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UNECE Group of Experts on
Population and Housing Censuses

Homeless: a new approach in Italian Population Census and Household surveys

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Towards a new approach based on registers and targeted surveys

- The **2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme** recognizes population and housing censuses as an important source for supplying disaggregated data needed for the measurement of progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with special attention in assessing the situation of people by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics including people experiencing homelessness.
- The primary objective of the Population Census is the **counting of people who habitually reside** in the country. However, **some demographic targets**, for housing insecurity or for particular living conditions, are **difficult to intercept on the territory**, therefore **exposed to a high risk of undercover**. They require specific enumerated methods, different from those generally used for the rest of the population.
- Considering the need for a count of homeless people in all Italian municipalities as part of the Population and Housing Census, and the opportunity to design and carry out two ad hoc surveys, an interdepartmental **Taskforce** has been set up **to study and define methodological and organizational solutions.**

Towards a new approach based on registers and targeted surveys

CHALLENGES

- Traditional methods of population census are limited in their ability to capture the complex and dynamic nature of homelessness.
- People experiencing homelessness, due to lack a fixed domicile, cannot be counted using standard address list-based approaches like those most often used in the Census and household surveys.
- To overcome the limitations of traditional population census methods and gain deeper insights into homelessness, Istat is implementing an innovative methodological approach characterized by an integrated approach systems based on Population Registries and targeted surveys.
- Reconciling the information needs of the Population Census (counting) with those of the Extreme Poverty Survey (estimating size and detecting demographic and social characteristics).

Homeless people: the ETHOS Typology and Population Census Regulation

The **ETHOS European Typology** identifies conceptual categories of severe housing exclusion divided into 13 operational categories, indicating the absence of (adequate) housing. These conceptual categories are:

1.
Rooflessness

2.
Houselessness

3. In insecure
housing
conditions

4. In inadequate
housing
conditions

For the **Population Census**, according to **Regulation (EU) 2017_543**, the observation field for homeless is:

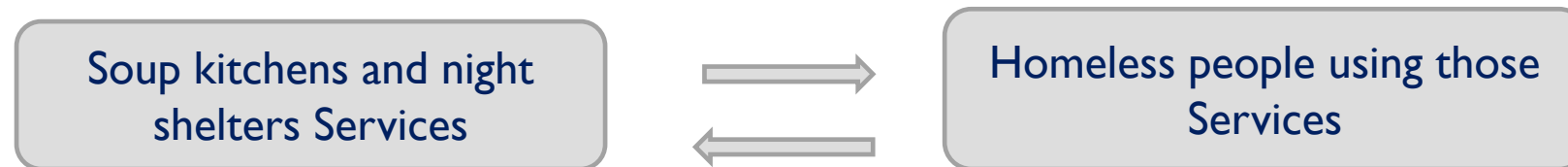
*”**Homeless persons** (HST.M. 2.2. and HST.H.2.2.) are persons **living in the streets without a shelter** that would fall within the scope of living quarters (primary homelessness) **or persons moving frequently between temporary accommodation** (secondary homelessness)”.*

The 2021 Permanent Population Census: homeless people

- In the **2021 Population and Housing Census**, for the first time, **Registers were used to obtain personal information on homeless people**, completing the count and defining the demographic structure of the enumerated population.
- Census data were supplemented with information obtained from a **specific survey** in all municipal registries **on specific population segments** (not previously involved in the sample surveys of the Permanent Census): a) people living in institutional household; b) people residing in authorized camps or tolerated and spontaneous settlements; c) homeless registered in the Registry at dedicated addresses for homeless.
- The first and second editions of this ad hoc survey were conducted on the addresses, whether real or fictitious, where homeless people are registered in the Population Registry.
- The addresses were identified from the Basic Register of Individuals (RBI), and the municipal registry operators verified and updated them. Simultaneously, the total number of individuals registered at the confirmed addresses (separated by Italians and foreigners/stateless, and by gender) was collected. According to the data provided from the Population Census the homeless persons registered in the municipal registers at the end of 2021 amount to **just over 96,000**, almost **38%** of them were **foreign nationals**.

Survey on homeless individuals using soup kitchens and night shelter services (2011, 2014)

- The **first targeted research** that led to the official estimate of the number of homeless people at the national level was carried out in **2011**, by an agreement with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the fio.PSD and the Italian Caritas. The survey was carried out **using a different methodology from that adopted by Istat for Household sample surveys**.
- The survey tried to intercept homeless individuals, in the places where they go to receive the **services** they needs; specifically, the centres where soup kitchens and night shelter services are provided have been considered.
- Objective: to **estimate the size** and identify **demographic and social characteristics** of the homeless.
- Sampling strategy: **indirect sampling** using a sampling framework indirectly related to the target population.



- The sampling basis was provided by the services provided (meals served and beds) related to the types of services taken into account (Soup kitchens and night shelters Services).

Survey on homeless people NOT using soup kitchens and night shelter services (2014)

In 2014, Istat carried out an **experimental survey on homeless people contacted by the Street Units** which was complementary to that conducted at the soup kitchens and night shelters.

The survey was carried out by the Street Units that carry out support interventions for persons living in a state of social marginalization directly on the territory.

The definition of Street Units has been developed by an intense collaboration between different experts.

It has been estimated (Istat, 2014) that the proportion of homeless people not included in the estimate of the survey at the soup kitchens and night shelters services is 3,5%, value obtained from the ratio between the homeless people contacted by the Street Units who do not attend the soup kitchens and night shelters services (estimated at 63) and the total number of homeless people in Turin (estimated at 1,792).

The Extreme Poverty Survey: Survey on homeless people using soup kitchens and night shelters

Istat is planning a **new Survey on homeless people using soup kitchens and night shelters services** following the previous surveys (National research on the condition of the homeless in Italy).

- **Observation field:** people living in public spaces (on the street, barracks, abandoned cars, caravans, sheds), night shelter and/or are forced to spend many hours of the day in a public (open) space; in hostels for homeless people/ temporary accommodation; accommodation for specific support interventions (for single homeless people, couples and groups). Excluded: people living in overcrowded conditions; receiving hospitality guaranteed by relatives or friends; living in occupied accommodation or in structured camps in the cities.
- According to the ETHOS Typology, the observation field relates to the following operational categories: 1. People Living Rough, 2. People in emergency accommodation; 3. People in accommodation for the homeless people; 4. People in accommodation for women only partially - excluded are women in shelters for women victims of violence, 5. People in accommodation for immigrant only partially- asylum seekers and refugees are excluded.

Survey on homeless individuals using soup kitchens and night shelter services

The **observation field** includes homeless **not registered** or resident in **municipalities** other than those where they live.

- **Main variables:** Condition of homeless; Duration of the condition of homeless; Socio-demographic characteristics (age, sex, citizenship, country of birth, educational qualification); Registration in the Registry of Resident Population, critical events and other information related to the homeless condition.
- Based on the previous survey, the survey may cover a list of municipalities including the metropolitan cities.
- The **sample design** is a **2-stage stratified**. The **1-stage units** are the **opening days** of the organizations providing services for homeless people, while the **2-stage units** are the **services provided** by the organizations associated with the target population.

The Extreme Poverty Survey PIT on homeless people not using soup kitchens and night shelters services

The Extreme Poverty Survey, also, assumes planning a **Point-in-Time (PIT) on homeless people not using soup kitchens and night shelters services** in the metropolitan cities. The observation field of the PIT is the homeless people living on the street (Primary homelessness) .

- The survey at the Soup kitchens and night shelter services and the PIT survey on homeless people not using soup kitchens and night shelters services will be complementary in the metropolitan cities.

Challenges: identify the existence of a network of Street Units within the metropolitan cities; alternatively identify interviewers's teams; check the definition of methodological rules to control the risk of multiple counts and sub-counting population coverage in the metropolitan cities.

Way out: relevant stakeholders will be involved in the Survey's design as well as in the collection of data; the reporting period of the PIT Survey must fall within the reporting period of the Survey on persons using the soup kitchens and night shelter services.

The homeless people within the Permanent Census of population

- The homeless figure suffers from **under-coverage** as it is derived from a survey that captures only the registered component in the Population Registry, and, from **over-coverage** as it includes other types of people (for example, women victims of violence or minors in pre-adoption) who do not strictly fall under the category of homeless/roofless. As known for the purposes of counting and defining the total census population, it does not guarantee an exhaustive enumeration of the subgroups in question.

under-coverage
Homeless people NOT
registered in the Population
Registry

over-coverage
Homeless people registered
in the Population Registry
for other reasons

Key features and advantages of the new approach

- **The estimate of the number of homeless persons registered** in the Population Registry, obtained through the Soup kitchen and night shelter services survey, **will contribute to the final estimation** of the number of homeless persons.
- **The estimate of homeless persons NOT registered in the Population Registry**, obtained through the soup kitchen and night shelter services surveys, **will allow integrating the data** in relation to the underestimation due to the absence of the persons not registered in the Population Registry (e.g., Extra-UE Irregular foreigners). The estimate of the aggregate homeless NOT registered in the Population Registry may be used to supplement the final estimate of homeless people from the ad hoc survey at the registry.
- Furthermore, the survey on homeless people using Soup kitchen and night shelter services will allow, for the first time, to **estimate the number of irregular or illegal homeless foreigners** within the population Census.
- **Integration into the Basic Register of Individuals (RBI)** of data collected through the Extreme Poverty Surveys will be carried out downstream of the survey. For the integration/correction of census data **the profile approach** will be used: for each record (variables: age, gender, citizenship, etc.) will be provided the probability of inclusion ('0/1').

Concluding remarks

- **Measuring homelessness** is a **challenging task**. Condition of **homelessness** is defined **spatially** and **temporally**. The fluidity of the phenomenon makes its measurement more challenging.
- An **integrated approach** with a combination of **multiple data sources** (administrative and survey data) and methodological tools may lead to **regularly monitor** homeless individuals.
- The new statistical approach aims to:
 1. separate the homeless target from other types of people that municipalities register at fictitious and real addresses but do not fall within the category of homeless in the strict sense
 2. broaden the homeless target with homeless people not listed in the municipal population Registries (e.g., foreign homeless individuals no EU without a valid/non-renewed residence permit).
- A **more in-depth** and **targeted understanding** of the phenomenon (administrative and survey-based) may **allows** for the development of **preventive actions** to protect people most at risk of falling into marginalization and to tackling extreme poverty.

Thank you!

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