

THE STATE-OF-THE-ART RESEARCH OF HOMELESSNESS AND PROVISION OF SERVICES IN EUROPE

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Introduction to the project EUROHOME

In this contribution I want to provide information about the set-up of the project under which the book *Coping with homelessness: issues to be tackled and best practices* was produced and to set the stage for the reading of this volume.

This book presents the collected set of papers solicited under the project EUROHOME - *Emergency and Transitory Housing for Homeless People: Needs and Best Practices*. The project brought together experts in the study of social protection, social exclusion, family and population sociology, housing and homelessness to review the body of knowledge in the field, analyse recent trends and discuss prospects for the improvement of the prevention and public response to housing exclusion in Europe. The project was organised around four major questions: What is known about homelessness? What are the key risk factors of social exclusion and homelessness? Are social services adequately dealing with the needs of homeless people? Can we identify models of good practice in integrated policies of social protection and complementary services for homeless people?

EUROHOME was funded by the European Commission, Directorate General XII, Science, Research and Development under the Targeted Socio-Economic Research programme, area III research Into Social Exclusion and Social Integration in Europe. The consortium which implemented the project was composed of four contractors and two associated contractors: The European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) Brussels, Belgium (co-ordination); The Interdisciplinary Centre for Comparative Research in the Social Sciences (ICCR) Vienna, Austria; The Danish National Institute of Social Research (SFI), Copenhagen, Denmark; Polytechnic of Milan, Department of Territorial Sciences (DTS), Milan, Italy; The National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES), Helsinki, Finland; the Research Institute Kivotos, Athens, Greece.

The implementation of the project was carried out by means of workshops focused on four research topics: data, services, risks and models of best practice.

The workshop *Data Available on Homelessness, Data Needed for the Analysis and Recommendations to Official Statistical Offices* addressed the key research problems related to the evaluation of existing data sources on homelessness and assessment of needs for the future methodologically well founded research. This first project workshop was held in Vienna from 11 to 13 July 1996. It was organised and hosted by the Interdisciplinary Centre for Comparative Research in the Social Sciences (ICCR), Austria.

The workshop *Urgent and Transitory Accommodation - Needs and Provisions* dealt with the crisis intervention, temporary housing, support and assistance provided within the service

sector. It addressed the controversy between immediate and long term needs of homeless people and ways their needs are met within the institutional framework of services. A preliminary evaluation was made of the capability of the existing system of urgent and temporary assistance to deal effectively with multiple problems of homeless people. The workshop was held in Athens on 4 and 5 October 1996. It was organised jointly by FEANTSA and the Research Institute Kivotos, Greece.

The workshop *Vulnerable Groups and Social Safety Nets Against Homelessness* focused on the debate about the relationship and interdependence between poverty and social exclusion with the aim of understanding how various processes and factors of vulnerability are relevant for the production of homelessness. It provided a framework for understanding the role that policies play in the protection against vulnerability and homelessness. The workshop was held in Milan on 23 and 24 May 1997. It was organised and hosted by the Polytechnic of Milan, Department of Territorial Sciences (DTS), Italy.

The workshop *Models of Best Practice: Integrated Approach v. Complementary Services* dealt with the relationship between welfare policy, values and norms and the consequences for homelessness. The workshop addressed the issues of solidarity and its limits, the meaning of work and integration, and the importance of preventing and minimising effects of homelessness. The role of housing policy and of the service sector was extensively examined. The meeting was held in Copenhagen on 12 and 13 October 1997. It was organised and hosted by the Danish National Institute of Social Research (SFI).

Two types of papers were prepared under the project: academic papers giving the state-of-the-art research and case studies presented by the local authorities, service providers and activists as illustrations of field experience and practical problems encountered. Workshops and their outputs were part of the working process under the project EUROHOME.

Preparation of this volume was a team work of 20 contributors supervised by the editorial board composed of Dr Ronald Pohoryles, Ms Inger Koch-Nielsen, Professor Antonio Tosi, Ms Sirrka Liisa Kärkkäinen, Dr Aris Sapounakis, Mr Volker Busch-Geertsema, Ms Maryse Marpsat, Professor Marc-Henry Soulet, Dr Dragana Avramov (editor in chief). The book is a systematic set of research findings organised into meaningful groupings. Only workshop papers meeting the academic requirements were selected and 10 additional contributions were solicited specifically for this volume (see the Table of contents - Appendix 1).

The introductory part gives an overview of the main lessons learned from the research about homelessness and ways to tackle housing deprivation and exclusion in Europe. The research perspective, concepts, causes, prevalence of homelessness, trends at the European level and the policy options are addressed by Avramov in order to set stage for the reading of this book.

Chapter 1 provides a broad research perspective on poverty, social exclusion and homelessness. It highlights how various concepts differ from each other - sometimes in their underlying fundamental philosophical assumptions and sometimes in the dilemmas as to the usefulness of their use for research and policy. Paugam, Duffy, Soulet and Tosi address the key dilemmas emerging in a dynamic and expanding research of various aspects of deprivation in advance market economies with developed social protection and welfare assistance.

Chapter 2 deals with data on homelessness and research methodology. The first contribution gives an overview of primary and secondary data available in Europe and a critical analysis of the 'usability' of existing sources for scientifically sound comparative research at the European level (Avramov). Pertinent national surveys a description of the methodology applied in Finland (Kärkkäinen) and the Netherlands (de Feijter), the cities of Vienna (Koflet), Paris (Marpsat and Firdion) and Plymouth (Williams) provide insight into best methods to be used according to the target population and research and policy aims. In terms of the development of the state-of-the-art methodology lessons learned from the United States (Burt) provide further sound grounds for an informed debate about research options and the choice of best tools.

Chapter 3 deals with values underlying policies which have an indirect or direct impact on homelessness. Different regimes of social policy (Daly) and different approaches to homelessness (Vranken) set the framework for understanding models of policies and patterning of homelessness. Case studies for Denmark (Kristensen) and Finland (Kärkkäinen) are examples of what may currently be considered as best practice in Europe in integrated policy approaches to homelessness.

Chapter 4 addresses the role of crisis intervention and emergency needs of people who find themselves homeless. The role of emergency is analysed by Soulet and the heterogeneity of homelessness and the consequences for service provision are examined by Koch-Nielsen and Børner Stax. Three examples of approaches to temporary and emergency accommodation are given: Germany (Busch-Geertsema) with focus on needs of immigrants and asylum seekers, Greece (Sapounakis) with focus on the newly emerging phenomena of homelessness in that country and Denmark (Brandt) where homelessness may be seen as something other than lack of housing .

Chapter 5 provides an overview of what we have learned from the EUROHOME research project and sets the stage for our future research (Avramov).

The authors are addressing a diverse audience: the academics, teachers and students, public authorities at the European, national and local levels, social workers and other service providers, interest groups and lobbyists. We are aware that expectations of various readers of this book are diverse. Thus, in order to meet academic standards we provide in each chapter empirical facts, guidance for the development and testing of hypothesis which organise the research findings and enable tentative generalisations and we assess prospects for the future. In order to facilitate the interpretation of diverse research findings we conclude each chapter with a summary of facts and ideas and propose a direction for feasible policy action. An informed interpretation of policy implications of research about homelessness with which each chapter is concluded is an expression of personal views of authors. Conclusions and policy recommendations published in this book are drafted by Tosi, Kofler, Koch-Nielsen and Kärkkäinen. Reflections about needs for future research are formulated by Avramov. The debates about implications of our research for the development of future policies and measures to prevent and tackle homelessness were a constant activity of our network throughout the work on this volume. The conclusions provided here are based on research, but the interpretation of policy implications of research and proposed recommendations reflect also our views as citizens as to what kind of society we wish to live in today and what kind of tomorrow we see for the future generations.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the European Commission for the financial support provided to the project and the production and publication of the book *Coping with homelessness: issues to be tackled and best practices*.

Introduction to the state-of-the-art research

The European policy discourse on housing exclusion in the 1990s reflects an awareness that homelessness can persist as a serious social problem in prosperous economies on the one hand, and by dissent about the nature of social processes which generate or are conducive to housing exclusion on the other hand. The political debate tends to disassociate situations of housing exclusion from social processes at work. The social perception of homelessness as a marginal situation which affects a small number of people largely determines the scope of the political action, perception of social responsibility and allocation of public resources for tackling housing deprivation. In the few European countries in which legislation or administrative practice address homelessness as an issue of public responsibility, there are marked differences in the perception of living and housing conditions which fall in the homeless category. A comparative overview of legislation and administrative practice reveals that the term *homeless* is used to cover quite diverse living conditions of socially deprived individuals or households (see Avramov, 1995a and 1996). There are marked differences in the criteria for the identification of homeless populations who are eligible for housing assistance and those homeless who may expect only humanitarian assistance.

The European research discourse has largely been influenced by the policy context under which homelessness emerged as a social construction in Europe. The early studies were simple counts of literally homeless people sleeping in night shelters and on the streets. At the time of the growing visibility of homeless people in the second half of the 1980s there was hardly any credible primary research in Europe about paths into and out of homelessness. Small scale research about needs and problems of homeless people was limited to situations of no abode or to night shelter users. Throughout the 1980s the major research efforts to count, describe and identify problems of homeless populations were made in the United States. Findings from the United States were frequently extrapolated to the homeless populations in developed market economies in general. The conceptual field of European research of homelessness in the early 1990s has evolved along two mainstream approaches: homelessness as a housing problem and homelessness as a problem of social '*fragilisation*'. The analysis of processes which are conducive to homelessness went in two directions: system inadequacy and personal deficiency.

It is only in most recent years that the homelessness research agenda at the European level is taking into due account the organisation and functioning of society and in particular its social policies and services. The role which public provisions play in the protection against vulnerability in the European context is increasingly being acknowledged. Research questions which are opening the Pandora's box regarding the future of social and welfare protection in Europe, namely "What would Europe look like without social protection and welfare safety-nets?" and "How can we make social protection and welfare assistance more effective and efficient from the point of view of the public, service providers and users?" - are a challenge also for research on the housing dimension of social vulnerability, exclusion and integration.

After initial stock taking and ‘*cataloguing*’ situations of homelessness in the early 1990s there is now a clear cognitive and policy need to relocate the realm of homelessness from the periphery of research to the core of the new policy context of social exclusion research. That is why in this contribution I will first broaden the perspective by addressing homelessness in the framework of social exclusion and social integration processes. Then I will look at the levels of causality which need to be addressed in research of housing deprivation and homelessness and finally will report on what is known about levels and trends in homelessness and policy responses.

I intend to show that the weaknesses of early research efforts and lack of empirical documentation to support many of our research hypotheses do not originate from the biased or underdeveloped social theories but rather from a lack of resources to implement targeted primary research in which all levels of causality could be addressed. I argue in this contribution that pragmatic obstacles can explain the scientific reductionism which prevailed in the early 1990s and which served as fertile ground for the quick-fix policy and lobbying platforms throughout the 1990s.

Lessons learned from research

Social exclusion and homelessness : broadening of perspective

Research about poverty in Europe has evolved, over the past two decades or so, towards a wider debate, measurement and analysis of deprivation in both distributional and relational terms and the broadening of perspective towards issues of social exclusion. Research about homelessness has lagged behind. It suffered from both a too narrow a perspective and too much generic judgement.

It is only in recent years that research is gradually moving away from the focus on individual deficiencies towards the analysis of social processes which are conducive to different degrees and forms of housing exclusion. As long as research of homelessness was limited to the phenomenological level and focused only on the literally homeless it constituted a legitimate, albeit a narrow research domain. But, in order to break the deadlock of a static approach homelessness research needed to broaden its perspective. The enlargement of the research domain posed new challenges. In its initial phases it tended to blur the perception of its main subject - housing deprivation and homelessness - and it opened ground for misinterpretation. Some social activists and lobbyists (mis)took the broadening of the research perspective as an identification of the phenomenon of homelessness with other phenomena such as poverty, social marginalisation and social exclusion. It is only in recent years that it has been effectively argued by researchers that the interpretation of the process of production of homelessness as being identical to the production of poverty turns a blind eye to the specificity of paths into and out of homelessness. Housing deprivation is perhaps the most obvious indicator of material deprivation in Europe today. Homeless people are a small albeit the most visible fraction of the socially excluded. This, however, does not mean that we can automatically regard as identical paths in and out of poverty and various situations of social exclusion with paths into and out of homelessness. Homelessness as a specific form of extreme social exclusion and social detachment of individuals cannot be understood and tackled effectively from the

perspective of generic debates about unmet housing needs, unemployment and material deprivation which '*ultimately and inevitably*' lead to homelessness.

Resources, opportunity and ability to make use of social institutions - namely family and informal networks and public provisions - are the supporting pillars of social integration in contemporary societies. The erosion of one or more of these pillars, be it through lack of access to material resources, social barriers to access meaningful activity or lack of access to care and support, is conducive to marginalisation and different forms of social exclusion. Social exclusion entails an accumulation of deprivation in several of the most important domains of human activity: labour, education, consumption of public services and care, family and informal networks, communication, political participation, leisure and recreation. Its material dimension includes poverty in terms of the lack of resources at the disposal of an individual or a household and its relational aspects include inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power (Room, 1995; Duffy, Paugam, Soulet and Vranken in this volume). Exclusion is associated with social stigmatisation and isolation, low self-esteem, the feeling of not belonging and never having been given a chance to be included in the society.

The underlying common denominators of social and housing exclusion are lack of material resources and weakening of social ties. Material poverty may be said to be a dependent variable of homelessness in developed market economies. It operates in conjunction with other risks. A broader look at the society and vulnerable groups shows unequivocally that only a small proportion of very poor people become homeless. But when we limit the perspective to homeless people only then poverty seems to be a common denominator of homelessness. All homeless people are poor. Homeless people experience material deprivation as the overwhelming majority depend on welfare, day labour, casual work and/or begging. The impact of the lack of material resources refracts through the limited ability of poor families to provide assistance to the vulnerable or non-earning adults. Poor families may be able to provide support and care for young adults only as long as they remain in the parental household. For those in pursuit of independent living arrangements, or for conflict-burdened families the home leaving of one of its members often implies cessation of transfers of resources and services and weakening of bonds. Informal networks of socially weak families tend to be limited to the neighbourhood and networks generally have a low capacity to transfer material and non-material resources to those who move away to another region or town. Research indicates that the majority of people unable to fend for themselves end up on the street or in an emergency shelter after relatives and friends are no longer able or willing to provide accommodation. However, not all homeless people originate from poor families.

Small scale research illustrates difficulties which homeless people have to establish and maintain family and informal networks and to make use of other social institutions. These difficulties seem to be partly inherent to social structures and ways our societies operate and partly to personality features of people affected. Indeed, social ties are built through most important domains of human activity which bind housing with family life, work, health and culture. The majority of those who become roofless and end up on the street or in an emergency shelter for homeless people are poor, have no stable work, have weak health, can no longer rely on family and friends for help and are not well equipped to take part in or make use of the mainstream culture.

In order to look at homelessness as a social process rather than just as a condition of ‘*non-housing*’, the research community needed to address risk factors, risk groups and ways risks materialise for particular individuals and families belonging to risk groups. Initially this brought considerable confusion about the habitual use of the concept of *risk*. In social research methodology the notion of risk is understood as the probability of an event occurring. The risk period is conceptualised as the duration of the non-occurrence of a given event (Yamaguchi, 1991). People under eviction proceedings are at risk of becoming homeless but the event has not occurred yet and may never occur. In the cost-benefit analysis conceptualised and widely used by economists it is postulated that success comes when opportunities exceed risks. By analogy some social scientists interpret the notion of being at risks as having poor opportunities or few options. In market economies, it is argued, one can more easily take risks when one has multiple opportunities. Changing a job may be opportunity-enhancing for highly skilled people. But, moving from welfare to casual jobs may be too risky for low-skilled individuals. Duffy (1997a) argues that for the poor and disadvantaged groups ‘flexibility is both more risky and more difficult to achieve’.

First research hypotheses in the domain of homelessness analysis emerged around the notion of risks as a consequence of social ‘*fragilisation*’ due to the increasing burden of housing costs. Indeed, contextual research confirms that difficulties in maintaining housing may be considered to be conducive to social exclusion both in its material and relational dimensions. Low income people may suffer serious deprivation because they are overburdened by housing costs. The issue is not only what percentage of household income is spent on rent and related housing costs but what amount of disposable income remains for other needs after housing costs are paid. Research points in the direction of a conclusion that housing costs are causing deprivation and may be contributing to the ‘*ghettoisation*’ more particularly of the urban poor. Rent and housing related costs are permanent costs. In most European market economies they are the second highest expenditure of an average household. As a proportion of household income housing follows immediately the expenditure on food. Research has shown that socially vulnerable people have to make serious savings on nutrition, medication, education, communication, culture and leisure in order to keep up with market rents. Containing telephone costs to a minimum, not being able to buy or having to give up a car and to cut down on public transportation costs may lead to social isolation. Housing costs may be said to be one of the key causes of general deprivation of the unemployed, those with casual or low paid jobs, and people dependent on welfare transfers or low pensions. While the causal relationship between poverty, poor housing conditions and deprivation due to high housing costs can be documented, the relationship between housing costs and homelessness is less obvious and under-researched.

The broadening of perspective is necessary to include in the analysis of housing exclusion not only those literally homeless using night shelters, soup kitchens or people living on the street but also people living under conditions of severe housing stress in dilapidated housing estates, in crime ridden neighbourhoods, conflict burdened households and overcrowded apartments. The broadening of perspective is necessary so that we can address the process of exclusion and paths into and out of deprivation and vulnerability. But broadening of the perspective requires conceptual rigor and research discipline (see Soulet and Tosi in this volume). The conceptualisation and development of assumptions as to why and how risks do or do not materialise for particular individuals belonging to risk groups, analysis of the risk period and

rates of occurrence of the event during the risk period, relationship between transition rates and explanatory variables require scrupulous research and use of advance methods.

Risk factors and causes of homelessness

The first step towards understanding homelessness is the acknowledgement of the complexity of paths into homelessness. The second step is imminently analytical. It entails separating or breaking the complex deterministic system into its component parts and regrouping into meaningful systems the indicators, explanatory variables and causes. In a simplified way it may be said that the *decomposition* of the complex reality is necessary so that we can analyse, measure and connect the variables; *reconstruction* is necessary so that we can interpret, assess prospects for the future and explain *why* and *how* things happen the way they do.

Research about homelessness has made sufficient progress so that we can make informed assumptions about macro or structural causes, meso or intermediate causes, and micro or proximate causes (often referred to as personal causes) as components of the deterministic system. The structural, intermediate and proximate causes of homelessness are different levels of causation and not independent variables of homelessness. The combination and the feedback between background, intermediate and personal factors causes homelessness.

My personal research has led me to identify the following components of the three levels of causation which are specific to the housing dimension of social exclusion. They are relevant for the accumulation and organisation of research findings and the connection and interpretation of the phenomena of housing exclusion and homelessness.

The key structural factors of housing exclusion may be identified as:

- lack of affordable housing;
- lack of adequate social protection;
- lack of adequate assistance and care for individuals with mental disability or personality disorders;
- juridical and social segregation of particular individuals or classes of individuals.

The way these macro social factors operate may be summarised in the following way:

- Lack of affordable housing entails a severe competition at the bottom level of the rental market. Individuals who have a social, physical or mental disability are weak competitors and are at risk of being excluded from the regular housing market.
- Lack of adequate social protection of people who do not have enough income to live in a way compatible with human dignity ghettoises people in severely sub-standard housing and run down neighbourhoods.
- Lack of community-based mental health care for individuals suffering mental and personality disorders is one of the key determinant of homelessness for those belonging to the risk group. People who do not need to be institutionalised but need care and support in order to be able to live in independent housing are at risk of becoming homeless if not assisted by the community.
- Legislation which restricts movement, access to land or housing for particular groups or classes of individuals (e.g. travellers and Gypsies, ethnic minorities, non-nationals, migrants, ex-offenders, mentally or physically handicapped) is one of the key structural cause of homelessness. Even when legislation does not sanction segregation, the social

practice may still operate as a strong factor of housing exclusion. Research shows that particular ethnic groups, individuals who cannot produce a secure employment record and those with a visible physical or mental disability are discriminated against in the private rental market.

The missing link in research of housing exclusion and homelessness remains the identification and analysis of intermediate causes and better understanding of ways they operate. While we can advance hypotheses about the importance of structures and functions of:

- family;
- friends;
- informal networks;
- neighbourhood;
- peer groups;
- street-gangs and other sub-cultural groups;

we still know little about ways they operate. We have no reliable research which could highlight how networks may be preventing or exacerbating housing exclusion and homelessness.

The proximate or personal causes of homelessness are a set of factors associated with a personal history and personality features of individuals. These may be conducive to social isolation and homelessness. Proximate causes of dislocation from regular housing may be identified as:

- history of inadequate institutions (orphanage, succession of youth care institutions and foster families, mental hospitals, prisons, etc.);
- troubles in the family;
- dropping out of school;
- substance abuse;
- mental disability or personality disorder.

When risks materialise they may result in temporary living conditions which exacerbate fragility and produce new proximate causes. Sleeping rough, in an emergency shelter, squatting, and, becoming estranged from the family may be associated with minor criminal activity and identification with the counter culture on the street. If social intervention does not occur in these initial phases of the process of detachment the condition of homelessness may lead to:

- prostitution;
- major criminal activity;
- heavy substance abuse;
- severe mental disability.

The experience of life on the street and in emergency shelters where individuals encounter abuse, crime and self-abuse may become a determinant of long-term and life-long rupture of social ties and detachment from the values of the mainstream culture.

In a somewhat simplified way it may be said that the identification of structural factors which tell us how the society is organised helps us to identify the general risk factors of

homelessness. The identification of intermediate or meso level causes, through which background factors operate, tell us which specific population sub-groups are most exposed to risks of homelessness. The micro or personal causes help us to perceive which particular individuals in a specific society are running the highest risk of homelessness.

The notion of risks implies a possibility, threat, hazard, chance of loss or peril. It can be measured as the probability of an event occurring. The size and the composition of groups for whom risks materialise and who find themselves homelessness depends ultimately on the effectiveness of the system of family and social protection. In all societies only a small proportion of individuals belonging to groups at risk of homelessness fall through all the existing social safety nets. Some of those who encounter the world of homelessness are able to develop personal coping strategies and build their own paths out of homelessness. Some are effectively assisted by the public authorities. Others just drift and rely on daily survival. A universal rule for every exposure to deprivation and hazard which affects those belonging to the risk groups and those who become actually homelessness is: the longer the struggle - the higher the casualties (Avramov, 1997).

The organisation and functioning of society and in particular its social services illustrate how risks materialise or how they are buffered in different European countries. Although there is a general shortage of affordable housing, the unemployment rate is high, and the divorce rates are among the highest in Europe, there are almost no homeless families in Finland. Those families who found themselves homeless are accommodated in temporary apartments for a few weeks before they are provided permanent accommodation. In 1996 360 household composed of two or more persons (many of them Ingrian returnees awaiting permanent accommodation) were reported to have been temporarily homeless. In the United Kingdom, by contrast, the overwhelming majority of those officially recognised as homeless are families. They may find themselves as homeless on waiting lists for housing for several years.

Excluded from housing = excluded from official statistics

The first practical obstacle to a comprehensive analysis of housing exclusion is the lack of reliable data organised into meaningful groupings which would document the living conditions of people suffering housing stress and those who find themselves homeless. Generally, contextual data can be used as indicators of the key structural causes and small scale research of actually homeless people may give information about proximate causes of homelessness. The meso level causes are least researched. The **connection** between poverty, social marginalisation, social exclusion, housing stress, the nature and strength of networks of socially vulnerable groups and individuals, personality features, individual handicaps and homelessness remains largely an unexplored territory.

Data collected in household surveys provide an abundance of information about housing conditions of people who have a home. But they tell us nothing about homeless people and their living conditions. Technically, the absence of homeless people from household surveys from which data on housing conditions of the population are drawn are easy to explain. The sampling method for household and family budget surveys is based on a selection of respondents from a pool of people who have a home. A private household is generally defined as a unit composed of people who share a dwelling and housing-related costs. In some countries the definition of a household will focus on the sharing of accommodation and income (e.g. Ireland). In others, it will focus on whether members share accommodation and

meals (e.g. Spain), or household chores or the use of a living room (e.g. UK). Although the meaning of living together and sharing may vary between countries, everywhere a household implies an address, a dwelling. The majority of homeless people do not have an address in a conventional dwelling. They do not live in private households. They do not have a principal residence.

Population censuses in Europe do not follow the same sampling technique as housing and household budget surveys. Homeless people are not intentionally left out of the count. But, so far, no specific effort has been made to ensure a comprehensive coverage of this population sub-group. No effort has been made to process and tabulate data in a way which would make it possible to identify homeless people as an aggregate. Even if we assume that homeless people are included in a statistically significant manner in the general population count it is difficult to imagine how this population could be identified as a specific group on the basis of census data. Namely, no country has developed an official definition of the conditions of homelessness for census purposes. In any case, one should not expect to obtain from a population census data which can be better gathered in targeted surveys. Indeed, population censuses are a massive counting exercise which is too bulky a tool and too expensive an enterprise to be used for collecting data about homelessness and housing deprivation which affect a small proportion of the total population.

Technical aspects explain how homeless people remain beyond official statistics. They do not provide an explanation why in a value-knowledge society in which services are planned and resources allocated on the basis of information, we have no reliable data about homelessness and the housing dimension of deprivation. The conspicuous absence of data on living conditions of homeless people in EUROSTAT's *Social Portrait of Europe* (1996) and the absence of comprehensive survey of homelessness at the European level confirm that authorities are willing to measure social progress only in terms of the improvement of housing conditions of well-housed people (Avramov, 1997).

What have we learned about the extent of homelessness and housing deprivation?

One of many reasons for the lack of data about the prevalence of homelessness is a lack of agreement about what homelessness is. In order to distinguish homeless people as a separate category we need a specific definition. It comes as no surprise that only countries in which there is a statutory obligation to assist the homeless or a high degree of political commitment to house the homeless there is an administrative definition of homelessness in official use.

In the United Kingdom positive law (Housing Act, 1985) imposes a statutory obligation on local authorities to provide housing to homeless people found to be in priority need. People are homeless if they do not have access to housing or if they do have housing but access to it is denied. The criteria for the identification of people eligible for accommodation are developed in the guidelines for the implementation of the legislation. They are: that the applicant is homeless or threatened by homelessness, that she/he is not homeless or potentially homeless intentionally, that she/he has a priority need.

The legislative definition in Ireland is enshrined in the 1988 Housing Act. Under the Act someone is homeless if, in the opinion of the authority, there is no accommodation available which he/she can reasonably occupy or remain in occupation of, and, if a person is living in a

hospital, country home, night shelter or other such institutions because they are unable to provide reasonable accommodation from his/her own resources.

The Housing Fund of Finland which conducts an annual survey on homelessness uses an operational definition which enumerates a series of situations of homelessness which affect persons living outdoors or in temporary shelters, in night shelters or other shelters for the homeless, in institutions or institutional homes either temporarily or permanently due to lack of housing, prisoners soon to be released who have no housing, persons living temporarily with relatives or acquaintances due to lack of housing, families who have split up and are in temporary accommodation due to housing (see Kärkkäinen in this volume).

If we resort to administrative definitions the population which is included in the homeless category will obviously vary from one country to another. Furthermore the opinions of public authorities as to who should and who should not be considered to be homeless and entitled to assistance may vary from year to year in the function of resources allocated rather than in the function of the level of needs.

A group of experts who prepared a report on homelessness for the Council of Europe proposed the following definition of homeless people "individuals or families socially excluded from lasting occupancy of a suitable dwelling" (Council of Europe, 1993 p. 23). The authors operationalise the definition by identifying situations of homelessness which range from rooflessness to unacceptable housing conditions. Similarly Daly defines homelessness as "a continuum of condition and need" (1993 p.16) and identifies circumstances which can be combined to form a definition of homelessness and which range from rooflessness, houselessness and insecure accommodation to inferior or sub-standard housing.

While descriptive definitions provide a useful nomenclature, a combination of descriptive and normative elements of above definitions has left too much space for freehanded interpretations of concepts such as 'unacceptable', 'insecure' or 'inferior'. Outside the research community such definitions give grounds to the 'game of numbers' in which figures are blown up to imply that tens of millions of people in Europe are homeless. What the sum of figures stands for is in fact is a small proportion of literally homeless people and an overwhelming majority of housed albeit badly housed people - those living in old housing, sub-standard accommodation and overcrowded dwellings.

My personal research has convinced me about the usefulness of a causal approach in defining homelessness. The housing dimension of deprivation is characterised by the absence of a personal, permanent, adequate dwelling. Difficulties and obstacles in accessing and maintaining a home are seen as defining criteria of homelessness. A social condition is thus defined through social mechanisms and processes which induce it. Homeless people are those who are unable to access a personal, permanent, adequate dwelling or to maintain such a dwelling **due to** financial constraints and other social barriers, and those people who are unable to access and maintain such a dwelling **because** they are unable to lead a fully independent life and need care and support but not institutionalisation.

Concepts such as personal, private and adequate which I refer to have been extensively elaborated by the United Nations (see for example 1992). The proposed causal definition, nevertheless, has its share of shortcomings. Namely, at present we are not able to identify with precision the 'weight' of clusters of causes (associated with financial constraints, social

barriers and need for care) and their interrelationship. However, the key assumptions incorporated in these definitions are based on reliable research across Europe and in my view contribute to a better understanding of what is specific to homelessness.

Exclusion from housing is a process marked by the accumulation of problems associated with poverty, breakdown of family and social networks, personality disorders, isolation and social detachment of individuals. Homelessness is neither a group characteristic nor is it a static condition. For the overwhelming majority of people who find themselves homeless it is not a life-long condition. The majority of those affected experience only an episode of literal homelessness.

A socially correct way to assess the level of needs for housing and assistance and care for people unable to access and maintain a home from their own resources would be to ensure a statutory obligation to provide and monitor the demand over time. In practice, however, what is usually monitored is the level of provision by a variety of institutions which range from soup kitchens run by charities to social housing provided from public funds. Thus what is currently on the market of services is (wrongly) identified with the level of needs and by analogy a wrong assumption is made that the number of service users stands for the number of homeless people.

Homeless people as users of services and groups at risk of housing stress and deprivation

Services for homeless people are often the only source of information concerning the tip of the iceberg of housing deprivation. In many European countries the number of current users of services depends on the supply rather than on the demand for accommodation assistance and care (Table 1). Thus, countries with a weak institutional framework of assistance will record a small number of homeless people together with countries with strong preventive policies and measures

The number of people dependent on services for homeless people cannot be explained by macro economic parameters. Indeed, less prosperous European countries do not register a higher number of service users than countries with the higher GDP per inhabitant. The number of people estimated to be homeless in Greece, a country with no minimum income scheme, is lower than in the Netherlands, the forerunner country in social protection. The number of people officially recognised as homeless or threatened by homelessness in the UK is 40 times higher than the estimated number of homeless users of services in Spain. In the UK local authorities have a statutory obligation to house homeless people found to be in priority need. Spanish authorities make no such commitment. Figures provided by public and voluntary services for homeless people tell us more about housing standards and the level of development of services than about the extent of housing exclusion.

Table 1. Estimated average annual number of people dependent on services for the homeless in the early 1990s

Country	On an average day, or on the day of a survey	Over the course of a year
Austria	6,100	8,400
Belgium	4,000	5,500
Germany	490,700	876,450
Denmark	2,947	4,000
Spain	8,000	11,000
Finland	4,000	5,500
France	250,000	346,000
Greece	5,500	7,700
Ireland	2,667	3,700
Italy	56,000	78,000
Luxembourg	194	200
Netherlands	7,000	12,000
Portugal	3,000	4,000
Sweden	9,903	14,000
UK	283,000	460,000

Source: Avramov (1996)

The interpretation of the prevalence of homelessness and exclusion from adequate housing in an international comparative perspective needs to take into account national housing standards and environmental factors, infrastructure, climate and general habitat. People living in shacks, tents, containers and caravans are not considered to be homeless in Portugal. Public authorities cannot be held responsible for providing proper housing. In Sweden, by contract, a caravan is not considered to provide adequate housing. Local authorities can expect to receive a court order to provide proper housing if they fail to offer accommodation to the needy which corresponds to the housing standards compatible with the Swedish standard of human dignity. In the United Kingdom guidelines for the implementation of the homelessness legislation have in practice become guidelines for the attribution of social housing. Authorities argue that the number of people accepted for housing under the homeless legislation is much higher than the number of homeless. Thus, comparing figures about service users in Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom requires great rigor.

In order to understand homelessness in a comparative perspective we need to take into account the social context within which risks of homelessness materialise. Comparing only numbers of users of services for homeless people and social, demographic and medical profiles of those who are considered to be homeless in different countries can be misleading. Currently available information about service users is a useful indicator (not a measurement) of needs which are met. The number of users of services is furthermore useful information for service providers - in market economies it justifies their existence.

Homelessness is a residual of public, family and informal protection. The composition of the homeless population ultimately depends on the efficacy with which these networks operate. It is generally known that people who are at risk of homelessness have a combination of two or

more handicaps and have experienced multiple severely stressful life experiences. Low income or no regular income, low educational attainment, poor qualification, a history of mental health problems, chronic illness, alcohol and drug abuse, experience of institutionalisation (psychiatric hospitalisation, jail, orphanage, foster care), traumatic events in the family of origin, sexual abuse and domestic violence constitute a web of handicaps and traumatic events which may be conducive to homelessness.

The stronger the public and/or family support is, the stronger and more serious are handicaps which lead a person into homelessness. Typically, families at risk of homelessness are better protected than single persons; women are better protected than men. If a woman falls through all social support safety-nets and ends up sleeping rough she is more likely than a man to have a history of mental health problems which precede the experience of homelessness. Research in the USA and Spain (Koegel, 1996; Vazquez and Muñoz, 1996) confirm that among people sleeping rough and those using soup kitchens, temporary shelters and other emergency services for the homeless, women more often than men will have had severe mental disorders before and during their transition to homelessness. Mental disorders are a risk factor of homelessness which does not operate independently from other social and personal handicaps. Risks can be reduced or reinforced by the system of social support. The nature and the targeting of the system of protection will determine **which** personal handicaps will be conducive to homelessness.

The number of service users is the measure of the emergency housing demand which is met. This indicator does not tell us about the level of unmet needs for emergency accommodation and other services for homeless people nor about people in housing need in general. What do we know about living conditions of people who are not covered by housing surveys because they do not live in houses and flats, because they do not live in a private household, because they do not have a principal usual residence, because they rotate between a street, squat, transitional accommodation, marginal, often illegal lettings? How many people depend on night shelters and soup kitchens? How many people rent a single occupancy room on short term basis (while they hold a casual job or the week in which they receive a welfare benefit) and double up with acquaintances and relatives or squat when they run out of meagre resources? What coping strategies are developed by households living under conditions of severe housing stress? Although answers cannot be found in official statistical publications general indicators of housing exclusion can be identified from a variety of sources.

Although no systematic count of people in housing need has even been attempted by the statistical offices, it is possible to use the available data for an initial estimation of the number of people who are living under conditions of severe housing stress due to bad housing, overcrowding and tenure insecurity. Estimates about the prevalence of housing deprivation are possible only for some European countries. On the basis of available data from public and non-for profit service providers, primary research, population censuses and secondary sources I have estimated the prevalence of housing deprivation for the 15 European Union countries.

People living in economic hardship form the core of risk groups which are threatened by housing stress and housing deprivation. In the European Union those at highest risk of housing deprivation emerge from the lowest income tranche which encompasses:

- 57 million people living below the poverty threshold;
- 31 million people dependent on welfare;

- 18 million unemployed dependent on unemployment benefits or family transfers.

In terms of bad housing conditions it can be estimated that in the European Union at least:

- 15 million people live in severely substandard and/or overcrowded dwellings;
- 2.4 million people live in "unconventional dwellings" which are mobile, semi-permanent or not built for human habitation.

In terms of housing insecurity and housing stress in the 15 European Union countries it may be estimated that:

- 1.6 million people are under eviction procedures;
- 400,000 people are evicted each year.

It may be estimated that homelessness affects each year:

- 2.7 million homeless people who rotate between friends and relatives, furnished rooms rented on a short term basis and services for homeless people;
- 1.8 million people dependent on public and voluntary services for homeless people.

All of the above conditions may overlap and therefore it is not possible to add any of the given numbers in order to estimate the prevalence of housing exclusion. The above figures may be considered only as a preliminary indicator of the housing dimension of deprivation in the most prosperous European countries.

What have we learned about recent trends in homelessness and housing deprivation?

The 1980s mark a decade of accelerated improvement of housing standards and housing conditions in general. The 1980s are also a decade of growing visibility of homelessness. In the 1980s and early 1990s a visible presence of people sleeping rough in European cities coincides with an invisible pressure on services for homeless people. Fragmented research and information gathered by service providers enables us to describe a trend in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It may be summarised as follows. A growing number of people who could not afford a home from their own resources were turning to services for homeless people. The duration of stay in shelters and transitional dwellings funded by public and voluntary organisations was increasing. A growing number of women with and without children were being provided temporary accommodation in shelters for homeless people. The fastest growing population of users of services for the homeless seem to have been women and young adults in the 18 to 25 age group.

However, in the second half of the 1990s there are indicators that trends may have reversed in some West European countries. Information from Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, the United Kingdom and West Germany seem to indicate that the number of homeless people users of services has been decreasing.

Recent figures which are documenting a decline in the number of users of services for homeless people in several countries put before researchers a number of important questions to be answered. The same type of data from service providers which now indicate a decline in numbers have been used by the research community, social workers, service providers and their lobbyists to argue that there was an increase in homelessness throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Can we then conclude that the most recent figures announce the reversal of the

trend in homelessness? If that is the case how can the decline in homelessness be explained? The mid-1990s coincide with an increase in structural risks of homelessness, (unemployment, decline in the provision of publicly funded housing for rent, rent increases and cuts in social benefits) and yet the number of people for whom risks materialise is decreasing. The question as to why and how under conditions which are exposing more and more people to risks of homelessness the number of people who have become homeless seems to have declined can at best be addressed through a number of hypotheses (see Avramov, 1998).

It is not possible to quantify trends in homelessness in a consistent, statistically relevant manner for all the European countries. Emergency, basic need services are typically provided by charities, non-profit organisations and voluntary associations. They neither have the means nor the know-how to engage in data gathering and analysis. In fact, the humanitarian nature of services provided by voluntary organisations may exclude asking of questions about the origin or the nature of problems of their clients. Data on trends are generally available only when public authorities have a statutory obligation to provide housing for the homeless and/or when emergency services are funded by the public authorities. We generally have to resort to indicators using a variety of sources to tentatively identify trends.

The first countries to react to the growing homelessness by developing and implementing integrated preventive policies and complementary services for homeless people were the northern European countries. Finland is a country with an outstanding record in containing housing deprivation and reducing homelessness: between 1987 and 1994 the number of homeless people has been reduced by half. The number of people who found themselves homeless has continued to decline throughout the second half of the 1990s (see Kärkkäinen in this volume). The number of users of services for homeless people seems to have decreased in recent years also in Sweden, West Germany and Belgium while the supply of services has not decreased. The decline in the number of people accepted on waiting lists for housing under the homeless legislation in the United Kingdom has also declined but it is not yet clear whether this is due to a fall in demand or in supply.

In most southern European countries a relatively large stock of sub-standard housing and single-occupancy rooms accessible to low-income people have traditionally been a buffer against a rise in the number of those literally roofless. Several hundreds of thousands of people live on the borderline of homelessness in shacks, tents, containers, caravans, staircases, caves or premises not actually designed for human habitation. They are generally not recognised by the public authorities as homeless but are classified as people living in 'unconventional dwellings'.

In eastern and central European countries homelessness has become visible only in the 1990s and is generally associated with the difficulties of transition to market economy. It is often argued that the present upsurge of homelessness is largely a legacy of the former establishment but researchers in some countries also acknowledge that the recent closings down of worker's hostels and even orphanages have pushed some of the most vulnerable adults and children onto the streets. Nothing is known about their number. Preliminary research points in the direction of the conclusion that the burden of housing costs has increased substantially for the whole population, that the security of tenure has decreased for socially vulnerable groups, that the population at risk of homelessness is increasing and that people who find themselves homeless live in extreme misery (Avramov, 1995b; Duffy, 1997b). What differs currently between European developed market economies and

countries in transition from planned economy are not so much paths into homelessness but chances of receiving public support and assistance when homeless and prospects for getting out of homelessness.

The visible homeless, those sleeping rough or in night shelters, are only the tip of the iceberg of people experiencing housing deprivation. The hidden homeless - those living in forced cohabitation under conditions of severe family conflicts, domestic abuse or overcrowding - and people at the borderline of homelessness living in dilapidated accommodation unfit for human habitation, form the overwhelming majority of those experiencing deprivation. But we have no data to document recent trends in hidden homelessness, housing stress or housing deprivation.

Lessons learned about tackling homelessness

What have we learned about preventive policies and services for homeless people?

There has been no comprehensive analysis in Europe about the impact of current direct and indirect policies on housing deprivation and homelessness. Conclusions about the effects of policies are generally drawn from contextual data, macro economic parameters and the creative reading of political statements of intention. Lack of resources and policy interest in a scientifically sound analysis of whether policies work and what unintended effects they may produce has been a major issue of concern within the EUROHOME network of researchers. In this volume Daly discusses different regimes of social policy and concludes that there is no immediate cross-national patterning between welfare regimes and the extent of homelessness.

Comparative overviews of policy options and practice in various European countries indicate that the strong political will and an effective commitment in terms of (material and non-material) resources are the key variables to be analysed (Avramov, 1995a; 1996). Policy choices translated into practice in advanced welfare states show that anti-poverty and social integration measures are more effective when income protection is accompanied by a comprehensive system of housing supply, and, housing subsidies, benefits, allowances. The Nordic countries Denmark, Finland and Sweden have been successful in progressively removing obstacles to housing for low-income groups. They also implement a generous system of income transfers which enable people to maintain a home (see Kristensen, Koch-Nielsen, Kärkkäinen in this volume). They have all managed to contain the effects of structural causes of housing deprivation and to reduce homelessness over past 10 years or so.

In countries which focused their anti-poverty measures on minimum subsistence means and emergency assistance for the homeless but pursued throughout the 1980s the policy of disengagement from the public funding of permanent housing for socially vulnerable groups - risks of homelessness persisted (see Busch-Geertsema in this volume). In many countries the lack of adequate housing assistance to low-income groups has been a serious deficiency in the system of social protection. In countries with a weaker public system of welfare protection lack of adequate housing support to low-income and non-earning groups has been an additional stumbling point in the development of a comprehensive system of protection from poverty (see Tosi, Sapounakis in this volume). Lack of a guaranteed minimum subsistence means and a new market housing strategy which does not foresee efficient safety nets for the poor are increasing risks of poverty and housing stress in southern European countries as well as in countries in transition to market economies. In southern Europe the absence of effective

public policies and measures, the family support has been so far the most effective (and often only) buffer against homelessness. Housing deprivation in terms of sub-standard housing and overcrowding remained however widespread. In many countries family solidarity has traditionally played a significant role in preventing homelessness of adults with no income. However, changing family structures and culture are affecting the functional basis of direct family support. These changes have not, so far, been accompanied by new welfare models. Transition to market economies in eastern and central Europe has not been accompanied in the 1990s by effective social protection and welfare and housing assistance to those who are too young or too old, too weak or too slow to profit from the new economic opportunities.

In order to go beyond just informed assumptions in addressing the impact of policies on housing deprivation and homelessness there is an urgent need to evaluate how well are current social policies, welfare benefits and housing allowances reinforcing housing security of individuals and families. There is a cognitive and policy need to analyse whether and how policies, measures and services are reinforcing social cohesion at the European, national and regional levels. There is need to develop housing impact methodology (lessons can be learned from family impact studies) and to evaluate the efficacy and efficiency of policies which are aimed at helping people to maintain housing and measures and services set in place for people who find themselves outside the housing system.

The consolidation of European Union requires reforms of welfare protection on different levels. It also requires that the system ensures sustainable living conditions and that people are treated fairly in their daily life. Innovative institutional changes which take into account competition, globalisation and sustainability have to be based on an informed dialogue. Informed choices are needed in order to alleviate existing social tensions, to deal with various forms of spatial dimensions of social exclusion and to promote social integration. Change and dialogue is needed to achieve gradual harmonisation of sustainable policies of welfare protection and measures of social integration. A pre-requirement for informed choices is sound knowledge about the impact of past and present social, welfare and housing policies and targeted measures.

Within the scope of the EUROHOME project we could not develop and implement a policy impact approach - due to financial constraints and time limitation - however I consider the recommendation to pursue this research road as one of the key research challenges for our network in the future (see Avramov in Chapter 5).

As for responsive policy measures they have traditionally been influenced by the way homeless people are perceived. Social detachment of homeless people has often been interpreted to imply that homelessness is a life-style choice. Homeless people were seen as consumers and abusers of public services and resources. This perception of homelessness leads to assertions that the greater the number of services provided the higher the number of 'free loaders'. By analogy it was assumed that people will intentionally make themselves homeless in order to profit from the public handouts. The Finnish example extensively discussed by Kärkkäinen in this volume testifies to the fault in reasoning in advancing the 'free loader-hypothesis'. Our research unambiguously shows that the higher the number of effectively assisted and cared for people - the lower the number of those who become homeless and remain a heavy burden for public expenditures.

The Nordic countries which can be quoted as an example of best practice in integrated policy approach to homelessness show that tackling difficulties associated with homelessness requires complementation between preventive and responsive measures and a well thought approach to services. In the late 1990s models of best practice are those schemes which extend services far beyond temporary emergency assistance. They acknowledge that homelessness is not only a housing condition (see Koch-Nielsen and Børner Stax, Koch-Nielsen, Brandt, Kärkkäinen in this volume). They operate under the assumption that housing the homeless is indispensable but that it is not a sufficient tool for social reintegration of homeless people. They provide for people in need of housing and social support and their aim is to resettle homeless people into independent housing and to provide sufficient support and care so that they are able to stay in individual housing. Depending on the set of specific needs of individuals, the integrated approach implies that in addition to personal housing (as opposed to placement in institutions) formerly homeless people may expect to receive: individual guidance; counselling on how to manage their financial resources; how to reconstitute family and social ties; professional training; access to employment; psychological and medical support. This approach also questions the validity and usefulness of the assumption that all homeless people **can-ought to-will-be** integrated in the labour market.

Although there is evidence that effective preventive and responsive policy measures can reduce homelessness, many European countries seem to be giving way to pressures to reduce the public involvement. The new policy climate seems to be characterised by a shift away from comprehensive preventive measures and a move towards responsive measure of mainly short-term nature and lip-service to innovation and new forms of partnerships between public, private and voluntary sectors. More and more public resources are being channelled towards emergency provisions which include temporary accommodation. This is often done without examining whether these provisions are actually determined by client needs. The effectiveness and efficacy of services is not monitored from the point of view of providers, other institutions and clients. There is an urgent need to develop performance measurements of services and to develop standards of service provision. We have found no evidence that voluntary services are more effective, less expensive and more client-friendly than publicly funded and publicly run chains of services. Unless more focus is put on the control of quality and material and non-material costs and benefits of services in general and crisis intervention in particular the result could be that the short-term funding of exploratory pilot projects may turn out to be a policy flirt with innovation rather than a commitment to a pursuit of flexible but efficient and stable chains of services.

In the 1990s initiatives have been launched by numerous institutions in Europe with the aim to describe innovative projects and to collect information about pilot projects and new partnerships. But, there has been no co-ordinated effort to evaluate the impact and to measure the real outcomes in terms of material and non-material costs and benefits of such projects. There is no project which brings together at the European level experts to develop adequate methodology for performance measurements which could be implemented at the local, national and European levels. Paradoxically, at the time of budgetary constraints which impose reforms in the welfare systems in Europe there are currently no scientifically sound tools to evaluate the effectiveness, efficacy and long-term outcomes of past and current homelessness policies, outcomes of crisis intervention and supported housing services for socially deprived individuals and families.

The deadlock of the mainstream policy debate about services and the role of different partners in the resettlement-rehabilitation-reintegration programmes highlight the need for a U-turn in rethinking services. As researchers we can reiterate the importance of acknowledging different levels of causation of housing deprivation and homelessness. The importance of the analysis of the interaction and the feed-back between different levels of causation is not a matter of academic pedantry. To ignore or to deny the underlying structural causes, just as to ignore or deny the impact of personal histories and personality features, is disruptive for an effective action. In the public debate about homelessness the policy makers typically tend to ignore or underestimate the impact of structural causes; the lobbyists tend to ignore or underestimate the impact of personal factors. An uninformed debate about homelessness is often translated into costly *ad hoc* programmes and services which fail to address the real needs of homeless people. Services for homeless people are increasingly becoming a market-driven sub-sector driven by an economic cost-benefit rhetoric and (re)production of clients. What we have learned from our research is that services for homeless people are expensive. Costs to the public may be as high as ECU 1,809 per month for one place in an institution for homeless people (Hanover, Germany) and ECU 940 per month for long term housing provision in flats combined with social support for single homeless persons (IMPACT, 1998). These costs to the public are one more in the chain of reasons why services need to be made more accountable to the general public and to their clients.

There are indicators that services are mushrooming across Europe and may be providing more 'care' than the clients actually need (IMPACT, 1998). Under these circumstances reducing the debate about tackling homelessness to a debate about '**models of best practice**' resembles an attempt to reduce the issue to a mere technical task of '**writing-out recipes**' just because a product looks appealing - rather than **looking for remedies** which require more rigour and are less marketable. A thread connecting all the chapters of this book is the ultimate conclusion that there is no quick-fix solution to homelessness. Action is needed at the level of integrated policies which bind social protection, welfare assistance, housing policies, housing support with complementary services providing material and non-material support and care to people with specific multiple needs. The composition of the population that becomes homeless varies between countries and over time. Services for homeless people need to be systematically monitored in terms of the quality of assistance and care and material and non-material benefits for the public and clients. This volume does not prescribe services. Authors identify best research methodologies and highlight models of best policy choices in tackling homelessness.

Reflections about needs for future research

What have we learned from the EUROHOME project?

The main conclusions may be summarised as follows:

1. Innovative and appropriate methodologies and data are a crucial prerequisite for scientifically sound research about homelessness and an indispensable input into policy development and implementation.
2. While acknowledging that progress has been made in recent years in research, serious gaps which impair the development of informed policies have been identified.

3. Available data on homelessness in Europe is sparse and non-comparable. At the national level targeted primary research of homelessness is rare. It is non-existent at the European level.

4. The expert group has developed methodological recommendations, identified methodological requirements and proposed the necessary steps and accompanying measures in order to carry out pertinent policy oriented research about homelessness.

5. The risk concept is important for understanding homelessness. Risk situations are affecting more people due to the employment crisis and new policy trends. Vulnerability factors are multiplying due to the growing duration of risk situations and loosening of social bonds. The area of vulnerability is potentially more of a problem than the entity of current exclusion would suggest.

6. The whole range of policies for fighting poverty and ensuring social protection are important but that they are not sufficient as is shown by the actual existence of homelessness even in systems with widespread general protection.

7. The policies for fighting homelessness which are identified as feasible are: multi-facetal (as opposed to mono-facetal), integrated (versus segmented), long term (versus short term), preventive (versus curative) structural (versus individual) with participation of the homeless (versus imposed by public authorities).

8. It is noted that there are two trends in service provision. The first one is a kind of 'super-market approach' as is focused on provision of services without examining whether these are actually determined by client needs. The second one is based on a more thorough assessment of problems to be tackled.

9. Better understanding of the identity crises of homeless people and their self-perception could be of great policy value and be employed in the evaluation of services.

10. It is necessary to learn more about the role and functioning of family and informal networks of socially vulnerable people so that targeted measures can be developed and benefits transferred to reinforce the existing networks, rather than just to continue channelling more and more resources and services to sheltering and assisting people once they fall through the personal safety nets.

11. Integrated policy models developed in Denmark and Finland are identified and described as models of best policy and practice in preventing homelessness and assisting homeless people. It is acknowledged, however, that even in these countries people with multiple problems fall out of the system of standard social and welfare protection. Complementary services for crisis intervention are needed and exist even in countries with strong integrated policy approach. Services for the homeless who have multiple, albeit, fast changing problems prove to be efficient instruments of reintegration providing that there is a continuation between general social and welfare protection and crisis intervention.

12. In addressing the issue of models of good practice we could not go beyond a descriptive level as no resources were available for field research. Only contextual

conclusions could be drawn about the impact of policies to combat housing exclusion. The future research agenda is determined by the need to implement policy impact studies using modern methodologies.

13. In the current mainstream stock-taking of 'best' practice in the domain of service provision models are generally identified on the basis of what service providers intend to achieve and on self-evaluation. Criteria for the measurement of success are usually set by service providers and outputs and outcomes remain beyond the critical analysis of performance from the point of view of other institutions and clients.

What can researchers further say about homelessness?

14. Researchers can further contribute to the development of conceptual and methodological aspects of homelessness as a specific condition and as part of broader phenomena of social integration and exclusion in advanced welfare states.

15. Researchers can improve data and make extensive use of modern methods for data analysis in order to end the 'game of numbers' about homelessness and housing aspects of deprivation. Researchers have the know-how to gather credible information needed to shape effective policies and efficient services.

16. The composition of the homeless population varies between countries and over time. Researchers can monitor which social processes are contributing to the '*fragilisation*' of particular risk groups and which risks are conducive to homelessness in a longitudinal perspective and a dynamic social setting.

17. Researchers can contribute to the better understanding of requirements for effective social inclusion by further analysing coping strategies of people living under severe housing stress in dilapidated housing estates, crime ridden neighbourhoods, conflict burdened households, overcrowded apartments, overburdened by housing costs or living in transitional emergency accommodation or supported housing.

18. Researchers can study changes in patterns of homelessness between countries and over time in order to distinguish temporary maladjustment which can be addressed through palliative measures from structurally induced housing deprivation which may be of a more lasting nature and which may require fundamental changes in mainstream housing, social and welfare policies.

19. Researchers can contribute to the assessment of the monetary and non-monetary costs of social and housing integration and monetary and non-monetary benefits for the public and individuals and families affected by deprivation.

20. The domain of service provision is a policy twilight zone. Researchers can break the dead lock of the mainstream debate about services and new partnerships which is more based on ideologies than on sound knowledge. The debate about **innovative-models-which-are-(presumably)-transferable-although-we-do-not-know-whether-they-actually-work-and- how-much-they-actually-cost** has not contributed much to tackling homelessness or social exclusion for that matter.

21. We know that services are mushrooming and there are doubts that they may be operating as revolving doors for the homeless. They may be providing more care than the client need and/or wish to receive. Researchers can analyse effectiveness and efficacy of crisis intervention and supported housing.

22. We know that there is fragmentation of services, competition between service providers, lack of co-operation between specialised services. Researchers can analyse effectiveness and efficacy of partnerships.

23. We know that services for homeless people are highly costly, not sufficiently needs based and their success rate in terms of outputs and outcomes is generally unknown. Researchers can contribute to the development of adequate monitoring systems which will make service providers more accountable to the public and to their clients.

What can researchers further say about policies and services?

24. Researchers have recognised that there is an urgent cognitive and policy need to undertake methodologically sound evaluations of policies and services by means of:

- policy impact studies;
- performance measurements of services from the point of view of providers, other institutions and clients.

25. Researcher can develop a methodology for housing and welfare policy impact studies.

26. Researchers can develop service performance measurement methodology.

27. Researchers can develop standards of service delivery in the field of supported accommodation assistance which take into account the needs and points of view of users.

28. Researchers can use their research tools to monitor the impact of policies and performance of services on a rigorous and systematic basis.

As researchers we have learned to think long and work fast. We have already translated most pertinent components from the above list of 'can do' into project proposals and submitted them to the funding agencies. We have proposed concrete outputs and are now waiting for concrete outcomes.

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APPENDIX 1

**COPING WITH HOMELESSNESS: PROBLEMS TO BE TACKLED
AND BEST PRACTICES IN EUROPE**
Dr Dragana Avramov editor

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