

POLICY STATEMENT

HOW TO MEASURE THE EFFECT OF POLICIES ADDRESSING HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS Recommendations for Indicators on Housing and Homelessness

FEANTSA calls on all EU Member States to include indicators on housing exclusion and homelessness in their future National Action Plans against social exclusion and poverty (NAPsIncl).

FEANTSA calls on all of its member organisations to encourage their national governments not only to develop an integrated and comprehensive homelessness strategy in the framework of the NAPsIncl, but also to measure the effects of these policies by including indicators on housing exclusion and homelessness.

I. INTRODUCTION

In March 2000, the Lisbon European Council launched the EU Strategy against poverty and social exclusion (EU Strategy). In December 2000, the Nice European Council agreed on a set of Common Objectives for the EU Strategy and decided that indicators had to be developed to allow an effective monitoring of the EU Strategy. The Stockholm European Council, in March 2001, gave a mandate to the Council to adopt a set of commonly agreed social inclusion indicators by the end of the year. These indicators had to allow the Member States and the Commission to monitor progress towards the goal set by the Lisbon European Council of making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010.

The Social Protection Committee (SPC), consisting of representatives of governments of the EU Member States, was given the task to develop common indicators. The SPC set up the Subgroup on Indicators, consisting of representatives of the governments of the EU Member States with specific expertise in the area social inclusion indicators, to prepare the report. In October 2001 the SPC produced a “Report on Indicators in the field of poverty and social exclusion”.

Also during 2002, the Belgian Presidency of the EU commissioned the “Atkinson group” to prepare the report “Indicators for Social Inclusion in the European Union” which included recommendations for indicators on housing and homelessness.

In December 2001, the Laeken European Council adopted the set of 18 indicators proposed by the SPC. Most of the 18 indicators relate to income and employment. Only one indicator referred to housing - i.e. *Low-income rate transfers with breakdown by tenure status*.

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In their report the SPC recognised that they were unable to present a proposal for housing indicators, but agreed on the following common approach: “NAPsIncl should contain quantitative information covering three issues: (1) **decent housing**, (2) **housing costs**, (3) **homelessness and other precarious housing conditions**.”

FEANTSA has put together recommendations for quantitative indicators covering these three issues. Housing exclusion is a complex problem. In proposing quantitative indicators we recognise that this does not capture the multi-faceted nature of housing exclusion, which also involves factors related to social service provision, access to employment, education, health services and cultural provisions. We also recognise that quantitative indicators do not measure the quality of life and other qualitative issues more associated with homelessness and therefore intend to return to this in the future.

We believe that in order to monitor the effectiveness of the EU Strategy - referring back to the SPC recommendations - data should be collected on:

- Adequate housing - this should cover the quality and the availability of housing.
- Housing costs - this should cover the affordability of housing.
- Homelessness - this should cover all those in acute homelessness or threatened by homelessness.

We take note of the SPC suggestion that indicators should be prioritised by placing them in the following three levels:

- Primary indicators
- Secondary indicators
- Third level indicators - those that Member States identify themselves to highlight specificities in particular areas.

II. HOUSING INDICATORS

Adequate housing

In order to propose indicators on housing exclusion, we realise that it is first necessary to define what is meant by the term adequate housing. Definitions have been put forward by the UN and other agencies. In summary, adequate housing is a place you can live and perform your basic and personal needs. It therefore encompasses:

- Adequate privacy
- Adequate space
- Security of tenure
- Structural stability
- Adequate lighting, heating and ventilation

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- Wastewater removal and sanitation
- Drinking water supply
- Affordability
- A location, which allows access to employment, health, education, childcare and other social facilities.

We recognise that because of national cultural, social and economic considerations it would be impossible to find indicators to cover all the aspects of adequate housing. That is why we are proposing to concentrate on quantitative indicators of **quality**, **availability** and **affordability** of housing.

1.1. Quality

We believe the selected indicators on quality of housing should provide the most explicit evidence of poverty and social exclusion. FEANTSA is of the opinion that the most important indicator on quality of housing should be **fitness for habitation**. This is defined as the number of households living in dwellings classified as unfit for habitation.

In some Member States assessments of unfitness are made with reference to a fitness standard. The common requirements of a fitness standard are that a dwelling:

- Is structurally stable
- Is free from serious damp and mould
- Has adequate provision for lighting, heating and ventilation
- Has an adequate water supply, a waste removal system and sanitation
- Has satisfactory facilities for the preparation and cooking of food

We recognize that as there is no agreed EU definition to the fitness for habitation standard, it can only be measured by reference to national standards. This means that although we consider it to be the most important indicator we can only propose **as a third level indicator**. We also recognize that in some Member States there is no national standard for fitness for habitation and therefore call on these states to define a fitness standard.

We therefore propose **overcrowding as the primary indicator** of quality of housing. The commonly used method to measure the extent of overcrowding has been to calculate a simple room rate by dividing the number of persons in a dwelling by the number of habitable rooms (excluding kitchen & bathroom).

In proposing overcrowding we recognise that this dimension is contingent with culture and depends on many other factors such as the quality of the housing unit and its immediate environment (air quality, noise levels etc.). We therefore propose the **third level indicator of habitable space per person (square meters)** for Member States to include in their NAPsIncl. Where definitions of average standards of space per person exist, we propose **as a**

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2nd level indicator those living in habitable space of less than 50% of the accepted average standard.

1.2. Availability

We consider that another important aspect of housing exclusion is the availability of adequate housing. In order to measure availability it is necessary to measure fluctuations in both supply and demand. We propose as the primary indicator the number of housing units available (reserved) for persons with social need.

Linked to this would be the 2nd level indicator waiting time before a reserved housing unit becomes available¹. We propose also that Member States should also measure fluctuations in social housing stocks by reference to annual completions of social housing dwellings.

1.3. Affordability

Another important aspect of housing exclusion is housing costs. In the framework of the EU Strategy indicators should focus as much as possible on the affordability of housing for people living below the poverty line. We propose as a primary indicator the percentage of individuals living in households where the net disposable income after total expenditure on housing is below 60% national equivalised median income. FEANTSA believes that it is necessary to consider total expenditure on housing as opposed to rental costs. Also in measuring net disposable income the need to identify and explain differences in housing support methods and allocations is avoided. Also this indicator is tenure neutral.

III. HOMELESSNESS or HOUSING EXCLUSION INDICATORS

The SPC in their report agreed that the NAPsIncl should contain quantitative information on homelessness and other precarious housing conditions. Comparative national statistics are lacking. In 2002 the 15 National Correspondents of FEANTSA's European Observatory on Homelessness were asked to produce a national report on the statistics relating to homelessness and housing exclusion in their countries. The reports showed wide differences in the availability and nature of homelessness statistics. The "Review of Statistics on Homelessness in Europe" prepared for FEANTSA by Edgar, Doherty and Meert comments: 'There is no single and consistent method of collecting data on homelessness employed by

¹ Here there is a wide variation between countries, in Germany housing units are reserved for persons with social need whereas in other countries this would refer to the general availability of social housing units.

the national statistical offices or other official sources of statistics in the Member States of the European Union’.

We consider that **it is the role of national statistical offices to count the numbers of homeless people and those threatened by homelessness**. Therefore we propose a European initiative to provide a legal basis upon which to develop public statistics on homelessness by 2010.

In terms of numbers we propose 2 homelessness indicators:

- Acute homelessness (roofless and/or homeless)
- Threatened by homelessness

1. **Acute homelessness**

The only accurate measurement of homelessness is the number of people without permanent accommodation, without a place to call home, this includes:

- **Rooflessness.**
- **Houselessness**

Rooflessness can be considered as absolute homelessness, this refers to rough sleepers and those moving between overnight emergency shelters and sleeping rough.

Houselessness refers to those living in temporary accommodation such as bed and breakfast accommodation, long term shelters or institution. Here we also include those about to leave care or be released from prison.

2. **Threatened by homelessness**

As a primary indicator for the number of people threatened by homelessness we propose to take the **number of people (households) under immediate threat of eviction**. These numbers can be counted as a recognised legal procedure comes into play once an eviction notice has been served.

We also propose as **2nd level indicator the number of people in rent arrears for a period of 6 months or more.**

All proposed indicators should have breakdowns by age, sex, household type.

3. **Quantitative information on the profile of the homeless population**

At the same time it is important to build up information on the profile and needs of homeless people. **Only the providers of services to homeless people are in the position to**

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provide data on profile and needs. They can collect these data both at the point of entry into the service and during the provision of support services. The service providers can collect information, which has a high degree of accuracy while at the same time respects confidentiality and data protection requirements.

We propose a European initiative on the integration of service provider based national documentation systems at European level. FEANTSA plans to conduct a study into the nature of the data, which is presently being collected by homeless service providers.

SUMMARY

FEANTSA proposes that all future NAPsIncl should include quantitative **housing indicators**, these should include the following:

- Adequate housing
 - Quality of housing - Overcrowding.
 - Availability of housing - the number of housing units available for persons in social need
 - Affordability - the percentage of individuals living in households where the net disposable income after total expenditure on housing is below 60% national equivalised median income.

FEANTSA also proposes 2 **homelessness indicators**:

- Acute homelessness - the number of people in a situation of rooflessness or houselessness
- Threatened by homelessness - the number of people (households) under immediate threat of eviction.

Homelessness in Europe needs to be tackled by effective policies, at the same time Member States need to develop indicators in order to gather reliable data on homelessness and to monitor the effectiveness of their policies.

Policy paper adopted by the Administrative Council of FEANTSA on 9 November 2002. For more information, please contact Virginie Henriet at the FEANTSA office (Tel 003225386669 / Virginie.henriet@feantsa.org).