

The question asked in the Budapest survey uses the beginning of the *first* episode of homelessness as a reference (rather than counting the *last* episode of homelessness), hence capturing situations where people have moved in and out of homelessness for a period of time. This should allow for a more complete picture of the causes of homelessness and the associated needs of the person.

Table 15. Definition of the core variable DURATION OF (CURRENT) HOMELESSNESS in the six cities

City	Duration of homelessness
Budapest	Do you consider yourself to be homeless? If yes, since when? Less than 1 year, 1-2 years, 2-3 years, 3-4 years, 5-6 years, 6-7 years, 7-8 years, 8-9 years, 9-, 10 years+longer
Dublin	How long have you currently been homeless (i.e. under 6 months, between 6-12 months, up to 2 years, up to 3 years, up to 5 years, up to 10 years, over 10 years)?
Marseille	How many times are you in difficulty? One day, Less than 1 week, 1 week to under 1 month, 1 month to under 6 months, 6 months to under 1 year; 1 to under 2 years; 2 to under 5 years; 5 years and longer.
Oslo	Current: < 1 week; >1 week to <3 weeks, 3 weeks to 6 months, <6 months History of homelessness: 1. over years, 2. < 6 months, 3. first time
Ostrava	Use of recommended MPHASIS time groupings.
The Hague	Not available

Comparability: Taking up the last point above, it is clear that the way the questions are asked for this variable can lead to quite different results. Moreover, the questions asked can lead to very subjective answers. “Do you consider yourself to be homeless” can be interpreted in different ways (e.g. staying with friends can be perceived by the individual as not being homelessness) and the shame/embarrassment felt by some about their situation can influence the way they respond to this question. Indeed, subjectivity can be an issue when trying to find out exact dates of entry into homelessness. If the aim is to collect this information for policy purposes (which requires precise data on length of stay in hostels or transitional accommodation), then this can be a challenging variable to collect and compare across countries.

However, if the aim is to get a general idea if the person is experiencing short-term or long-term homelessness (requiring different support needs), then *exact* duration of homelessness is less important. In the Oslo survey, the social worker answers the questions on behalf of the service users, which can further affect the accuracy of the answers. In the French 115 system used for the Marseille data, they try to overcome the subjectivity (linked to the notion of “homelessness”) by formulating the question differently: “How many times have you had difficulties”. The answers to the questions are then interpreted by the social workers. In this way, if an individual has been on the street for six months and living with friends for three months, this can hopefully be better captured with the question linked to difficulties rather than homelessness. Another example would concern children who leave the parental home and find other places to live – they most often do not have a home of their own, but they do not always report themselves as homeless.

Another point raised by the Group was the notion of “current” homelessness as recommended in the MPHASIS variable, explaining that the word “current” can lead to different interpretations as well, since notions of “repeat” homelessness vary across cities and countries. For instance, if someone was briefly homeless three or six months prior to the question asked, is that taken to be part of “current” homelessness (taking the whole period for calculating the duration of homelessness) or should the homelessness be counted only from the point of entry into the service asking the question.

Given the issues raised here, the FEANTSA Data Group felt it would be useful to recommend specific questions to ask for this variable in order to increase data reliability and EU comparability. There are currently no harmonized definitions of short-term or long-term homelessness at EU level, but the FEANTSA “Ending Homelessness” campaign refers to five goals to be achieved including: 2. No one living in emergency accommodation for longer than is an ‘emergency’ and 3. No one living in transitional accommodation longer than is required for successful move-on, both of which could serve as general guidelines for the implementation of this MPHASIS variable.

vii. Reasons for homelessness

Availability: This variable is found in the data set of four of the six cities in the case study (Budapest, Marseille, Oslo, and Ostrava). In Dublin, the variable on reasons for homelessness is not asked in *Counted In*. Regarding The Hague, see previous comments in section “v Households”.

Definition: More than one response can be given to the question on reasons for homelessness, and then the “primary” reason of homelessness is taken as the reference. This can naturally lead to a fair amount of subjectivity in the choice of primary reason. The Group agrees with the MPHASIS guideline to ask the homeless persons themselves to define the reasons for their living situation. Apart from the Oslo data set (which was recorded by social workers about homeless clients), this was indeed the method used in the three other cities (Budapest, Marseille and Ostrava). The group noted however that there is a tendency for service users to refer to personal (rather than structural) reasons for homelessness.

Differences in definitions are present, namely in the formulation of the questions (see differences below between Budapest, Marseille and Oslo in Table 16).

While the MPHASIS recommended variable focuses on the *last* period of homelessness, the Budapest survey measures this variable on the basis of the *first* period of homelessness.

This variable was used in the last national survey in Norway in order to get a wider perspective on pathways into homelessness. Collecting information on this variable in Norway was considered crucial for raising awareness on homelessness being linked to different problems (e.g. not only linked to substance abuse, but also to more structural problems) and to show that different homeless groups have different needs.

Reasons for homelessness – MPHASIS survey:

Reasons(s) for the last period of homelessness as defined by homeless persons are recorded in 15 of the 20 client register systems covered by our survey. The number of systems which record these figures according to the categories proposed by Edgar et al. (2007) is much lower than this (6) as in practice some systems omit categories (for example force majeure) while others record additional ones. Additional categories, such as “new to city and unable to find accommodation” and “trying to live independently” can be classified under the “other reasons” heading.

It is recommended therefore that the variable and the categories as proposed by Edgar et al (2007) are retained (with 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 majeure (fire, flood, etc)
- Other reasons

Table 16. Definition of the core variable REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS in the six cities

City	Reasons for homelessness
Budapest	Q: What is the reason of your becoming homeless? I had to leave home due to family problems; After my divorce my ex-spouse/partner stayed in our accommodation; I was chased away from my apartment; The housing my workplace provided ceased to be available when I was made redundant; I could not keep paying the rent; I was evicted; My housing became uninhabitable; I have left state-care; I sold my apartment; I was released from prison; I was released from hospital, nursing home; I am a victim of the housing-mafia; Other, please specify
Dublin	Question not asked in survey
Marseille	Q: Why do you call 115 or why are you in difficulty? Use of MPHASIS recommended categories
Oslo	Q: Below we have listed some factors that can be part of the situation of a person who is homeless. In your opinion, is the person in or affected by of these situations? Evicted within last 6 months; Loss of income last 6 months; High debt, victim of high debt; Loss of dwelling due to rent arrears last 6 months; Loss of dwelling due to damage, nuisance, conflicts last 6 months; Has had unmet need of support in dwelling; Moved due to harassment/discrimination; Loss of dwelling due to relationship break-up/family conflict; Not able to live in dwelling/loss of dwelling due to violence; discharged from psychiatric ward last 6 months; Discharged from addiction treatment/institution last 6 months; Discharged from other institutions last 6 months; Released from prison last 6 months; The person has a physical disability; the person has a visible or known mental illness; the person has an addiction.
Ostrava	Use of MPHASIS recommended categories
The Hague	Not available

Comparability. The list of reasons in the data of Oslo and Budapest are far longer than the recommended MPHASIS variable, but most can fit into the MPHASIS list of reasons and the rest would fit into the category “other reasons”. Hence it makes perfect sense to keep a longer list for local data needs, while keeping the MPHASIS generic categories of reasons for EU statistical purposes.

However, the difference in variable definitions such as the different terms used in the questions e.g. “homeless”, “in difficulty”), the fact that in some cases social workers answer the questions as opposed to the service users themselves, the different timeframes used as a reference for the variable (first period or last period of homelessness), all mean that more guidance on the phrasing of questions is needed to ensure greater EU comparability of data on reasons for homelessness.

IV. Conclusions

Through this case study, the group has highlighted some of the key conclusions of their discussions on the MPHASIS core variables, highlighting challenges (namely in data availability, the variable definitions used and the comparability of the data collection across the six cities) and giving pointers on ways to overcome these data inconsistencies.

i. Availability

There were some challenges for finding data according to the initial methodology agreed.

Data was not always available on ETHOS 3.1 as the target homeless population for the case study (some data covered a wider population than people in ETHOS 3.1; other data showed overlap between ETHOS 3.1 and 2.1).

The data collection methodologies used did not all go through homeless services (see for instance the use of data from the national emergency phone line in France; or the collection of data based on individual homeless client plans rather than based on homeless services in The Hague).

The year and timeframe of the data varied from city to city (spanning 2008-2010 for the year, and one night/one week/six months/one year for the timeframe).

Furthermore, data was not available for all the MPHASIS core variables in all six cities (see Tables 6 and 7 on page 13). The profile data available in the six cities of this case study generally cover the recommended MPHASIS core variables, although only the basic core socio-demographic variables of “age” and “sex” are available for all six cities. Data on “household structure” and “duration of homelessness” are available in five cities, while the core variables of “nationality”, “previous accommodation” and “reasons for homelessness” are used in four cities only. Finally, only three cities use the core recommended variable of country of birth.

Existing gaps in data are mainly linked to the fact that the core variables are not collected in a given city e.g. “nationality” in Budapest, “country of birth” in Ostrava, “reasons for homelessness” in Dublin, variables 4-7 in The Hague, “previous accommodation” in Oslo. These gaps can be present for different reasons. If some variables make no sense in a given cultural context, a homeless service provider will not necessarily see the value of collecting them. Similarly, a survey of homelessness carried out by local or national government will be determined by the policy needs and budgets of the institutions, and will hence influence the selection of certain variables.

Despite these shortcomings and data gaps, the group had enough information for their discussions to compare the data collection processes in the six cities, examining the definitions used and highlighting some barriers to comparability which need to be addressed.

ii. Variable Definitions

The definitions used for the core variables inevitably vary across countries, but this exercise has enabled the group to compare the different definitions (with the MPHASIS core variables as a European framework for discussions) with a view to adapting them for future data collection in their respective countries. We would encourage other data collection experts inside (and outside) the FEANTSA membership to follow suit.

Regarding the definitions used for “age” and “sex”, they were mostly similar across the six cities. Although for “age”, some cities ask for the *year* of birth only while, other cities ask for the full date of birth (day, month, year).

“Nationality” and “country of birth” caused most debate in the Group given the sensitivity of the variables in some cities, the irrelevance of the variable in cities with only few homeless migrants, and the different interpretations of the term “nationality”.

The variable definitions for “household structure” do differ in terms of the questions asked and the categories put forward in the six cities. However, as stated in the MPHASIS survey, in most cases the categories can be regrouped according to the recommended categories. There was some discussion on the place of youth homelessness in this variable and the need for national data collection systems to better capture homeless households with children.

Discussions on the variables “previous accommodation”, “duration of homelessness” and “reasons for homelessness” (crucial for measuring the impact of homeless policies) revealed significant differences in the questions asked and seem prone to greater subjectivity than the first four variables.

In conclusion, the recommended MPHASIS core variables are generally well-adapted to the collection of homelessness data for EU statistical purposes, offering generic variables which are flexible enough to integrate specific local data. However, there is room for further harmonisation of the definitions of the variables and the questions asked for each variable.

iii. Comparability

From this process we have learned a number of lessons about EU comparability of homelessness data collection.

The conclusions on the variable definitions above indicate that a first step towards improving comparability of data would be to issue clear guidelines on the formulation of questions for the different variables, as well as providing further clarifications of certain concepts which are still interpreted differently across countries. These guidelines would be useful to build consensus between the wide range of professionals involved in homelessness data collection (e.g. social workers, statisticians, researchers, policy-makers), and to reduce the subjectivity present in some of the core variables.

The choice of methodology used to collate the data can somewhat affect the outcomes of the questions asked for different variables, since homeless people are interviewed at different points of their homelessness cycle if they are targeted through point-in-time surveys or through continuous recording systems used by service providers for case management purposes (e.g. the variable “household structure” can change during a homelessness cycle, and hence the time at which the question is asked will be significant).

Homelessness data collection is intricately linked to policy and ideology, and hence we have seen considerable differences in the groupings and options in the different variables e.g. the use of different groupings for age, different options for describing household structure, the use of long/detailed or shorter lists of reasons for homelessness.

Even where data is available, care should be taken to interpret the data especially where there are high rates of “unknown” in responses of homeless clients, which can be due to a number of reasons: the definition of homelessness and target population used, the lack of time when in emergency situations, the presence of language barriers, the choice of clients not to share sensitive data. For instance, the choice of the target homeless population (in this case study ETHOS 2.1 and 3.1) will influence the profiles of the homeless population (e.g. people who are living on the streets tend to be single rather than in families, some homeless services are specifically for men or women only or are not open to children, etc.).

iv. Next steps

The FEANTSA Data Group thought it too early to publish robust and comparable cross-country data on homelessness, and chose to focus rather on comparing the data collection process in six cities as a crucial first step towards raising awareness of data producers and users on ways to improve cross-country comparability. But with more resources and European coordination (namely with more detailed guidelines for the use of the different MPHASIS variables), it would be feasible in the future to have comparable statistical data on homelessness at EU level.

The Group hopes that the challenges highlighted in this small case study can foster debate in FEANTSA member organisations on how to take into consideration the EU dimension of their national/regional/local data collection systems on homelessness, in order to start making progress towards better cross-country comparability of homelessness data.

The Group has used this process to learn about the standardisation of variables in homelessness data collection in their respective countries, and are keen to reach a European consensus regarding the core MPHASIS variables (especially in terms of the formulation of questions) before modifying existing homelessness registration systems and surveys. Moreover, for this first exercise on cross-EU comparability of homelessness data collection, the Group chose to focus on the MPHASIS core variables but would also like to highlight the importance of the non-core MPHASIS variables recommended for data collection at national/local level, especially in relation to support needs and service quality.

The Group therefore proposes the following **Roadmap** (in line with the Jury recommendations following the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness in December 2010) for the European Commission/Eurostat to develop a Europe-wide monitoring system on homelessness to meet the data needs of the European Union's new Europe2020 strategy (in relation to the poverty reduction targets):

1. Set up a European data steering group on homelessness (with representatives from different backgrounds: service providers, statisticians, public civil servants, researchers, etc.) to develop and adopt a European framework to measure homelessness and housing exclusion using the ETHOS typology and the MPHASIS core variables as a starting point for data collection.
2. Issue a recommendation to EU Member States to develop, improve and consolidate their national data collection systems on homelessness, as a first step in developing a Europe-wide monitoring system on homelessness.
3. Adopt an integrated approach to measuring different forms of homelessness using data drawn from a range of administrative and survey data sources - an approach which corresponds closely to the future vision of an integrated model of statistics production set out in the 2009 Commission Communication on the reform of the production methods for European statistics⁶.
4. Commission research on cross-country comparability of homelessness data, with a view to developing common and consensual guidelines on the use of EU conceptual frameworks like the ETHOS typology and the recommended MPHASIS core standard variables on homelessness.
5. Use the results of the 2011 population and housing census (first initiative ever to collate EU statistical data on homelessness) to draw lessons for the development of a permanent EU statistical survey on homelessness.

⁶ Commission Communication of 10 August 2009 'The production method of EU statistics: a vision for the next decade' COM(2009) 404 final

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Annex I: European Consensus Conference Jury Recommendations on homelessness measurement and data collection

Key Recommendations

- The jury calls for the ETHOS typology to be used as a common framework definition of homelessness at EU level. This common framework definition should underpin an overarching, integrated EU homelessness strategy.
- The jury calls for an EU-wide monitoring system on homelessness based on straightforward and robust national/regional data collection strategies. This requires the adoption of common guidelines for measuring, monitoring and reporting on homelessness.
- Policy makers at the national/regional level should develop data collection strategies in the framework of integrated national/regional homelessness strategies, as called for by the 2010 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. These strategies should aim to collect data on all ETHOS categories. The jury draws attention to the added value of the EU in helping to build capacity for national/regional level data collection on homelessness and calls for ongoing work in this area in the framework of an integrated EU homelessness strategy.
- In the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the jury recommends that the indicators sub-group of the SPC continues work to develop indicators on homelessness in line with the categories of the ETHOS definition.
- The jury calls on Eurostat to use the ETHOS definition to develop a retrospective question on episodes of homelessness in the EU-SILC household surveys.
- Further increasing knowledge and understanding on homelessness should be a key element of an overarching, integrated EU homelessness strategy framing national/regional strategies. In this respect, the jury recommends more longitudinal research on homelessness in order to better understand its temporal aspects and its dynamics, with a view to complementing ETHOS by arriving at shared understandings of episodic, transitional and chronic homelessness within the EU. This should also account for the way in which homelessness is structured by gender.

Annex II: MPHASIS non-core variables

Variable	Non-Core
Economic characteristics	
Main activity	Paid employment (non subsidised) Subsidised employment, sheltered employment Voluntary work School or training Unemployed (but able to work) Retired Long-term sick/disabled
Source/type of income (several answers possible)	Income from paid employment Pension for old age or severely disabled Income from minimum subsistence scheme Other types of welfare benefits Educational grants Income from begging/sex working Other types of income No income at all Indication of main income source
Educational characteristics	
Highest educational attainment	Highest educational attainment (coded to ISCED level)
Support needs/problems	
Physical health	Disability (y/n) Other physical health problems
Mental health	No, suspected, diagnosed
Addiction	Alcohol (no, suspected, diagnosed) Drugs (no, suspected, diagnosed) Other substances/gambling, etc (no, suspected, diagnosed)
Financial	Debts (y/n)
Occupation	Lack of occupation/training (y/n)
Safety/Violence	Experience of domestic abuse (y/n)

Source: Busch-Geertsema and Edgar (2009)