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The future of population statistics

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

Note by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat)*

Summary

Considering the need for a count of homeless persons in all Italian municipalities as part of the Population and Housing Census, and the opportunity to design and carry out two ad hoc surveys, a Task Force has been set up to study and define methodological and organizational solutions. In this document, we focus on the new approach to the homeless count within the Italian Population Census and Households surveys. The fundamental objective of the Population Census is to count the people who habitually reside in the country. In order to count homeless people, such an elusive or hard-to-reach population, the Permanent Census used municipal population registers. The Extreme Poverty Survey plans to carry out a new Survey on Homeless People using soup kitchens and night shelter services, in continuity with the two previous survey editions ('National Survey on the condition of the homeless in Italy', Istat 2011, 2014). The field of observation defined in previous editions of the survey includes: homeless people living on the street (primary homeless) and homeless people who resort to facilities that provide soup kitchens and night shelter services for homeless people (secondary homeless). By examining the methodologies employed in Italy to enumerate the homeless within population censuses and their limitations, this study seeks to provide valuable insights towards the design of ad-hoc household surveys within the census of population. This is part of an ongoing Istat work stream.

*Prepared by Vanessa Ioannoni and Evelina Paluzzi. NOTE: This document is the joint work of the authors. However, section I is written by V. Ioannoni; sections II.A and II.B by E. Paluzzi; sections II.C and II.D by V. Ioannoni; sections III.A and III.B by E. Paluzzi; section III.C by V. Ioannoni; and section IV by E. Paluzzi.

NOTE: The designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

I. Introduction

1. Homelessness is a pervasive social issue, one of the extreme forms of destitution, requiring urgent attention from politicians and researchers around the world. Homelessness is, however, a complex phenomenon and may take many different forms and shapes.
2. The global economic crisis and COVID-19 have exacerbated inequality and seem to have aggravated the homelessness situation in Europe.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has been a difficult period for everyone and especially for homeless people, one of the most vulnerable groups in European society (Pleace et al., 2020). Homeless people are more at risk because they often – especially those experiencing long-term and repeated homelessness – have underlying health conditions. People experiencing street homelessness and those living in emergency shelters experienced difficulties in self-isolating, entering lockdown, and following other recommended preventative measures to keep safe. People living in temporary accommodation faced challenges around overcrowding.
4. The profile of the homeless population¹ has been changing. More young people and children, migrants, and other disadvantaged minorities, women and families are increasingly at risk of homelessness.
5. The lack of comprehensive data does not allow for adequate monitoring of homelessness in the European Union (EU).
6. Difficulties in measuring homelessness arise because it is hard to agree on a definition of what constitutes homelessness. O’Connell (2003) makes the point that, despite the huge volume of research into homelessness in both the United States of America and the United Kingdom, quantification of homelessness remains elusive.
7. Debates about a shared definition of homelessness that can be measured in a consistent and comparable way across Europe have involved researchers for many years. They continued in the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Action CA15218 – ‘Measuring Homelessness in Europe’². This led to a special issue of the European Journal of Homelessness (Vol. 14 No. 3, 2020) which centred on measurement when someone is in a physical and legal situation that crosses the line between having a home and not having one.
8. Homeless people are a diverse population with various life histories and experiences, and researchers have employed a spectrum of definitions depending on the scope, nature and purpose of the study (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010).
9. The challenge of providing a unique, all-encompassing definition and measuring this population is also due to the transience of the homeless population. People without secure accommodation change location, status and living arrangements and this makes it difficult to delineate their diverse and changeable living situations.
10. It has been acknowledged widely that the most common definition of homelessness as ‘street homelessness’ or ‘rooflessness’ represents only a minority of homeless persons and is associated with particular groups in particular places.
11. The European Observatory on Homelessness has carried out a study to build a definition of homelessness and housing exclusion that is wider than rooflessness and that represents a compromise between different national approaches. In order to create a common framework for the definition of homelessness, the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing exclusion (ETHOS) was developed by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) in 2011, which has played a key role in broadening debates on homelessness counting. The ETHOS typology, which takes into account physical,

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1061&langId=en>

² <https://www.cost.eu/actions/CA15218/>

social and legal aspects of a ‘home’, classifies homeless people according to four main living situations, i.e. rooflessness, houselessness, living in insecure housing, and living in inadequate housing.

12. Since 2000, homelessness has emerged as a clear thematic priority in the EU efforts to tackle poverty and social exclusion (European Commission, 2014).
13. An important survey to measure the extent of material deprivation and social exclusion is the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey. The survey has been established to provide data to be used for the structural indicators of social cohesion in the European Union. In the EU-SILC survey, overcrowding and housing deprivation are amongst the indicators of the social inclusion strand, but other categories of homelessness are not included.
14. In 2022, in Italy just under a quarter of the population (24.4 per cent) was at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Istat, 2022), almost the same as in 2021 (25.2 per cent). Despite the recovery of the economy significantly reducing the population in the condition of serious material and social deprivation (4.5 per cent compared to 5.9 per cent in 2021), the population at risk of poverty remains stable (20.1 per cent).
15. Moreover, as revealed in detail by FEANTSA (2009), there is a large variety in the quality and availability of data on homelessness in the separate member States, both regarding statistics in general and regarding information on the different categories of homelessness as used in the ETHOS-typology.
16. As regards migrant and ethnic minority homelessness, reliable data are almost completely lacking at the level of the EU. Quantitative data on migrant housing and homelessness (based on census information) is sometimes obtainable at a national level. These studies tend to report largely on only one area (often large cities) and hardly provide for a systematic comparison between different migrant groups. For smaller groups or recent immigrants (e.g., seasonal workers or asylum seekers and refugees) available data are particularly scarce. Also the gender dimension of migrant homelessness remains largely underexposed in many of these national qualitative samples. Generally, work on migrant homelessness reveals that available data are often extremely poor (Busch-Geertsema, V., et al., 2010; European Commission, 2014). Furthermore, homeless migrants, depending on their legal status, often face specific barriers hindering their access to services for homeless people.
17. The 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme³ was approved by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its 46th session and adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in Resolution E/RES/2015/10. The Programme recognizes population and housing censuses as one of the primary sources of data for formulating, implementing and monitoring policies and programmes aimed at inclusive socioeconomic development and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, it 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 to assessing the situation of people by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics including people experiencing homelessness.
18. Population censuses are commonly employed to collect data on the general population, but they can also serve as a valuable tool for capturing information about the homeless population. However, traditional census methods may not account effectively for the complex nature of homelessness. Traditional methods of conducting population censuses have been limited in their ability to capture the complex and dynamic nature of homelessness. Since people experiencing homelessness lack a fixed domicile, they cannot be counted using standard

³ UNSD — Demographic and Social Statistics

address list-based approaches most often used in censuses and household surveys (Bruce D., et al., 2022) To address this issue, various innovative approaches have been developed, including targeted surveys, street counts, service-based counts, and targeted enumeration in specific locations known to have a high concentration of homeless individuals. These methods aim to improve accuracy by reaching out to homeless individuals directly, rather than relying solely on their self-identification in a standard household census. It is crucial to develop new approaches that may provide a more efficient and inclusive understanding of the homeless population. This paper aims to propose an innovative methodological framework that may leverage advancements in integrated systems approaches based on population registers and targeted surveys, aiming to overcome the limitations of traditional population census methods and gain deeper insights into homelessness.

II. Data and methods

19. This section describes the main official sources of homeless population estimates in Italy: the Permanent Population Census and the survey on soup kitchens and night shelter services.

A. ETHOS European classification

20. FEANTSA has developed a classification of homelessness based on a grid of indicators related to severe housing exclusion called ETHOS (European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion), which classifies homeless and severely marginalized people with reference to their housing conditions.
21. The classification identifies four conceptual categories of severe housing exclusion for people:
 - (a) rooflessness
 - (b) houselessness
 - (c) in insecure housing conditions
 - (d) in inadequate housing conditions.
22. These conceptual categories are divided into 13 operational categories, indicating the absence of (adequate) housing.
23. For the population census, according to European Regulation (EU) 2017_543, the field of observation for ‘homeless’ is as follows:

“‘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).”
24. According to the definition in the EU Regulation, homeless persons are therefore:
 - (a) people living on the street without a shelter that would be considered adequate housing (street homeless/ primary homeless);
 - (b) people who frequently move between temporary accommodation (secondary homeless).

B. The 2021 Permanent Population Census in Italy: homeless people

25. The population under study, “homeless people”, due to its peculiarities (including spatial mobility), falls into the category that is often considered hard-to-reach or elusive in the literature.

26. In the 2001 population census, data on the homeless were collected through a ‘point in time’ survey (over the course of one night) in large municipalities. For 2001, the Municipal Census Office (UCC), after a preliminary survey of the territory to identify areas with higher presence of homeless people (such as train stations, public parks), had to carry out the survey of the homeless on 20 October, using surveyors specially appointed by the UCC. They could be assisted by municipal agents to avoid duplication and the survey had to be conducted simultaneously throughout the municipal territory. The household form (‘model CP.1’) was used, and the surveyors completed either List A or List B and their respective Sections II or III, depending on whether or not the persons had their habitual residence in the municipality. The compilation of the form was entrusted to the surveyors.
27. For the 2011 census, respondents were identified based on the Municipal Registry Lists (LAC) and auxiliary lists used to identify potential survey units not listed in the Register. The use of LAC allowed for personalized questionnaires to be sent to families registered in the register as of 1 January 2011. Individuals registered at conventional addresses who were not sent such a questionnaire were enumerated by the UCC. In the case of real addresses corresponding to associations, personalized questionnaires were sent if the number of registered members was less than 200. For addresses with more than 200 registered members, different strategies were adopted: in some cases, personalized questionnaires were sent to the address (for example, the social services office of the municipality); in other cases, they were sent to the UCC which contacted the responsible person of the structure; in yet other cases, the UCC sent enumerators with questionnaires to the association after prior contact with them. In addition to identifying the homeless persons through the LAC, the UCC also had to conduct field surveys of the homeless using specially trained enumerators, assisted by municipal agents, simultaneously across the municipal territory on the reference date of the census (9 October 2011). A preliminary survey of the municipal territory was conducted to identify areas with a higher presence of homeless people. 34,653 homeless individuals were identified for a total of 28,576 families.
28. In the 2021 census, for the first time, registers were used to obtain personal information on these populations, completing the count and defining the demographic structure of the enumerated population. Census data were supplemented with information obtained from a specific survey conducted at all municipal registries on three specific population segments (not previously involved in the sample surveys of the Permanent Census): a) people living in institutional households; b) people residing in authorized camps or tolerated and spontaneous settlements; c) homeless people registered in the register at dedicated addresses, both real and fictitious.

C. Survey on soup kitchens and night shelter services

29. Generally, for the estimation of unknown and elusive populations, reference is made to sampling methods or techniques which allow the unavailability or incompleteness of the population list to be overcome by using the places of attendance or the social links of the population of interest (Inglese F. and Masi A., 2019⁴). The system-based approach of services used by homeless people (James, 1991; Franklin, 2010) uses the places/times of attendance (mostly soup kitchens and night shelters) of the target population (time-location sampling). This approach faces limitations due to not covering that part of the homeless population that does not attend the services involved in the survey, but also has the advantage of being able to refer – for the definition of a probability sample – to a methodology whose theoretical foundations are traceable to indirect sampling (Lavallée, 2007; Deville and Lavallée, 2006).

⁴ Istat working papers n. 5/2019. National Institute of Statistics 5.

30. The first targeted research that led to the official estimate of the number of homeless people at the national level was carried out by Istat in 2011 (Istat, 2011; Istat, 2012; Istat, 2014), following an agreement with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the *Federazione Italiana degli Organismi per le Persone Senza Dimora* (fio.PSD , the Italian Federation of Agencies for the Homeless) and the Italian Caritas. The survey of homelessness was carried out using a different methodology from that adopted by Istat for household sample surveys.
31. The population studied is not traceable to a place of residence and, for its characteristics in the literature, has been defined among those difficult to reach or elusive ('hard-to-reach') populations. The survey on soup kitchens and night shelter services tried to intercept the population of the homeless, or rather a substantial part of it, in the places where the people go to receive the services they need; specifically, the centres where soup kitchens and night shelter services are provided have been considered (Franklin, 2010; De Vitiis et al., 2014a and 2014b; Istat, 2014).
32. The sample design adopted is of the time-location sampling type (Kalton, 2009; Marpsat and Razafindratsima, 2010): the units belonging to the specific population of interest are reached through the selection of the places they frequent and the moments of time in which they attend (Ardilly and Le Blanc, 2001).
33. The national survey carried out in the soup kitchens and night shelters adopted a methodology based on indirect sampling. This theory is based on the idea of using as a basis of sampling statistical units – in the present case the services (meals and beds) provided at soup kitchens and night shelters – associated with the target population (the homeless persons using the above services).
34. In indirect sampling, the estimation procedure is based on the weight-sharing method, the implementation of which requires knowledge of the probabilities of inclusion of the selected sample units (the services provided in the centres) and the connections between the sample units and the target population (services provided and homeless persons) which are not of the one-to-one type (the same homeless person may be associated with more services provided). The individual sample weights are obtained from the probability of inclusion of the services provided, also taking into account the number of connections, or links, between respondents and selected services.
35. The Extreme Poverty Survey plans to carry out a new Survey on Homeless People using soup kitchens and night shelter services in continuity with the two previous survey editions (National research on the condition of the homeless in Italy, Istat 2011, 2014). The observation field defined in previous editions of the survey includes homeless people living in the street (primary homeless) and homeless people using facilities that provide soup kitchens and night shelter services for homeless people (secondary homeless).
36. Defining homelessness has long been a topic of debate. The European ETHOS classification is the most prominent definition and classification of homelessness with an articulated theoretical foundation.
37. The definition of homeless persons adopted within the survey is: a person is considered homeless when he or she is in a state of material and intangible poverty, which is characterized by severe housing distress, that is, the impossibility and/or inability to independently provide for the finding and maintenance of a home in its own sense.
38. According to the previous surveys (Istat 2011 and 2014), the observation field definition includes homeless people and specific subgroups of the homeless, or people living in:
 - (a) in public spaces (on the street, stations, abandoned cars, caravans, sheds)
 - (b) in a night shelter and/or are forced to spend many hours of the day in a public (open) space
 - (c) in hostels for homeless people/temporary accommodation

- (d) in accommodation for specific social support interventions (for single homeless people, couples and groups).
39. Excluded from the field of observation are all persons: living in overcrowded conditions; receiving hospitality guaranteed by relatives or friends; living in occupied accommodation or in structured camps in the cities.
40. According to the European ETHOS classification, this definition relates to the following operational categories:
- (a) people living rough
 - (b) people in emergency accommodation
 - (c) people in accommodation for homeless people
 - (d) people in accommodation for women, only partially (excluded are women in shelters for women who are victims of violence)
 - (e) people in accommodation for immigrants, only partially (asylum seekers and refugees are excluded).
41. The following are the main variables: condition of homeless; duration of the condition of homeless; socio-demographic characteristics (age, sex, citizenship, country of birth, educational qualifications); registration in the register of resident population; critical events and other information related to the homeless condition. Based on the previous survey, the targeted survey may cover a list of 158 municipalities including the metropolitan cities⁵.
42. The sample design is a two-stage stratified sample. Services provided at soup kitchens and night shelter services are surveyed in two steps: the first stage units are the opening days of the organizations providing services, while the second stage units are the services provided by organizations to the targeted population
43. The homeless people who, in November and December 2014, used at least one soup kitchen and night shelter service in the 158 Italian municipalities where the survey was carried out were estimated at 57,241. This amount corresponds to 2.43 per thousand of the population regularly registered with the municipalities considered by the survey, an increase compared to three years before, when it was 2.31 per thousand (47,648 people).
44. Those observed by the survey, however, also included individuals not registered, or resident in municipalities other than those where they live.

D. Survey of homeless people not using soup kitchens and night shelter services

45. 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, allowing an estimate of the proportion of homeless people who do not use the soup kitchens and night shelter services. The survey was carried out in Turin using the Street Units that, even without an explicit request for help, carry out support interventions for persons living in a state of social marginalization directly on the territory (Inglese and Masi, 2019).
46. Identifying the conditions needed to make it possible to apply the methodology based on indirect sampling, as adopted in the national survey carried out in the soup kitchens and night

⁵ Administrative divisions of Italy which include a large core city and the smaller surrounding towns that are closely related to it with regard to economic activities and essential public services, as well as to cultural relations and to territorial features.

shelter, was one of the main challenges. Another was developing specific tools to mitigate the risk of multiple counts and that of the under-coverage of the population.

47. 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 shelter services is 3.5 per cent, a 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).
48. The Extreme Poverty Survey depends on a point-in-time (PIT) approach to assess homeless people not using soup kitchens and night shelter services. The observation field is the homeless people living on the street (primary homeless) at the designated PIT.
49. Such persons will be identified with the help of street units or interviewers and with the administration of a limited number of questionnaires to homeless people in metropolitan cities.
50. The survey of homeless people through the Street Units is complementary to that at the soup kitchens and night shelter services. The objective of the PIT Survey is to estimate the share of homeless people who do not use these services.
51. In 2014 an experimental survey was conducted over a week in the city of Turin, at the services offered by the Street Units. The defining aspect is essential since in the experimental survey in Turin there was no shared definition of Street Units. The definition of Street Unit has been developed by an intense collaboration between different experts. The definition adopted has been a flexible instrument with respect to the types of intervention, but not flexible with respect to the following aspects: the activity carried out, which starts from the relationship with people living in a condition of social marginality, by being present in the street, that is, directly observable in the territory, and without there being an explicit request for help. Moreover, as for the definition of soup kitchen and night shelters, the service had to be an intentional and strongly organized tool. The Street Units also had to guarantee accessibility to all persons interested in the service offered without specific prerequisites, in a situation of guarantee of privacy and anonymity.
52. The fundamental aspect that made possible the experience of the Experimental Survey on Street Units in Turin was the existence of a coordination of Street Units.
53. The challenge in designing the Point-in-Time 2024 survey is to identify the existence of a network of Street Unit within the metropolitan cities or, alternatively, to identify interviewer teams using the example of the experience in Paris (*Nuit de la Solidarité*, 2023). It was also be necessary to check the definition of methodological rules to control the risk of under- and over-coverage in the metropolitan cities.
54. The survey at the soup kitchens and night shelter services and the PIT survey will be complementary in the metropolitan cities. The reporting period of the PIT must fall within the reporting period of the survey on persons using the soup kitchens and night shelter services. In order to avoid overlap (double counting) respondents to the PIT survey are asked whether the person contacted in the street has made use of the soup kitchens and night shelters.
55. It will be essential to assess whether is possible to carry out the PIT survey in all metropolitan cities, or to limit it to a few of them.
56. It is therefore important that the design of the survey cannot disregard the knowledge of reality by the relevant stakeholders (i.e., organizations and associations working with homeless people). It is necessary to assess whether in metropolitan cities there are Street Units and if they is a network among them. The first step is the census of services (of metropolitan cities). Otherwise, it will be necessary to define another type of interviewer unit and the existence of a network organization. A possible approach could be to set up interdisciplinary teams composed of Street Units and of volunteers trained ad hoc with different tasks and roles, following the example of the experience of the *Nuit de la Solidarité* in Paris.

III. The homeless in the Census

A. The Census of particular or hard-to-reach populations: homeless people

57. The fundamental objective of the Population Census is to count the people who habitually reside in the country. As is known, some hard-to-reach demographic targets are exposed to a high risk of being undercounted in the census. In order to identify these elusive or hard-to-reach populations, the Italian Permanent Census has relied on municipal registry data. In 2021, the first ad hoc survey was conducted, followed by the second survey in the following year. The third edition is currently underway (March 2023). These surveys, involving all Italian municipalities, focus on the three specific population segments described above, including those consisting of homeless people.
58. The field of observation for the ad hoc survey in the registries on homeless people is limited to the component registered in the Population Register: it consists of homeless/roofless people without a fixed abode who have established their domicile in the Municipality (Article 2, paragraph 3 of law 24 December 1954, no. 1228) and homeless people who have no domicile and are registered at a fictitious address or at a real address associated with an association or used by the municipality for the registration of homeless/roofless people.
59. The first and second editions of this ad hoc survey were conducted on the addresses, whether real or fictitious, where homeless/roofless people are registered in the Population Register.
60. 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 sex) was collected. The linkage between the individuals residing in the RBI and the verified addresses from the municipal registries, either by address or census section (geocoding), allowed for the aggregated counting of these population components directly from the RBI, ensuring their statistical 'inclusion' in the definition of the total census population.
61. In the 2023 edition, some innovations were introduced in relation to the homeless target: the survey is no longer conducted on the addresses where these people are registered in the Population Register but on the list of homeless families with their corresponding family codes, extracted from RBI. Additionally, municipalities are requested to fill in the outcome for all confirmed, modified or newly-inserted records, by selecting one of the following modalities:
 - (a) homeless family under the care of social services
 - (b) homeless family not under the care of social services
 - (c) other (for economic, working interests and various ties)
 - (d) information not available (in cases where the municipality is unable to distinguish between homeless people and other categories within the families registered in the Population Register as homeless/roofless)
62. The goal of this innovation is to narrow down the homeless target and separate it from the other types of people that municipalities register at fictitious and real addresses but who do not fall within the category of homeless in the strict sense. The field of observation, limited to only the registered component in the Population Register, does not guarantee an exhaustive enumeration of the subgroups in question for the purpose of counting and defining the total census population.

B. Homeless people in the Permanent Census of population: which aggregates to correct/integrate?

63. In 2021, according to the data from the Population Census, the homeless and roofless individuals amount to just over 96,000. This figure suffers, on one hand, from under-coverage as it is derived from a survey that captures only the registered component in the Population Register, and on the other hand, from over-coverage as it includes other types of people (for example, women who are victims of violence or minors in pre-adoption) who do not strictly fall under the category of homeless/roofless. As is known, for the purposes of counting and defining the total census population, it does not guarantee an exhaustive enumeration of the subgroups in question.
64. The information to be corrected/integrated in order to achieve an exhaustive enumeration of homeless people is as follows:
 - (a) *To correct.* The aggregate of homeless people registered in the Population Registry falls within the field of observation of the EU Regulation on primary and secondary homelessness. However, this register data also includes people registered as homeless for other reasons (e.g. due to work, circus performers, itinerant traders, or other reasons).
 - (b) *To integrate.* Homeless people *not* registered in the Population Register remain outside the field of observation of homeless people (for example, non-EU foreign homeless individuals without a valid residence permit or whose residence permit has not been renewed). However, this important aggregate does fall within the scope of observation of the EU Regulation on primary and secondary homelessness.

C. Key features and advantages of the new approach

65. The General Census Plan (GCP) will be revised to include non-registered foreign homeless/homeless persons. *Strictu sensu*, the GCP provides for the component not registered in the registry office because the Permanent Census is based on administrative registers and integration, as well as with surveys Area and List, with the information on undercoverage of individuals not registered in the register but identified through presence signals (the Integrated Data Base of Usual Residents, AIDA) coming from administrative archives not of master source. The revised PGC will, however, also include in the census population count the homeless foreigners from outside the European Union not holding a valid residence permit in Italy (in fact, this concerns all non-Community foreigners who do not have a valid residence permit in Italy). As highlighted, homeless persons not registered in the Population Register (e.g., ‘foreigners irregularly/illegally present in the territory’) fall within the scope of the Population Census under the EU Regulation and that of the Investigation on extreme poverty.
66. For the homeless aggregate within the Population Census, the data collected in the soup kitchen and night shelter services and Point-in-Time surveys will be used to correct/supplement the final estimate of homeless people.
67. The estimation of the number of homeless persons registered in the Population Register obtained through the soup kitchen and night shelter services survey will allow the estimation of the number of homeless persons.
68. The estimate of homeless persons not registered in the registry office obtained through the soup kitchen and night shelter services surveys will allow integration of the personal data in relation to the underestimation of the phenomenon, due to the absence of the persons not registered in the Population Register for any reason (e.g., non-EU Irregular foreigners).
69. The results from the targeted surveys at the soup kitchen and night shelter services and Point-in-time will make it possible to:
 - (a) estimate the aggregate of homeless persons registered in the Population Register

- (b) estimate the aggregate of homeless persons not registered in the Population Register
 - (c) estimate the total number of homeless people in line with the objectives outlined by the EU Regulation on primary and secondary homelessness.
70. The estimate of the aggregate homeless not registered in the registry office can be used to supplement the final estimate of homeless people from the ad hoc survey at the registry.
 71. With regard to the foreign homeless, the soup kitchen and night shelter services survey will make it possible, for the first time, to estimate the number of irregular or illegal homeless foreigners within the population census.
 72. Integration into the RBI of data collected through the Extreme Poverty Surveys will take place downstream of the survey.
 73. In particular, for the integration/correction of census data the profile approach will be used: the probability will be indicated for each record (with variables: age, sex, citizenship, etc.) of inclusion (0/1). No weights will be processed.
 74. A synoptic overview of the homeless aggregates in the Population Census and targeted surveys is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Synoptic overview the homeless aggregates in the Population Census and dedicated surveys

TARGET		ETHOS Classification	EUROSTAT	Counted by surveys within Register of Resident Population		Estimated by Extreme Poverty Survey (soup kitchen and night shelter survey)			TARGET		
				Italians	Foreigners (EU and non-EU)	Italians	Foreigners		Census of Population	TASK FORCE	
							Total	Non-EU		Soup kitchen and night shelter Survey	Point in time Survey
							Irregular (with expired residence permit); illegal (without residence permit)				
Homeless NOT registered in the Register of Resident Population	Roofless or street homeless	Living in the streets or public spaces, without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters) (Ethos: 1)	Primary homeless			X	X	X	X	X	X
	Homeless	Night shelter. People with no usual place of residence who make use of overnight shelter, low threshold shelter (Ethos: 2); Homeless hostel Temporary accommodation Transitional supported accommodation where the period of stay is intended to be short term (Ethos: 3); Women's shelter accommodation (partially) (Ethos: 4); Immigrants in reception or short term accommodation (partially) due to their immigrant status (Ethos: 5).	Secondary homeless			X	X	X	X	X	X
Homeless registered in the Register of Resident Population	Roofless or street homeless/moving frequently between temporary accommodation	Living in the streets or public spaces, without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters (Ethos: 1); Night shelter. People with no usual place of residence who make use of an overnight shelter, low threshold shelter (Ethos: 2); Homeless hostel; Temporary accommodation; Transitional supported accommodation where the period of stay is intended to be short term (Ethos: 3); Women's shelter accommodation (partially) (Ethos: 4); Immigrants in reception or short term accommodation (partially) due to their immigrant status (Ethos: 5).	Primary and secondary homeless	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Homeless	People who move frequently from one municipality to another for other reasons (travelling, work or tax reasons, etc.)	Everyone else	X	X						

IV. Conclusion

75. The debate on homelessness has revolved primarily around issues of definition, and the lack of a unified and shared definition has posed challenges in quantitative surveys, making it difficult to compare data collected in various national contexts. The ETHOS classification undoubtedly represents a significant effort to overcome definitional problems and provides a valuable contribution to a common and transnational approach to data collection on the homeless (Amore et al, 2011). However, there is not only a problem of definition but also of data collection strategies that must be specifically designed, considering the uniqueness of the target population.
76. Measuring the phenomenon of homelessness is undoubtedly a challenging task: the high dispersion and mobility across the territory, housing exclusion, labour deprivation, and weak social and relational networks make this group difficult to reach (a so-called 'hard-to-reach population'). But counting the homeless serves at least a twofold purpose. On the one hand, it addresses the need for comprehensive census counting, which should include the entire population habitually residing in the territory, leaving no one excluded, not even the 'excluded'. On the other hand, it supports the planning and adoption of social policies to support and combat homelessness.
77. However, the condition of homelessness is defined not only spatially but also temporally. Being homeless does not only mean not having a fixed place to live, a physical domicile at which to be traced, but this condition is characterized by a timing that marks the individual's transition to the state of homelessness, and therefore, also by a duration in the condition that can sometimes be discontinuous, episodic, transient or chronic. The fluidity of the phenomenon makes its measurement even more challenging.
78. However, in a country where the population is registered in a Population Register, and where volunteer work and non-profit organizations supporting the homeless are significant, where the population census is permanent and integrated with administrative archives providing valuable individual information, it is not unreasonable to believe that there are favourable conditions to reliably detect the homelessness phenomenon.
79. By using a combination of multiple data sources (administrative and survey data) and methodological tools, it is possible to regularly monitor the target of homeless individuals, which constitutes a changing and diverse aggregate, encompassing a variety of profiles. Indeed, thanks to its permanent and register-based nature, the census can serve as a continuous observatory capable of capturing the phenomenon over time, understanding its characteristics, transformations, and transitions. To grasp the phenomenon fully and develop effective actions for prevention and intervention, it is essential to consider not only those who are homeless at a specific moment but also those who are at high risk of transitioning into homelessness due to housing instability, employment, or family issues.
80. The phenomenon of homelessness, in addition to having many dimensions, is increasing, especially with the rise of immigration, cyclical economic crises, and health emergencies such as pandemics. Thus it now also affects asylum seekers, undocumented immigrants, family homelessness, and low-skilled job seekers. Minors, women, and precarious foreign workers are also at risk due to a progressive increase in poverty rates and social disparities in our country.
81. There is a need to design nationwide detection systems for the homeless, based on integrated strategies, with the aim of implementing the most suitable methodology and tools to reach the various subgroups that compose the homeless population, while ensuring the accuracy of the information collected and the estimates produced. It is desirable to make better use of data from both administrative archives and records of homeless service users, which would enable their identification for counting, territorial distribution, socio-demographic structure, and dynamics over time.

82. A more in-depth and targeted research-based understanding of the phenomenon allows for the development of preventive actions to protect those most at risk of falling into marginalization and to respond to and counter extreme hardship effectively.
83. Indeed, in the context of studies on poverty and inequality, the estimates of the number of absolute poor that Istat releases annually are partial because they do not include the 'extreme' poor, since they do not take into account the homeless. The official statistics on absolute poverty (based on household expenditure surveys) refer to a poverty threshold based on the monetary evaluation of a basket of goods and services (including food, housing, and other essentials) considered necessary for an individual to be considered protected from severe forms of social exclusion. However, the sampling frame is based on households, and therefore, the homeless are excluded.
84. It is important to ensure awareness of the lack and incompleteness of data on the homeless and, at the same time, of the potential that the new system of registers and the Permanent Census offer to capture the phenomenon of homelessness in its entirety, with new detection systems and integrated techniques. This integrated approach seeks to view the issue as a dynamic and evolving process rather than a static snapshot, and to provide more timely and targeted responses to combat homelessness proactively, building a system based on the Population Register and targeted surveys.

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