ALIGNING AN EU-WIDE DATA COLLECTION ON HOMELESSNESS WITH EXISTING NATIONAL DATA COLLECTION SYSTEMS

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Homelessness in the EU – a Social Problem that can be tackled?

- Social Policy is a little Europeanized policy field, which means that EU Member States did not delegate many competencies to the EU institutions (subsidiarity principle)

- Nevertheless the EU is in certain circumstances allowed to take action also in a field with few/no competence:
,Under the principle of subsidiarity, in areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Union shall act only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, either at central level or at regional and local level, but can rather […] be better achieved at Union level.' (Art. 5 par. 3 Treaty on European Union)

- Aim of the EU: Ending homelessness by 2030

  ▶ So that 'no one sleeps rough for lack of accessible, safe and appropriate emergency accommodation; no one lives in emergency or transitional accommodation longer than is required for successful move-on to a permanent housing solution; no one is discharged from any institution […] without an offer of appropriate housing; evictions should be prevented whenever possible and no one is evicted without assistance for an appropriate housing solution, when needed' (Lisbon declaration 2021)

WHY (COMPARABLE) DATA TO TACKLE HOMELESSNESS?

- Reliable data is the basis for effective measures to solve problems - the scope of the data must correspond to the scope of the problem to be solved

- Challenge: Due to the subsidiarity principle limited possibilities of 'top-down' measures, more 'soft law' instruments such as formats of mutual learning between the member states

- First step: comparable (harmonized) data on homelessness in the EU
  - The Lisbon Declaration stresses 'the importance of reliable data collection on homelessness [...] with the involvement of relevant stakeholders, allowing common understanding, systematic comparison and monitoring at EU level'
  - One of the strategic goals of the European Statistical System (ESS) for the next 10 years: 'to remain relevant, trustworthy, and effective'

HOW TO HARMONIZE DATA?

- Step 1: Developing a reference concept
  - ▶ Definition of what shall be measured
  - ▶ In an international context, it must be sufficiently universal so that the specific characteristics of all participating countries can be captured and adequately classified

- Step 2: Implementing harmonization stategies
  - ▶ Input harmonization: harmonized method of data collection
  - ▶ Output harmonization
    - – Ex ante-strategy: implementing comparable collection procedures – in practice often followed by a subsequent conversion process to adapt the data to the international reference concept
    - – Ex post-strategy: harmonizing existing national data

IT IS POSSIBLE!
FOR EXAMPLE: EU-STATISTICS ON INCOME AND LIVING CONDITIONS (EU-SILC)

- 1994 – 2001 European Community household panel (ECHP)
  - ▶ Predecessor of EU-SILC, but less binding and by many Member States more understood as an EU than a national project
  - ▶ Input harmonization
  - ▶ After phase I (1994 – 1996) Germany, Great Britain and Luxemburg decided to convert existing data on the national level to serve the ECHP instead of conducting an additional survey (ex post-output harmonization)

- Since 2003: EU-SILC
  - ▶ Started in 6 Member States & Norway, today implemented in all EU Member States & Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, Turkey, Serbia and Macedonia
  - ▶ Ex ante-output harmonized: methodological framework including definition of the variables, but data collection method depends on the local conditions in the participating countries
  - ▶ In Germany since 2005: separate data collection, since 2020 integrated in the national „Mikrozensus"

HOW TO HARMONIZE DATA ON HOMELESSNESS IN THE EU?

- Challenges:
  - ▶ In some EU member states there are already data collection systems at the national level in place (Denmark, Ireland, Sweden, Finland and Germany) or on the way to be implemented (e.g. Italy)
  - ▶ Despite of a common definitory framework (ETHOS) different local conditions when it comes to e.g. definition of homelessness, number and differentiation of services for PEH, experiences with homelessness counts
- These challenges are addressed in the pilot project "European Homelessness Counts" (EHC)
  - ▶ Aim: To develop an EU-wide methodology to collect comparable data on homelessness within the European Union

EXAMPLE: EU HOMELESSNESS COUNTS IN GERMANY (1)
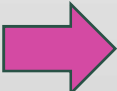
- 2020: Homelessness Reporting Law (national law)

  ▶ Turn of time concerning the understanding of homelessness as a social problem that can be tackled by policy measures on the national level - highly welcomed by all stakeholders

  ▶ All municipalities are obliged to report annually all PEH subgroups of ETHOS Light 2 & 3 on the 31st of January to the national statistics office

  ▶ Additionally every second year a so-called „accompanying report" on other forms of homelessness, e.g. ETHOS Light 1 & 6

- *Implementing another international data collection system on homelessness??*

EXAMPLE: EU HOMELESSNESS COUNTS IN GERMANY (2)

- Discussions on the local level:
  - ▶ „A data collection additional to the compulsory statistics is not feasible with our resources."
    - – The aim of EU-wide comparable data on homelessness is appreciated by the local stakeholders, but it needs to be feasible within the given (scarce) resources
    - – Both the time and the method of national and EU data collection must converge
  - ▶ „We are used to the services-based approach and think it is appropriate. A different methodological approach is not appropriate and would be confusing for the stakeholders"
    - – The services-based approach has been proven to be appropriate and feasible in service-rich contexts, which is the case in most german municipalities
  - ➡ Aiming to meet the minimum requirements of the EHC while staying as close a possible to the existing data collection system on the national level

EXAMPLE: EU HOMELESSNESS COUNTS IN GERMANY - LESSONS LEARNED

- In countries with already existing data collection systems, there is no need to argue for a data collection on homelessness in general, but a need for a convincing methodology and feasibility within the national context.

- From a national point of view, a national data collection system is an important achievement, that needs to be recognized as such when developing/implementing an EU-wide data collection.

- Participation in the EU Homelessness Counts revealed some data collection challenges that also refer to the national data collection and thus can improve it

- Existing national data collection systems are built on specific experiences in collecting data on homelessness in specific local/national contexts and an EU-wide methodology thus can build on that

ALIGNING AN EU-WIDE DATA COLLECTION ON HOMELESSNESS WITH EXISTING NATIONAL DATA COLLECTION SYSTEMS - CONCLUSIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

- Developing a common methodology to collect comparable data on homelessness i the EU, it needs to be taken into account, that a growing number of EU member states have national data collections in place or are on the way to introduce them

- We need to look at the approaches already implemented at national level and which harmonization strategies are promising to have comparable data in the end

  ▶ Probably for many countries the best option is to implement one data collection that serves both the national and the EU level

- Homelessness is understood and (scientifically) adressed differently in the EU Member States - the „Modular Approach", developed in the EU project „European Homelessness Counts" stands for an ex ante-output harmonization strategy, that takes into account the different local/national contexts which probably won't be harmonized in the near future.

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