

MPHASIS

Mutual Progress on Homelessness through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems

FINAL PROJECT CONFERENCE

PARIS, 17TH SEPTEMBER 2009

This conference marked the concluding event of the MPHASIS project on homelessness data collection and information systems (Dec 07 - Dec 09). It aimed to feedback from the numerous national meetings that had taken place during the exchange project and seek agreement on common actions points to take the work forward.

The event was attended by representatives of 25 out of the EU-27 countries (all except Cyprus and Slovakia), as well as representatives from Norway, USA, the European Commission and European organisations. Participants reflected the range of stakeholders engaged on homeless policy and data-collection issues, including national ministries, city authorities, researchers and NGOs.

The event was chaired by Eric Marlier of the CEPS/INSTEAD Research Institute, Luxembourg.

The MPHASIS project

Project background

Eric Marlier, Bill Edgar (University of Dundee, Scotland), Matt Harrison (RIS, London) and Volker Busch-Geertsema (GISS, Bremen) introduced the conference discussions with a presentation of the context in which the project fit and what it did.

The MPHASIS project to achieve “Mutual Progress on Homelessness through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems” came about thanks to co-funding from the EU **Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS**. This programme works alongside the EU’s political process of exchange and mutual learning between countries on social issues - the Social OMC. Homelessness has been identified as a key issue for European analysis and exchange.

The project specifically evolved as a follow-up to a one-year “Measurement of Homelessness at European Union Level” desk study carried out for the European Commission in early 2007. MPHASIS aimed to explore how the recommendations of this study on the development of national homelessness information strategies and on data collection could be implemented in practice and what obstacles needed to be overcome.

MPHASIS research

The project had a research strand, which aimed to go beyond the initial desk study by carrying out action-based research and supplementary desk research, all with oversight from members of the project steering committee. It undertook research in the following fields:

*For more information and the full research report, please visit:
<http://www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/index.html>.*

- **Databases of service providers**

Knowing where homeless services are is an important tool for finding the people accessing them. The project wanted to see whether a directory that existed already in England would be applicable to Italy, Netherlands and Bulgaria, three very different countries.

There was evidence that some common data was being collected. Progress was seen through development of a new national database in Italy and a proposal for a new Shelter Atlas in Netherlands.

- **Client-register information**

Client registers offer a valuable source of information on homeless people, but coherent systems are needed to obtain a reliable overall picture for purposes of policy development.

The project translated the Irish model - one of the only national systems for registering client data - into Hungarian and Swedish to allow it to be tested in these countries. A pilot ran quite successfully in Budapest, but the system was still embryonic in Sweden. It also looked at ways of extracting data from multiple existing sources - such as service providers and authorities - in France.

Major issues for exchanging best practice between countries were around standardising terms and scope, and taking account of different rules and cultures of data protection. Any attempt to bring in a method of data collection that does not respect the national culture will fail, mainly because it relies so strongly on workers on the ground, who need to be motivated to participate.

- **Institutional population data**

The best source of data on people leaving hospital or prisons into a situation of homelessness - a significant number - should be the administrative data of these institutions. The project examined systems of data collection in Norway and Poland to see whether these were genuinely good practice in their field.

Neither system was found to be very reliable, partly because the housing situation of people was not a priority for those collecting the data. A computerised system and common procedures would be needed to use this data for policy purposes. Data collection would also need to be disconnected from consequences for individuals - for example, parole applications can currently be affected if the prisoner says they have nowhere to go.

- **Population register data**

The project wanted to see whether it was possible to count and/or identify homeless people from population registers (which have been developed in many countries to augment or replace the census). It examined registers recently introduced in Germany and Slovenia.

Obstacles or problems to successful counting included: people sleeping rough not being connected to the central dwellings register; identifying on the register dwellings that are emergency accommodation; identifying homeless people staying with friends/family; and people being registered at an address where they last received a service even if they do not live there. It is particularly difficult to identify homeless people, even if you can do better at counting them.

- **Survey on core variables**

The project conducted a survey of all partner countries on the definition and usability of core variables in data collection - such as age, duration of homeless etc. This is based on the idea that you need to know more than just numbers to develop effective policies, but also the profiles of people - and that this information needs to be consistent.

The variables proposed were used in most countries. All countries monitor for age and gender of homeless people; most record country of birth and household structure – although the project recommends adjustments to align better with Eurostat categorisation. However, fewer countries record key information such as reasons for homelessness, duration of homelessness, or previous accommodation in any standardised way.

MPHASIS mutual learning

The project also had a mutual-learning strand, based on a series of 20 national platform meetings and this European conference.

- **National meetings**

The national platform meetings brought together all the stakeholders from each country with an interest in data collection or policy formation, sometimes for first time on this issue. The meetings were not designed to be conferences but discussion sessions; the average size was 21 people.

The events were planned as a starting point towards action and progress on tackling the key identified issues impeding effective data collection on homelessness at national level. The meetings showed a real willingness for mutual learning and an appetite for networking between the different types of stakeholder.

Meetings were particularly successful in countries with a national homelessness strategy already or where governments were looking to review existing strategies (eg Ireland and Sweden). Follow-up meetings have already been planned in at least 10 countries.

The meetings identified some country-specific recommendations (please see the national reports available at <http://www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/meetings.html>). An overview of the meetings also reveals some common European trends.

Overall it has been found that national strategies now exist in 11 countries and many are using ETHOS to some extent to develop their thinking. Countries tend to have many data sources, but significant challenges remain around filling gaps and bringing the information together to create an accurate overall image:

Technical/procedural issues:

- developing shared definitions of key terms and concepts - including homelessness itself
- counting people who are not accessing services
- discontinuity of monitoring - eg only every five years
- incomplete geographical coverage or incompatibility of data between regions
- double counting
- how to identify homeless people through a population census/register
- improving specific data sets - e.g. prison leavers, people passing through shelters and reasons for eviction

Governance issues:

- lack of political responsibility and leadership
- lack of funding
- lack of defined targets
- data protection issues
- difficulty in choosing the appropriate system - e.g. whether to build up from local/regional levels or down from the national level, to use existing data systems or develop a new one, and obligatory v. voluntary data collection

- **European conference**

This European conference of the MPHASIS project aimed to reflect on and discuss the findings from the research and national meetings. It sought to facilitate progress at national level by providing an opportunity for learning and exchange at European level and to set out the path for ongoing work in this field.

As an output, it hoped to agree a set of action points and recommendations to take forward the work of MPHASIS beyond its current project funding in finding solutions to the challenges identified.

Country Experiences in Developing Homeless Data Collection

The exchanges started with four country presentations of their work in the MPHASIS project. Presentations set out the context in which MPHASIS took place, the work undertaken in the project and the remaining challenges for achieving effective data collection and information systems.

- **Sweden - Annika Remaeus, National Board of Health and Welfare**

Homelessness is an important issue in Sweden despite being a rich country with a developed welfare state. The last mapping in 2005 found 17,800 homeless people out of 9 million. The Swedish government has a strategy to combat homelessness and exclusion from the housing market. Sweden

uses a rather broad definition of homelessness, similar to the ETHOS definition; it aims to include people living at risk of homelessness, including those in vulnerable housing situations.

To improve continuous monitoring and provide the knowledge necessary to tackle homelessness effectively, the National Board of Health and Welfare was asked to develop an Information Monitoring Plan. In this context, involvement in the MPHASIS project has been particularly fruitful and interesting.

The plan identified the most important stakeholders as: relevant ministries; regional and local authorities; and NGOs. The most important information sources were found to be registers, statistics from authorities, housing market surveys, homelessness monitoring by municipalities and homeless organisations.

The main problem is that it is not possible to put the information from these sources together to obtain an accurate overall picture since definitions and means of presentation of data differ so much. Overcoming this challenge is a key issue on the current agenda of the Board, in dialogue with the national government. To support these information sources, a national mapping - carried out every five years - is also needed.

- **Portugal - Teresa Caeiro, Ministry of Social Welfare**

Historically, NGOs have done all the work on homelessness. However, a working group of public and non-profit bodies was formed in May 2007 to agree a definition of homelessness and set out a National Strategy for Homelessness. Key factors in this development was an increased awareness of the need for an integrated approach to measuring homelessness emerging from the national Social Network Programme and participation of civil servants in FEANTSA meetings.

Monthly meetings brought together the different stakeholders to work on the group's tasks, with sub-groups taking on more specific tasks, including drafting groups. Sometimes external stakeholders were brought in to discuss good practice or provide expert opinion. A communication strategy allowed people to stay engaged and give suggestions for the work.

An information strategy is one of the goals of the strategy, so MPHASIS came at the right time for Portugal and was integrated into this process. It helped direct the work and identify the existing sources of information, which included the Social Network Programme - which already gathers information on evictions and discharge from institutions - the social security system, municipalities and institutions.

The complicated task is now to build an integrated information system from these existing sources - by 2010 - which can be useful for case managers, local level decision-making and national policy-making. An action plan will be developed for the system's implementation, the right funding identified and access of all stakeholders ensured. The core variables recommended by the European study will be used and encouraged in the different information sources.

- **Ireland - Marie Falvey, Department of the Environment**

Ireland has seen dramatic rises and falls of housing costs due to excessive credit. Nevertheless public funding for homelessness accommodation services increased by 5.3% in 2009 and official figures of

rough sleepers in Dublin have gone down. The government published a new Homelessness Strategy “The Way Home” in 2008, aiming to eliminate long-term occupation of emergency facilities by 2010.

Ireland recognises the two-way relationship between strategy and data on homelessness and thus the need for a strategic approach to data collection itself. MPHASIS was very timely in feeding into the work in Ireland on developing a data and information strategy as part of the national implementation plan of the overall homelessness strategy.

Ireland has used the specific “counted in” methodology to count homelessness - including all those in hostels, shelters and sleeping rough - in Dublin every three years. Further cities were surveyed by ‘counted in’ in 2008. There is also data from the three-yearly housing needs assessment carried out by all local authorities to inform social housing provision.

The two processes are not directly comparable as they serve different functions. However there are efforts to increase convergence between the two, including by looking at operational criteria for the common assessment of homelessness.

A new client database is being developed following a review of the LINK methodology - this is likely to include the standard variables set out by MPHASIS. This should be implemented in Dublin in 2010 and then rolled out nationally. There will also be increased coverage of homelessness in the 2011 census, helped by electronic mapping of institutions and accommodation for homeless people.

- **Poland - Piotr Olech, Pomeranian Forum**

There is a real lack of reliable data on homelessness in Poland. There is no client register database at national level. POMOST (meaning bridge) is the database originally used by social welfare workers, but it is called ‘the bridge to nowhere’ as data is not comparable and cannot be used. There are also weak service directories - there are eight different out-of-date directories.

A first barrier to improving data collection is the lack of common understanding or effective legal definition of what homelessness is. Another barrier was poor co-operation: between ministries; between the public sector and NGOs; and amongst NGOs, which are often competing for access to funding. NGOs provide 90% of services, but have no obligation to collect data and lack coordination.

An interesting regional system for gathering data was created by a federation of stakeholders in Pomerian in 2000. It works to combine different information sources, with the most important being a new two-yearly survey started in 2001 that covers around 3,000 people who are roofless, houseless or in insecure accommodation. This is supported by qualitative research on the profile of homeless people, thematic studies and surveys on the social perception of homelessness.

The MPHASIS national meeting was the first time the full range of stakeholders had met. Important issues were the definition of homelessness, POMOST software, harmonisation, data protection and preparation of the census. Everyone agreed to continue co-operation and a specific seminar was held to agree a definition of homelessness, leading to a broad definition approved by the Ministry in May 2009.

Workshops and discussion

Through dedicated workshops, a roundtable plenary session and questions and comments from the floor, a series of key issues were discussed and reflected upon. The key points of the discussion are set out below under the headings of the three workshops.

- **Census/surveys**

Including a workshop chaired by Martti Lujanen, Ministry of Environment, Finland.

There is now binding EU regulation on carrying out of a census in each country. This regulation makes it compulsory to cover not just conventional dwellings, housing units and collective housing, but the living arrangement of the whole population. (This is not just out of interest for who is homeless, but through a desire to have an accurate overall census of the population.) However, it does not say exactly how this should be done.

It was notable that the census offices came to all the national MPHASIS meetings and were clear on their commitment to enforce the EU regulation for the 2011 census. However, they were less clear on how they were going to actually do this.

Most countries use a conventional survey census, but there was agreement that such an approach would never give an exact number of homeless people. A study in the USA put fake homeless people on the street in New York to see if they were captured by the census survey and visited services the day after the census to find out how many people had been counted. It was estimated that the city, which has the best count in the country, missed half of its homeless population. France has started to test methods of counting street homeless people on census night. A UK representative suggested using people who have recently been homeless to help find homeless people during a count.

Several countries now use a register-based census, including Finland and Denmark or a combination of this with a traditional survey, such as in Luxembourg. MPHASIS researched new register-based systems in Germany and Slovenia. It showed that there are issues with counting rough sleepers, the development of an up-to-date register of special buildings and the correct identification of people registered with welfare systems. Furthermore, the definition of special dwellings or collective living situations is so broad that it is not always possible to separately identify people living in homeless accommodation, old-age peoples' homes or even student residences.

Denmark has tried to link the results of its population count with the general housing register. Denmark is one of the countries with the strongest administrative data and uses a national client identification system. However, it has found that the housing register is not detailed enough to identify homeless people. Similarly, Holland has found matching addresses with the central population register fails to capture those outside the mainstream.

Many countries still face the challenge of building an effective register of all dwellings. This was felt to be the case in Sweden. The Austrian statistical office has advised finding all the addresses where people are registered without having a decent home and thus match people who are in a precarious situation.

A Belgian project (SILC-CUT) is attempting to extend the EU-SILC survey to homeless people who are not covered by the population-register-based surveys. They are using an adapted survey of a sample of 250 homeless households and 250 households of undocumented migrants, having already surveyed 500 travelling families.

Some systems, for example in Austria, find it hard to avoid double counting. The use of a personal social security number can help overcome this problem, as happens in Finland. However, there are cultural and data-protection barriers to this practice in other countries, such as Norway. Similarly, having a count on just one day can help avoid double counting, although it was not clear to all participants that this was possible in practice or could identify people beyond those accessing low-threshold services.

Norway has carried out a one-week survey and Austria over one month to try to maximise coverage whilst minimising the risk of double counting. The recapture method used locally in Holland seems very reliable in this context. Over a two-week period, they have counted everybody who is living in a residential facility and researchers at every low-threshold facility have registered key identifiers of people every day. Combining the information, they have estimated the number of rough sleepers and residents in shelters in a municipality.

Another issue for successfully monitoring homelessness is not just counting people, but identifying their profiles so that effective policies can be developed. The core variables developed by MPHASIS are important in this regard. Several participants talked about migration as a strong feeder route into homelessness. Sweden found in its 2005 mapping that 25% of homeless people were born outside Sweden, whilst rough sleepers are increasingly non-nationals in Ireland. Immigrants in Sweden were found not to have the same problems as natives, who might have addiction or psychiatric problems.

Asylum seekers who end up on the streets because there is nowhere else for them to go are often not distinguished from other groups of homeless people. Furthermore, undocumented migrants face particular problems because they often fail to access emergency services or health care because of fears of arrest or deportation.

A lack of political leadership or resources was a key problem in many countries. In Germany, statisticians are interested in counting homeless people, but know little about the subject whilst the social policy experts in the ministry are not involved in the census. Countries such as Holland and Latvia have found that there is little political interest at national level to count homelessness given that it is a local responsibility - even though the statistical offices are ready to go. In Estonia, there is a challenge of resources to carry out the census effectively and fully.

Conclusions of discussions on census/surveys:

- Europe cannot decide how any country should carry out its census; some countries will use a survey, some registers. But for both cases the main problem is the same: how to get information of those who are not living permanently in conventional dwellings and collective housing.
- Parallel approaches and co-operation are likely to be best for providing the most efficient way of collecting and combining information. The recapture method seems useful.

- Register-based systems that can provide information on a more continuous basis than a 10-yearly census would be useful as part of the data package.
- There is need for more research and identification of good practice on how to link the central population register and the dwellings register
- We need a clearer definition of collective living situations so that homeless accommodation and those staying in it can be identified.
- It is not only the number of homeless people, but also their profile which is needed, since the faces and causes of homelessness are also important to inform the right policies. The MPHASIS core variables are important here.
- Statistical offices should have clear plans on how to count different categories of homeless people in their census. They are quite open to advice on how to monitor homelessness, but this needs to be very pragmatic and concrete. The UNECE meeting in Geneva with census directors is an important opportunity in this respect.
- Eurostat and the Commission should play an active role in prompting national statistical offices on the issue of homelessness.
- Resources need to be made available for an effective census process.

- **Client recording systems**

Including a workshop chaired by Mark Clarijs, Federatie Opvang, Netherlands

The Measuring Homelessness Report found that client-recording systems provide the best foundation for obtaining information about the numbers and profiles of people, since the majority of homeless people are in contact with the relevant services. However, there are different ways of organising these: data extracted from diverse local systems; or a common client-record system established for use by multiple service providers.

Clare Lardoux (FNARS) presented the example of the emergency-number service 115 which built software to record the information needed by service providers and the state in France. Involving professionals from the emergency-number service, state services and researchers, common recording fields and terminology were agreed. Use of the tool is not obligatory, but it is proposed to 115 associations who often use it because there are no development costs and it is well adapted to their needs.

Only local 115 organisations have access to their own lists - the French government does not have direct access to the data - although overall figures are extractable from the combined data. The national observatory prepares an annual report which is sent to the state. Furthermore, local organisations do not have to undertake specific surveys if data sets are required at regional or national levels, because the information is already available in the system.

The LINK client record system from the UK, the 115 system from France and the Czech Nadejesystem were all demonstrated to participants during the conference. They helped demonstrate that the technology is there to organise the data; the big barriers are financial and the desire to do it (culture).

Discussions identified an issue with incentives for data collection, which are not always clear for workers on the ground. There are often cultural issues around how happy people working in homeless services are about recording detailed information about their clients. Local organisations can also be concerned that the information will be used to evaluate their work or reduce their funding.

People recording data need to be consulted and trained in why and how the data needs to be collected and have the information fed back to them so that they remain involved and can benefit in their work. The interest for the client also needs to be made clear, which can include reducing the times they are asked the same information and providing information to enable improved services. Otherwise, workers are unlikely to respond well to a common system imposed from above.

Data protection and data access are key issues to overcoming reluctance to record client information. Portugal is asking local network groups what information they need to manage their work and decide who should have access to what. It was generally felt that governments should not have access to the names of people using emergency services and that homeless people should have improved access to their own data. EU and national guidance on data protection and data access should be provided.

There were questions around whether the purpose for which data is collected affects what is recorded or whether it was right that data recorded one day by a professional for their purposes could be extracted a year later to inform policy developments or indeed to evaluate service provision. It was not clear to everybody that data collected for multiple purposes is good.

However, most participants agreed that some sort of national political will and responsibility needs to be taken to develop a system. They agreed that a call at European level to ensure the client record data is available could help in this regard, particularly in countries such as Romania where little progress has been made, although this should fall short of telling countries exactly what system to use. The US example might be interesting; it defines core data and data security standards at the federal level, but leaves implementation open.

Finally, there were some comments about how to ensure the accuracy of these systems in the face of certain challenges. In the Czech Republic, a person who accesses services again after three months out of the system obtains a totally new record. In Latvia, the number of people registered at services was found to be many more than the number of places available and it was not clear where those people were.

An important consideration in deciding what approach to take is that traditional weaknesses in extracting national information from local registers were often because of the difficulty in collating these local paper-based information sources. Some of these problems could well be overcome by the increased use of web-based information systems at local level.

Conclusions of discussions on client-record systems:

- It is not possible to say that a national client-register system is better or worse than a system which extracts data from local systems. However, in both cases more guidance and political will is needed from EU and national levels to ensure effectiveness.

- Funding for the development of systems needs to be allocated
 - Client-record systems rely on workers on the ground being motivated to record information. Any system that fails to allay workers' fears about the confidentiality of client information is unlikely to succeed.
 - Systems do not need to be obligatory, but incentives are certainly needed. This means making it clear how local services and clients will benefit from accurate records and feeding back to workers after the initial recording stage.
 - On-line systems seem to work well and are good practice for enabling data collation and extraction.
 - Data protection and data access by all stakeholders are important subjects and there is a role for Europe to provide guidance on these issues, including ensuring access to their own data by homeless people and guaranteeing confidentiality where appropriate.
 - Efforts to ensure the accuracy of client-record systems might require further research on whether the purpose of data collection affects what is recorded and how registers can avoid duplication or omission of individuals.
- **Developing and implementing a homeless information strategy**

Including a workshop chaired by Rudi van Dam, Belgian Social Security Ministry

MPHASIS has defined the stages and actions required to develop and implement a homeless monitoring information strategy. However, significant strategic and organisational barriers remain to the achievement of such strategies in all countries.

Developing a successful information strategy requires identifying the right stakeholders and bringing them together. The Swedish approach of "multiple faces, multiple responsibilities" shows the full range of agencies and stakeholders involved. However, there was discussion on what the best mechanism to encourage collaboration is: Portuguese stakeholders signed a letter of commitment; in Norway there is a dedicated agency to bring stakeholders together; the Irish homelessness strategy requires local authorities to create homelessness forums, involving state agencies, local authorities, housing agencies and NGOs.

However, in some countries, such as Holland, if authorities try to encourage collaboration with service providers, it can be seen as interference. It was argued that data collection can only be made obligatory from above if the funding is also being provided from above. In Ireland, 90% of funding is provided by the national administration and 10% by the local authorities. If the process is more bottom-up then agreements must be found. It is better to convince people that data collection is good for them and their clients rather than just making it an obligation. This is a people business that needs a lot of sensitivity.

Several participants expressed that for a homeless information strategy to work it must be integrated into a homelessness strategy more generally. In Greece and Bulgaria an information strategy seems like a luxury since there is no homelessness strategy. However it was also suggested that a debate on developing an information strategy could help to promote the development of a homelessness strategy.

There are barriers to national strategies where the local/regional authorities have the key responsibility for homelessness issues. In countries such as Norway, Austria, Holland and Spain, such strategies cannot be developed at the national level in isolation. Regional responsibilities create a particular problem in Spain because the different regions use different languages and follow different regional laws, making the collation of national data extremely difficult.

However, there is evidence of good cooperation between national and local levels in some countries. In Holland, the government has provided funding to cities to help them tackle homelessness through their own strategies and in Finland the national government provides housing subsidies for local authorities according to homelessness numbers. In Ireland, a homelessness strategy was developed at national level, but there is a statutory requirement that local authorities develop homelessness action plans to implement it, overseen by the homelessness forums.

Top-down guidance could also be useful from European level. The Greek statistical office has said that they did not measure anything on homelessness since there was no directive to do so from Eurostat, whilst the European Social Protection Committee has helped put homelessness monitoring on the agenda in Austria.

There was a feeling that if there is no policy recommendation from the EU to provide information on homelessness and/or a homelessness strategy, then many countries will not see any progress soon. As well as a strategic framework or tools to enable the development of national regional strategies, the EU could provide practical guidance on core variables and indicators that would help in the development and implementation of these strategies. Participants were reminded that despite the good work of MPHASIS researchers, a European indicator on homelessness is still out of reach.

Prevention is a key issue in information strategies. If one of the aims of a homelessness strategy is to prevent homelessness, then tricky issues emerge around counting and monitoring people at risk of homelessness. What data can be collected? Some countries are not prepared to include risk factors in their work on homelessness. The UK has worked to improve the way information from prison services and homelessness services 'speak to each other' to provide better information tracking people's paths into homelessness. Discussions are also needed between justice, health and housing departments.

Strategies should also ensure that they are able to monitor homelessness figures over time and not just at a particular moment. The main message of MPHASIS on this is that a stock number or a prevalence number should not be mixed in comparisons. However, both need to be done, even if just, as in the Irish case, by extrapolating trends from a series of stock figures. Entry and exit data would be ideal to extract both point and flow information.

Participants raised the need to think politically in calling for more work on homelessness, considering both the timing of lobbying efforts and possibly highlighting the cost of homelessness to countries. A representative from the UK also warned against local authorities commissioning private companies to design an information system, because there have been cases where these have been so complicated that only the company that designed it is able to extract information usefully or where fundamental aspects have been forgotten.

Finally, it was considered important to think about how homeless people are viewed by society and also what the real and full intentions of data collection are. Both of these have an impact on the implementation of data collection strategies.

Conclusions of discussions on homeless information strategies:

- Homeless information strategies are needed as an important tool in tackling homelessness. They should be fully integrated with homelessness strategies, without the lack of one being an excuse for not developing the other.
- MPHASIS has deliberately not supported a particular approach to strategy development to respect countries' freedom under the OMC. However, the EU has a significant role to play in pushing for the development of strategies and also providing practical guidance on how strategies can work.
- All the national stakeholders need to be involved in formulating and implementing the strategies, although the processes for doing this can vary. A responsible agency should be identified for the strategy.
- In most countries, national strategies cannot be developed in isolation from the local authorities who are leading on the issue of homelessness.
- Core variables should be defined and indicators identified at European level.
- If a strategy is imposed from above, then resources should also be provided from above. The budget should be specified for monitoring homeless information.
- Issues that need to be considered in information strategies include how to monitor prevention policies, how to track people's pathways between health and legal institutions and homelessness, and how to monitor homelessness trends over time.

Concluding comments

FEANTSA – Freek Spinnewijn

We have come a long way

FEANTSA was very happy to be part of the MPHASIS project. This conference has shown how far we have come at European level since ten years ago when homelessness was a non-issue. It is clear that a focus on data collection and statistics at EU level has worked in taking things forward.

Ten years ago, the reaction of policy makers was that homelessness was too sensitive an issue and that countries did not want to work on it. However, basic interest in data collection has grown and this project has shown real desire for more EU cooperation. Furthermore, this is not just coming from NGOs, but also the public sector across Europe.

An EU role on homelessness

So, we are now at a potential turning point for the role of the EU on homelessness. The support for more cooperation is not a given, since the EU wants to work on other social policy issues where there is no such demand within countries. A key issue is to consider the wider political framework

beyond data collection. Within the OMC process, the EU can encourage Member States to develop homelessness strategies where they do not yet exist.

For the EU to monitor the progress of Member States, some interesting and important questions will need to be answered, particularly: What is progress in tackling homelessness? Is having more places in emergency accommodation progress or the opposite of progress? These issues seem to depend on the national context.

The future of MPHASIS

The network that has been created around data collection in MPHASIS is an interesting one involving not just people working in data collection, but also policy makers and service providers. This should not be allowed to just die. Keeping the coordination team - or a version of it - together could also be interesting to meet the continuing demand for technical assistance in countries.

It seems clear from what we have heard that we have to make sure the project does not disappear into nothing. There are plenty of possible follow-up directions to MPHASIS. It will be important to keep the network alive and maybe FEANTSA can play a role somehow. It should be possible to get a budget for the work; maybe European Social Fund money could support follow-up work on data collection systems on homelessness.

The group need to do something around the census 2011 and the October deadline to provide guidance and practical information on this is an important opportunity. Maybe now is also the time to go back to Eurostat; our work has moved on a lot since they were somewhat overwhelmed by the complexity of the issue eight years ago.

DG Employment and Social Affairs – Michele Calandrino

Homeless data and homelessness strategies

There sometimes seems to be a chicken-and-egg situation with regards the relationship between data on homelessness and homelessness strategies. Some people say that they cannot develop one because they do not have the other. However, the relationship should rather be seen as a positive spiral moving round continuously between data and strategy, with each feeding into the other. So it is important to start somewhere.

A peer review in November in Vienna will look at how data and information systems can drive and inform strategy. At the same time, strategy drives data requirements. Strategies also mobilise funding, which can also mean funding for data collection.

It is also important to get the right strategy and right targets. In more than one Member State, data collection is driven by two agendas: a social inclusion agenda and a security agenda. This can affect the type of information collected and the objectives for which it is collected. This can be more of a problem than misuse of information as such.

How do we move up the spiral with good data and good strategies? On homelessness and housing, competence lies with Member States, and often regional or local authorities play a very important

role. It is difficult to set a specific information system at European level that fits all countries and we are a long way from a European indicator on homelessness. The Social Protection Committee indicators subgroup does not even have the issue on its agenda because of the different institutional settings of any strategy, the different governance levels in member states and important technical difficulties. What people have been saying today is that you are also a long way from having definite homelessness data at the local level.

However, it is still important to work on this issue at EU level and the commission recognises this in support of projects like MPHASIS.

Next steps

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC), although not obligatory, can give a push to Member States. The focus of this thematic year is homelessness and housing exclusion. The Commission has sent a request for information to Member States, commissioned a study by the University of York and supported projects such as MPHASIS. This work will feed into the next Joint Report of the Commission and Council, which will be dedicated to homelessness. It is important to get this politically important report right because such a year is a one-off thing; we need to make the best use of it. It is good that national ministries are here and involved in this work.

We expect the Belgian Presidency to organise a consensus conference on homelessness and if that is the case, we would anticipate information systems being high on the agenda.

The issue of the work on the census is more the responsibility of Eurostat. The commission services are here to see if any last-minute fine tuning can be made and the Commission is happy to support the presence of MPHASIS at the October Geneva conference to prepare the census.

Conclusions on MPHASIS

The project has produced a wealth of information and the Commission will need to digest and evaluate all of this. However, the Commission priority is the same as that of participants here to see this work taken forward. We have invested a lot in methodology. To keep the motivation of Member States high, it is quite important that we start to share numbers. There is acknowledgement that it is not possible at the moment to have an EU indicator on homelessness, but we need to share hard evidence on what is being done in different countries.

The project has achieved a lot on the way forward methodologically (research strand) and on capacity building (mutual learning strand) and the Commission hopes that it has helped to create something sustainable by supporting this project. We invite all participants in this project to continue this work as much as possible and will discuss with FEANTSA how this can be done. EU co-financing possibilities will partly be dependent on political agreement on the size of the PROGRESS funding programme.

Eric Marlier concluded what he described as a “very successful conference” by setting out a draft outcome statement from the event’s discussions. This statement is designed to set out how progress can be ensured beyond the project. The final version of this statement is presented in annex below.

Annex: Conference outcome statement



MPHASIS

Mutual Progress on Homelessness through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems

Conclusions of Final Project Conference

Paris, 17 September 2009

These conclusions were prepared jointly by:

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Eric Marlier, CEPS/INSTEAD Research Institute (Luxembourg) – Conference Chair

A. General information:

- MPHASIS was a 2-year project (December 2007 - December 2009).
- The purpose of the project has been to improve the capacity of European countries to collect data on homelessness and housing exclusion (HHE); the project has involved 20 countries (19 European Union Member States plus Norway) and a diversity of partners including Ministries, Statistical Institutes, NGOs and Universities.
- The material produced for this final project conference and the CD, together with the report of proceedings and these final conclusions will form part of the report to the European Commission on the MPHASIS activities.
- The MPHASIS web-page will be maintained after the end of the project by FEANTSA and the University of Dundee.

B. Maintaining progress on MPHASIS in the future:

A clear message from the conference is that the MPHASIS national meetings have initiated dynamic action and that this needs to be maintained and taken forward. The EU has a key role to facilitate this.

We have seen in the country presentations that in Ireland, Portugal and Sweden there are linkages built between national, regional and local administrations in the framework of MPHASIS. Ten EU countries (and also Norway) have a National HHE Strategy. And we have also seen that in other countries the national meetings of MPHASIS had been the first time key stakeholders met to discuss HHE issues.

From the presentations and conference discussion, five areas can be identified where progress on measuring and monitoring HHE is required and is possible: “National governance”, “Networking”, “Monitoring progress”, “Guidance” and “Research”.

Progress in these fields will require a strategic approach by the EU to support these actions at national and/or sub-national levels.

1) National governance

- a. *Stakeholder involvement led by government:* all key stakeholders have to be actively involved in the measurement and monitoring of HHE; these include: the Ministries and public bodies who are expected to lead in this area as well as statistical institutes, service providers, academics and people having experience of HHE.
- b. *Cooperation:* close cooperation between all these key stakeholders is required. In addition, cooperation between data users and data producers needs to be improved to ensure that there is transparency in the purpose for data collection and that there is also a feedback to data producers to contribute to improving the quality of the information provided.

- c. *Action at all levels*: concerted action across the different policy levels (local, regional and national) and within each area (welfare, judiciary, health, etc.) is essential.

2) Networking

The evidence from the MPHASIS national meetings clearly demonstrates not only a demand for but also the significant added value of transnational learning and exchange in this area. Countries need to take advantage of all the opportunities that will allow developing such learning and exchange; the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion should provide a unique momentum for a leap forward.

- a. *Process and instruments*: regular Peer Reviews and Mutual Exchange seminars are needed to ensure further progress is made in the fight against HHE. Other methods, such as the 2010 EU “Consensus Conference” planned by FEANTSA, should also be explored.
- b. *Data collection*: transnational cooperation on HHE data collection should be continued with EU funding contribution (e.g. through the PROGRESS programme).
- c. *Social Open Method of Coordination (OMC)*: it is essential that HHE issues be considered an integral part of the Social OMC and be consolidated and continued post 2010.

3) Monitoring progress

- a. *Strategic approach*: in the next round of the *National Strategy Reports on social protection and social inclusion (NSRSPSIs)* which each EU Member State will have to submit to the European Commission, there should be a formal commitment to prevent and reduce HHE. For this, the Guidelines for the next round of NSRSPSIs should formally require countries to report on the information strategy they have (or are putting) in place to count and monitor HHE in the framework of the harmonised ETHOS definition¹.
- b. *Data sources*: a single data source is not enough for a proper count and monitoring of HHE: each country has to identify a good national “package” of available data sources (e.g. surveys, registers and clients’ record data) and to develop its statistical capacity as required at national and sub-national level.
- c. *Indicators*: on top of the recently agreed EU indicators on overcrowded households and households burdened with housing costs, the NSRSPSIs should report as a minimum on indicators derived from the ETHOS categories 1 and 2 (i.e., Rough sleepers and People in emergency hostels).

4) Guidance

There was a general call for guidance on developing HHE Strategies and HHE Information Strategies. There are action points referring to the need for EU guidance on specific issues, which include the following:

- a. *Core socio-demographic variables* to be collected in the context of HHE statistics: EU recommendations put forward in this field by Eurostat should be followed.
- b. *Data protection*: not only legal but also trust and partnership issues need to be addressed.

¹ See: <http://www.feantsa.org/files/freshstart/Toolkits/Ethos/Leaflet/EN.pdf>.

- c. *2011 Census*: the next census to be carried out in 2011 in the various EU countries will have to cover homeless people; in this context, it is important and urgent to reflect on the best ways to cover at least ETHOS categories 1 and 2. There should be transparency in the documentation and dissemination of the census methods being adopted to count homeless people and people suffering other forms of housing exclusion.

5) Research

- a. *Register data*: further research focused on administration registers (population, dwelling, employment...) and service providers' registers is needed to improve coverage of individual registers and links between registers. This is also directly related to 3b above.
- b. *Hidden homelessness and housing exclusion*: our knowledge of HHE in conventional dwellings should be improved – a possibility worth investigating is the use of specific modules in existing household surveys (e.g. in the *Community Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC)*).
- c. *Vulnerable groups*: targeted research is needed to better identify and understand the situation of vulnerable groups - for instance, surveys on people in temporary accommodation and living temporarily with family and friends.

Evidence of action in various countries and conference participants indicated that purely technical or legal (e.g. data protection) issues should no longer be put forward for justifying the absence of significant action in the fight against HHE. Action is required and possible.

In the short term, a useful way forward would be for the European Commission and EU Member States to agree on a **common framework providing guidelines for measuring, monitoring and reporting on HHE** utilising the actions specified in the measuring homeless study² and the above actions. This could be done *inter alia* on the basis of:

- a) the recently agreed EU indicators in the field of housing (covering overcrowded households and households burdened with housing costs);
- b) national indicators that ought to be developed according to these common framework and guidelines (in particular in the field of homelessness and poor housing quality);
- c) concrete recommendations and exchanges of good practices in the field of HHE current and/or potential data sources (see 3b above); and
- d) the outcome of the planned 2010 EU Consensus Conference on Homelessness.

The next step could then be to strengthen the EU and national monitoring tools, and improve the national strategies in these fields.

² See : Edgar W, Busch-Geertsema, Vi, Harrison M, Watson, P (2007) Measuring Homelessness in Europe, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Brussels