



Point in time counts in Belgium counts as a (local) advocacy strategy

Prof. dr. Koen Hermans



Legal definition of homelessness in Belgium

- Legal definition
 - A person who does not have his own housing, who does not have the resources to provide this on his own and therefore is residing or staying temporarily in a home until housing is made available
- Interfederal agreement (2014) to use ETHOS as guiding framework

Current numbers and data collection in Belgium

- Complex division of competencies between regions, communities, federal state and local level
- Each region has her own tradition
 - Flanders: baseline measurement (2014) (service-based count)
 - Brussels: two-yearly street count combined with users of services for the homeless and squats
 - Walloon region : coordination of registration of Relais Sociaux (service-based)
 - Belgium : persons with a reference address or a social assistance benefit for the homeless
- Many methods, less coordination

MEHOBEL-study (2016-2018)

- Goal: development of a monitoring strategy
 - Inventory of national strategies
 - Inventory of available data collection
 - Specific attention to hidden homelessness
 - Based on a multistakeholder approach
- Result :
 - Combination of methods is necessary to monitor homelessness
 - National point-in-time count is necessary instrument

After MEHOBEL

- Less political will to undertake action
 - Which government takes action ...
- Another study on the shelves....
- From a national approach to a bottom-up approach
 - King Boudewijn Foundation :
 - “The proof of the pudding is in the eating”
 - “A coalition of the willing”

Counts in Belgium

Leuven

February 21st 2020

Gent and province of Limburg

October 2020

Liège/Arlon

October 2020 (together with ULiège)

2 new regions in Flanders

October 2021

Charleroi / Namur

October 2021 (together with UCLouvain)

Point-in-time count: 3 guiding questions

- Who do we count ? Definition of homelessness: ETHOS Light
- What do we want to know: extent and profile characteristics at a specific point in time
- How can we measure this : short questionnaire

ETHOS Light as guiding framework

OPERATIONAL CATEGORY		LIVING SITUATION		DEFINITION
1	People living rough	1	Public spaces / external spaces	Living in the streets or public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homeless hostels	Where the period of stay is time-limited and no long-term housing is provided
		4	Temporary accommodation	
		5	Transitional supported accommodation	
4	People living in institutions	6	Women's shelters or refuge accommodation	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing
		7	Health care institutions	
		8	Penal institutions	
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9	Mobile homes	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence
		10	Non-conventional buildings	
		11	Temporary structures	
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	12	Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence

7th operational category

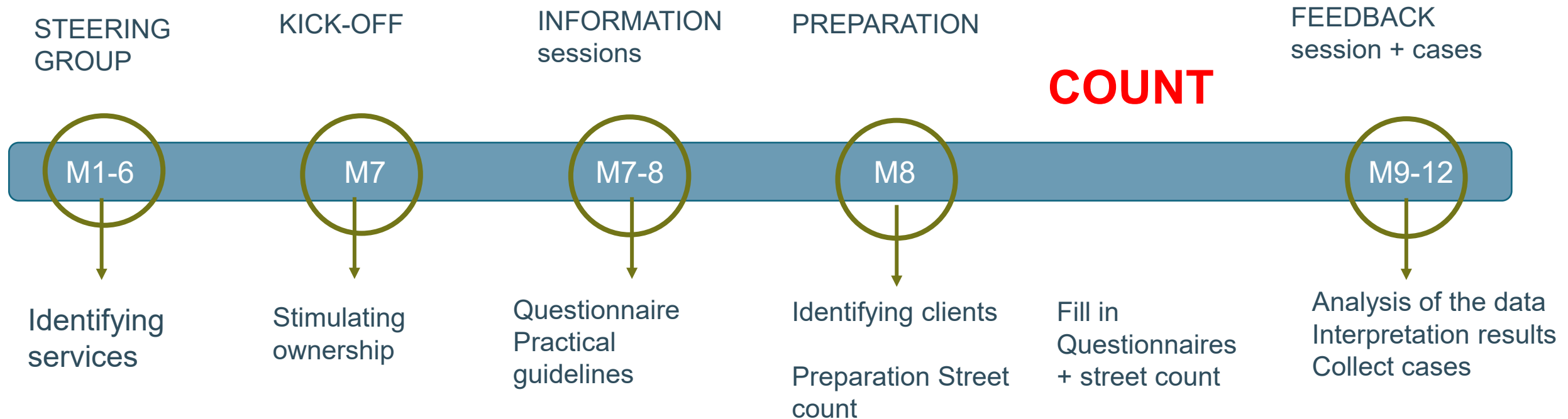
At risk for eviction (30 days)

- Juridical decision
- Formally unfit for housing
- End of contract

Specific attention for refugees

- Refugee centres (cat.4)
- Temporary housing (cat.7)

Methodology 'point in time count': 1 year



The questionnaire

- Check accomodation situation based on ETHOS Light during count day / count week
- Short questionnaire about the person: 3 pages
 - Gender, age, household, children, nationality, permit of stay, income, accomodation, reason of homelessness, duration, stay in institution, health, service use
- On paper/online, by social worker or together with client



Client identifier to detect double counts



+

avoid double counts

First letter first name

First letter first surname

Last letter last surname

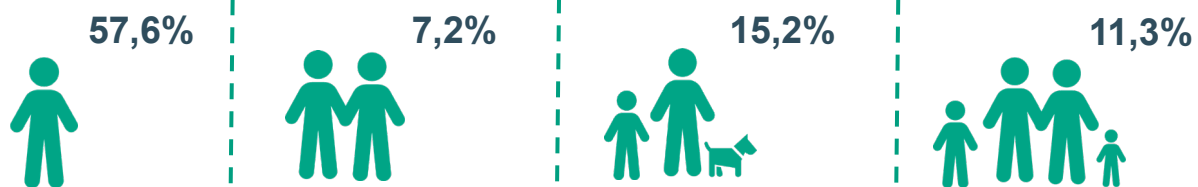
GENT

30/10/2020

37 counting organisations

- **Grote betrokkenheid laagdrempelige diensten**
- **Bijzondere aandacht voor kinderen**
- **Meer dan de helft van de getelde dak- en thuisloze personen geteld door OCMW**
- **Onderlinge afspraken tussen de diensten over wie wie telt**
- **Straattelling tijdens telnacht**

Catégorie ETHOS Light	Adults (#1472)	%	Male (%)	Female (%)	Children (#401)	%
1 – Public space	124	8,4	87,1	12,9	7	1,7
2 – Night shelter	113	7,7	82,3	16,8	6	1,5
3 – Temporary accomodation for the homeless	169	11,5	53,3	46,7	120	29,9
4 - Institution	136	9,2	72,1	27,2	6	1,5
5 – Non-conventional dwelling (tent, garage, car...)	264	17,9	68,6	31,1	82	20,4
6 – Staying with family/friends	565	38,4	68,0	31,7	128	31,9
+ Risk of eviction	76	5,2	72,4	26,3	48	12,0

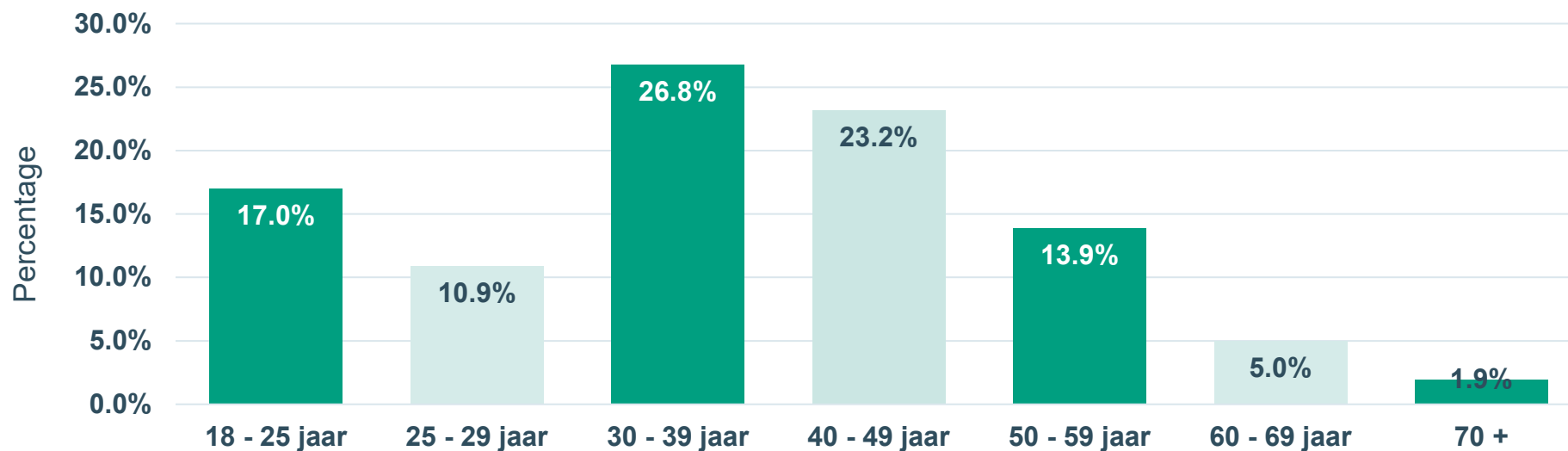


♂ 70,0%

♀ 29,6%

X/? 0,4%

Age



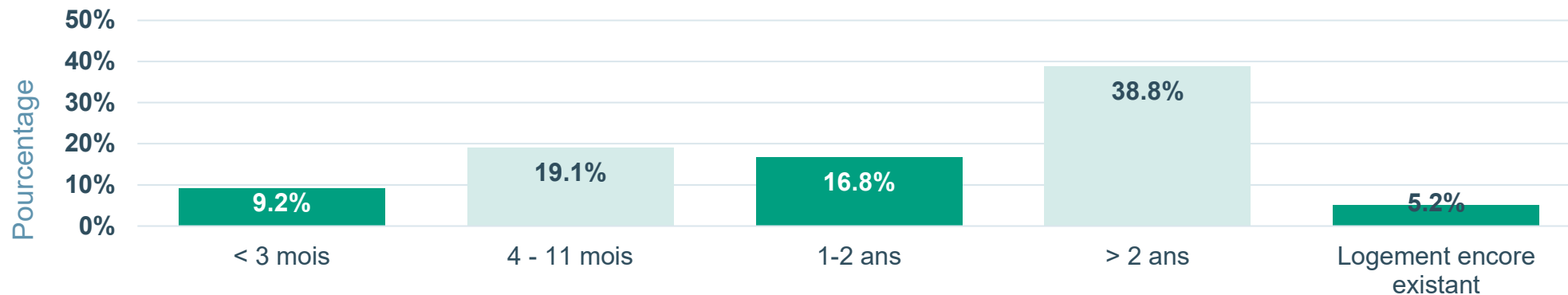
Nationality



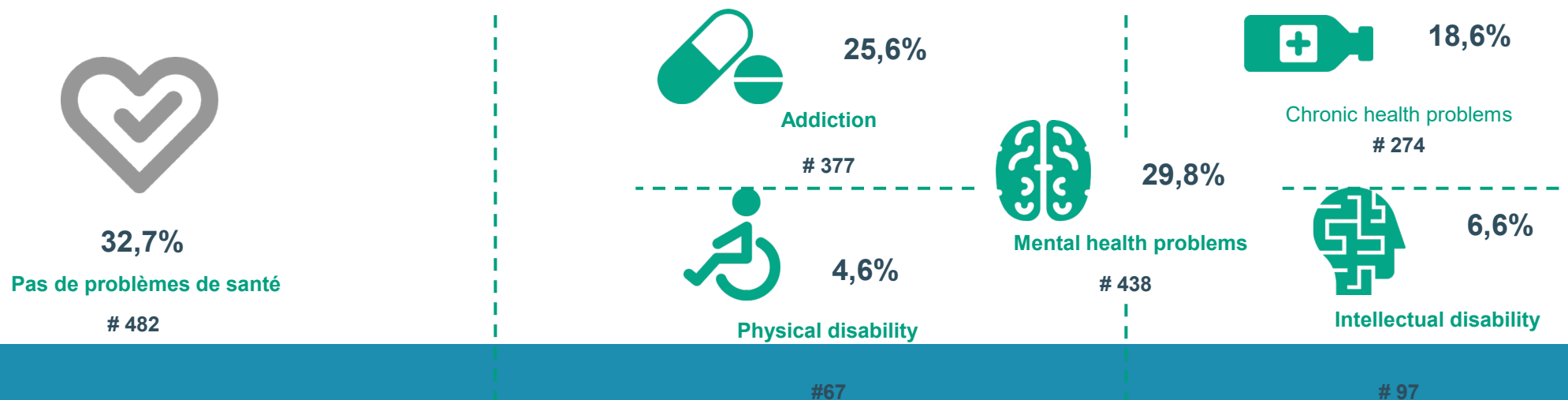
Not-Belgians



Duration



Health



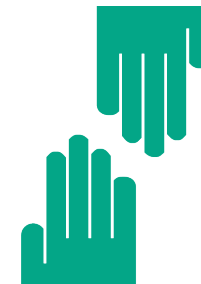
17,2%
253
**Housing first
target group**

Former stay
in psychiatry



19,6%

Former stay in
Youth care



7,9%

Former stay in
prison



12,3%

Definition : more than 2 years homeless and addiction or psychiatric needs

Some lessons learned

- Necessity of formal political agreement: no count without political engagement
- Participatory approach: as standardised as possible, as participatory as needed
- Preparation is THE KEY
 - Inventory of services for the homeless, All social services, Institutions (youth care, prison, psychiatric institutions, institutions for asylum seekers?), Low-threshold services...
 - Specific plan for street count
- Ethics and perverse effects of count : 'Making the hidden visible' but what if persons prefer unvisibility?

Some lessons learned (2)

- (Local) numbers and stories
- Limitations of counts : ‘point in time’ versus the dynamism of homelessness
- Independent research institution for data collection and analysis
- Indirect effects of counts:
 - Local coalition building
 - Growing sense of urgency
 - New (local) policy measures
 - Appeal to national authorities to undertake actions
 - ‘ A Way Home coalitions’ to end youth homelessness