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ENUMERATION OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

Data collection on homelessness in statistical offices in France, with a focus on census data

<u>Note by the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE), France</u>

I.   INTRODUCTION

1.   The data collected by the French census on homelessness needs to be viewed in the larger perspective of other data produced by the public system of statistics on the same issue.
In France there are two main public sources of statistical data on homelessness:

(a)   Data collected by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE);

(b)   Data collected by the Statistical Office of the Ministry of Social Affairs (DREES).

2.   Other official data collected as a product of administrative activity, can be useful but is limited in scope.

II.   THE MAIN SOURCES OF DATA COLLECTED BY THE INSEE AND THE DREES

3.   At INSEE, the two sources dealing with homelessness are:

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(a)   The Census;
(b)   The national survey of users of accommodation and hot meal distribution services (first conducted in 2001: SD2001 with the next one in 2012: SD2012). A methodological survey on rough sleepers (EMSA2009, SA standing for sans-abri which is the French for rough sleepers) was conducted in the city of Toulouse in 2009 in order to provide guidelines to improve the coverage of SD2012 for this sub-population.

4.   At DREES, the most important source on homelessness is the survey of Social Establishments, conducted approximately every fourth year since 1983 (ES survey: last ES2004, next ES2008).

III.   THE FRENCH CENSUS

5.   The 1999 Census was the last to enumerate the entire population simultaneously. Since 2004, the census is an annual survey (a "rolling census"). Not everyone is enumerated at the same time. The data collection depends on the place of residence. There are two categories of places of residence:

(a)   Municipalities of less than 10,000 inhabitants;
(b)   Municipalities of 10,000 inhabitants or more.

A.   Municipalities of less than10,000 inhabitants

6.   One fifth of the total number of municipalities in this size category is surveyed each year. For a given municipality, a comprehensive census takes place every fifth year. Conventional dwellings are surveyed exhaustively in January-February of that year; people sleeping rough and mobile homes the first two days of the data collection; people in institutions have been surveyed in March of the same year for the 2004-2009 period, but for the following 5 year period (beginning in 2010) they will be surveyed in January-February and for the institutions belonging to Category 6 (emergency shelters) on the first two days of the data collection, like the rough sleepers.

B.   Municipalities of 10,000 inhabitants and over

7.   In conventional dwellings, each year, about 8% of the population is surveyed in January-February. People sleeping rough and people living in mobile homes are comprehensively enumerated the first two days of the census surveys, every five years starting in 2006 (2011, etc.), in all large municipalities at the same time.

8.   People in institutions: all institutions of the same municipality are enumerated every five years, except for municipalities where the number of institutions is very large and one fifth is enumerated each year. This enumeration has taken place in March for the 2004-2009 period, but for the following 5 year period (beginning in 2010) people in institutions will be surveyed in January-February and for the institutions belonging to Category 6 (emergency shelters) on the first two days of the data collection, like the rough sleepers.
The homeless in the census

9.   There are different data collection procedures for different segments of the homeless:

(a)   People defined as « usually » sleeping rough (a different definition from the SD surveys where it is the housing situation the night before the survey that is used);

(b)   People accommodated by services in hotels or conventional dwellings (apartments);

(c)   People accommodated in collective (short stay) shelters and hostels;

(d)   People accommodated in collective (long stay) shelters and hostels.

C.   People defined as « usually » sleeping rough

10.   Rough sleepers, defined by the census as those "usually" sleeping rough, are comprehensively enumerated by municipalities in the first two days of the dwelling census surveys, the year of the dwelling census in small municipalities, in 2006 (2011, etc.) for the large ones.

11.   In 2006, homeless agencies have been consulted and this should be reiterated in 2011. According to the directions given to enumerators, it is necessary to prepare the data collection with the NGOs and the social services of the municipalities, in order to list the various areas that should be visited by the enumerators when collecting data about people sleeping rough or living in mobile homes.
2006 estimate: 13,700 in metropolitan France.

D.   People accommodated in hotels or conventional dwellings (apartments) by NGOs or other agencies

12.   In hotel rooms: if for a short period, they should be enumerated as people sleeping rough (in theory); if on a permanent basis (for a long stay), they are enumerated with people who have paid for their room, if their address is sampled, and cannot be distinguished from other people living in a hotel.
In apartments: they cannot be distinguished from other people living in conventional dwellings.

E.   Homeless people accommodated in collective shelters and hostels

13.   From 2004 to 2009: people accommodated in collective shelters and hostels have been enumerated at the time of the collective accommodation survey (in March).
Only people in short stay shelters can be distinguished in the results.
People in long-stay hostels are in one category with other long-stay institutions (retirement homes, long-stay medical centres, etc.).

14.   From 2010: data will be collected in institutions and in conventional dwellings at the same time (to avoid double counting). Data about category 6 institutions (emergency shelters, where people sleeping rough sometimes spend the night) will be collected on the first two days of the data collection, at the same time as the rough sleepers.

15.   A possible modification for improvement, recommended by a recent report on marginal housing situations but still not under study by the Census services, could be to split the category

"long stay institutions" into several sub-categories where shelters and hostels for homeless people would be apart from other types of long-stay institutions.

F.   Other non conventional dwellings

16.   In France, people living in some non conventional dwellings such as shanties etc. are also enumerated.
In smaller municipalities, they are enumerated in the dwelling census (their dwelling could be classified as « habitation de fortune » if the inhabitants declare it as such).
In larger municipalities, if their address is listed in the repertory of addresses (the RIL), which is the sample frame for the census, they are enumerated (if selected) with the conventional dwellings; if their address is not listed, they are enumerated as rough sleepers.

G.   Limits and advantages of the census

17.   People in long stay hostels, as well as in hotels or flats provided by accommodation services cannot be distinguished from people in similar housing situations (other long stay collective accommodation, hotels or flats rented by the person) but not homeless.

18.   Double counting and underestimates for the most precarious situations (sleeping rough, shanties), heterogeneity of the data collection for the rough sleepers are also a limitation of the census.
The census can be useful at a local level (though the level of municipalities should be avoided for very mobile situations). The estimate for large municipalities is updated every fifth year.

IV.   OTHER INSEE AND DREES SURVEYS

A.   National surveys on homelessness conducted by the INSEE

19.   The first survey was conducted in 2001; the next one will take place in 2012.
These surveys interview users of accommodation and hot meal distribution services. The questionnaire is very detailed (920 variables for the 2001 survey).

20.   Rough sleepers are defined not by their usual situation as in the census but by the one the night before the survey.
These surveys are statistically significant for metropolitan France, Paris metropolitan area, and other cities of 20,000 inhabitants and over taken together.
A methodological survey has taken place in 2009, in Toulouse, to prepare the 2012 survey and ensure the maximum coverage of rough sleepers.

21.   Limits and advantages: SD2001 cannot be used at the local level except for the Paris metropolitan area. There will be no new survey of this type before 2012, so they cannot be used for regular monitoring of the situation.

22.   Answers are given by the homeless themselves; the data is very detailed, which is invaluable for a better understanding of the processes that led to homelessness and the living conditions of the homeless.

The census and the SD surveys are completed by questions in other surveys on past homeless episodes (2002-2003 Health survey, 2006 Housing survey).

B.   The ES survey by the DREES

23.   The ES survey has been conducted by the Statistical Services of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (DREES), every fourth year since 1983.
The last two surveys were conducted in 2004 and in 2008 (data for the end of the year).
There is no data on rough sleepers, only on people accommodated by NGOs and other agencies in collective shelters and hostels listed in the sample frame (an improved version of the FINESS database).

24.   The limits of the survey: The survey is based on forms filled by the service providers, not on questions answered by the homeless.
The sample frame doesn't cover all possible shelters (there are currently attempts to improve it). Progress in recent years have been made by taking into account other forms of accommodation for the homeless, such as hotel rooms and shared flats funded through the ALT grant.
Advantage: it dates back from 1983, and is now conducted every fourth year.

25.   When is data available?
2001: SD2001 survey
2004: ES survey
2006: Rough sleepers census (larger municipalities, global estimate)
2008: ES survey
2011: Rough sleepers census (larger municipalities, global estimate)
2012: ES survey, SD2012 survey
Unfortunately, there are not many figures at a local level at a time when the progress of decentralization would make them necessary.

C.   Other data from public agencies

26.   Those figures should be considered carefully, because they are more linked to the activity of (or the funding by) an agency than an accurate evaluation of the number of people in a given situation.

27.   Double counting is frequent and some situations are not covered.
Examples: data from the DGAS[1] (which funds a large part of the long-stay shelters), from the CNAF[2] (data of the beds funded by the ALT grant, but double counting is possible with the DGAS figures, since a bed can have multiple sources of funding).

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[1] Direction générale des affaires sociales (National bureau of social affairs)
[2] Caisse nationale des allocations familiales.