

4 Strategies to Tackle Homelessness in Europe

4.1. Homeless Strategies and Information Monitoring

It has been argued that the approach to information collection on homelessness and housing exclusion should be driven by the strategies in place to tackle homelessness (Edgar *et al.*, 2007). It has also been proposed that a homeless monitoring information strategy should form an integral part of the homeless strategy. It is certainly broadly accepted that homelessness policies should be evidence-based.

This chapter gives a brief overview of the strategies to tackle homelessness across Europe in order to identify the issues involved in data collection. This leads to a discussion of the governance issues that can affect data collection and that may be instrumental in achieving progress to improving capacity for data collection regarding the broader definition of homelessness and housing exclusion represented by the ETHOS typology. The chapter concludes by examining the issues raised for data collection by some of the more recent changes in homeless strategies using examples from a number of different countries who have adopted national strategies in recent years.

4.2. Overview of Homeless Strategies

The purpose of collecting data on homelessness should be to provide the information necessary to improve policies and the provision of services in order to prevent and alleviate homelessness. The information collected on homeless people should be adequate to inform national and local governments who, in the framework of the EU Social Inclusion Strategy, should be developing strategies to:

- > prevent homelessness
- > tackle the causes of homelessness
- > reduce the level of homelessness
- > reduce the negative effects on homeless people and their families
- > ensure that formerly homeless people can sustain permanent independent housing.

There is a diversity of approaches to tackling homelessness across Europe and approaches have been changing markedly in recent years. This is not the place to discuss the factors that have led to the emergence of more integrated approaches. For our purposes, it is sufficient to emphasise the recognition that homeless strategies should be evidence-based. This requires a clear and consensual definition of homelessness among policy-makers and a robust method of data collection based on that understanding. However, there is no correct single definition of homelessness or single count of the phenomenon that will be an accurate reflection of reality. Rather, different counts will be required for different policy purposes. Hence, the definition adopted and the numbers counted as homeless will be a reflection of the policy context and policy purpose in which they are employed.

This section describes the situation regarding the development of homeless strategies.

4.2.1 SCOTLAND

The homeless strategy adopted in **Scotland** in 2001 is described in detail by Anderson (2007). The legislation enacted in 2001 required local authorities to produce comprehensive strategies to assess the level of homelessness in their areas and develop appropriate multi-agency responses, with effect from October 2001. Anderson (2007) argues that, although not explicitly announced as a 'right to housing', the combination of measures provided for in the legislation would mean that by 2012 there would effectively be a duty on local authorities to ensure that all households in Scotland had some form of accommodation. Besides the legislative change, local authorities were also expected to embrace the prevention of homelessness within their strategies. Research by Pawson *et al.*, (2007), argued that homelessness prevention should become *more* important as Scotland moves towards the 2012 target. As part of the implementation of the strategy, the Scottish Government established a Homelessness Monitoring Group which identified a number of key criteria to be monitored as part of the process of assessing progress on programme delivery (2006):

- > number of households applying as homeless
- > number assessed as homeless
- > % households placed directly into permanent accommodation
- > number experiencing repeat homelessness
- > households/families in B&B
- > time taken to deal with cases
- > indicators of customer satisfaction.

Output Issues include:

- > Prevention of homelessness
- > Quality of shelter accommodation
- > Access to permanent housing.

Process Issues include:

- > Co-ordination arrangements
- > Collaboration agreements / Protocols
- > Evidence base and monitoring procedures.

4.2.2 NORWAY

The **Norwegian** strategy to combat homelessness was launched as a national strategy in 2004 under the title “The Pathway to a Permanent Home”. The key components of the strategy include issues of output and issues of process which can be summarised as:

The strategy is explicitly based on results of the national surveys of homelessness and develops approaches to monitor and collect information.

The strategy covered the period 2005-2007 and identified three primary objectives and five specific targets (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 The objectives and specific targets established by the strategy	
Primary objective	Target
Preventing people from becoming homeless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Number of eviction petitions shall be reduced by 50%, and the number of evictions by 30% > No-one shall have to spend time in temporary housing upon release from prison > No-one shall have to seek temporary housing upon discharge from an institution
Contribute to improve the quality of overnight shelters	No-one shall be offered overnight shelters without a quality agreement
Help ensure that homeless people receive offers of permanent housing without undue delay	No-one shall stay more than three months in temporary housing

Source: *The Pathway to a Permanent Home, 2006*

4.2.3 THE NETHERLANDS

The strategy adopted by the **Dutch** government in 2006 covers the four main cities (referred to as the G4). The strategy is a complex approach focussed on identified homeless people on the one hand and improved co-ordination between key agencies on the other hand. However, the strategy identifies

five main aims or targets and associated indicators (see Figure 4.2). The strategy specifies three main components – firstly, to improve the situation of 10 150 identified homeless persons; secondly, to prevent a further 11 800 people becoming homeless; thirdly, to focus on providing firm foundations for these 11 800 people (e.g. care, social contacts, work).

Figure 4.2 Dutch Strategy – G4 Cities (2006-2012)	
Aims of the Strategy Plan	Indicators identified by the Plan
Homeless persons to have <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > incomes > accommodation suited to their needs > non-optional care programmes (temporary if possible, structural where necessary) > feasible forms of work. 	homelessness stability index (stable living accommodation, regular income, stable contact with the support services and form of daily occupation)
The number of evictions in 2008 reduced to less than 30% of the 2005 figure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > number of evictions per year > number of evictions leading to homelessness per year
End homelessness following prison discharge	number of cases of homelessness following detention
End homelessness as a result of leaving care institutions	number of cases of homelessness after leaving care institutions
Reduction in anti-social behaviour	Number of convictions Number of reports of harassment

4.2.4 SWEDEN

The **Swedish** Government's strategy contains four objectives for future work.

- 1) Everyone has to be guaranteed a roof over their head and be offered further co-ordinated action based on their individual needs.
- 2) The number of women and men who have been admitted to or registered at a prison or treatment unit or have supported accommodation or are staying in care homes and do not have any accommodation arranged before being discharged has to decrease.
- 3) Entry into the ordinary housing market has to be facilitated for women and men who are on housing ladders, in training flats or other forms of accommodation provided by the social services or other actors.
- 4) The number of evictions has to decrease and no children are to be evicted.

The strategy clearly specifies that developments concerning the scale of homelessness and exclusion from the housing market should be monitored continuously. In 2007, the Government commissioned the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning and the National Board of Health and Welfare to produce a plan for a survey of the secondary housing market in Sweden. The term secondary housing market refers to the housing let under various types of agreements or in some other way by the social services or through other actors. In the same year, the Swedish Enforcement Authority was instructed to develop statistics on eviction orders and their enforcement. The statistics are intended

to show the number of applications made and the number of eviction orders and evictions actually enforced per municipality. The surveys of the scale of homelessness conducted by the National Board of Health and Welfare, with the possibility of following developments over time, are another important source of knowledge. In order to take a concerted approach, the National Board of Health and Welfare was commissioned to propose, along with the relevant agencies, how to follow the continuous monitoring of homelessness and exclusion from the housing market. The "plan for continuous monitoring of the extent and character of homelessness" was published in March 2009 (NBHW, 2009). This argues that a plan for monitoring homelessness and exclusion from the housing market over time involves a number of questions:

- > How is homelessness to be defined?
- > What sources can be used to be able to monitor the development of homelessness over time?
- > What methods are being applied today to collect information that can be used to survey homelessness?
- > At what intervals are statistics relevant for homelessness surveys presented?
- > What core variables should be included in surveys of homelessness?
- > How can various types of housing support measures be categorised?
- > Are there any homelessness situations that are not covered by the existing source material?

The Plan reviews the sources of information about homelessness produced by different authorities in Sweden. Figure 4.3 summarises the sources of information for four situations of homelessness identified in the Strategy.



Figure 4.3 Sources of Information in Sweden on Homelessness Situations

Homeless Situation	Source	Stakeholder Authority
Situation 1: People sleeping rough, living in shelters, emergency accommodation, women’s refuges, hotels or camp sites	Official Statistics of Sweden Municipal Homelessness Surveys	The National Board of Health and Welfare Municipalities
Situation 2: People to be discharged within three months from correctional facilities or institutions without having arranged housing.	Statistics on the housing situation of inmates of correctional facilities facing probation The DOK Report Municipal Homelessness Surveys	Swedish Prison and Probation Service The National Board of Health and Welfare Municipalities
Situation 3: People in insecure housing situations, treatment institutions, HVB, etc.. Discharge/release is not planned within the next three months. No housing has been arranged before discharge/release.	Official Statistics of Sweden Monitoring of the secondary housing market Municipal Surveys	The National Board of Health and Welfare The National Board of Housing Building and Planning together with the National Board of Health and Welfare Municipalities
Situation 4: People living without a tenancy agreement with friends and acquaintances or having a subletting contract for less than three months.	Municipal Surveys	Municipalities

4.2.5 IRELAND

The new **Irish** strategy to address adult homelessness from 2008 to 2013 (“The Way Home”, 2008) builds on the progress achieved to date in tackling homelessness through the implementation of the Integrated Homeless Strategy (2000) and Preventative Strategy (2002), and is informed by the findings and recommendations of the Review of the Implementation of Homeless Strategies (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2006). This commitment is reiterated in the latest social partnership agreement (Towards 2016) and in the housing policy statement (Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities) which both contain specific provisions to address homelessness.

The Way Home document identifies six strategic aims to:

1. prevent homelessness
2. eliminate the need to sleep rough
3. eliminate long term homelessness
4. meet long term housing needs
5. ensure effective services for homeless people, and
6. better co-ordinate funding arrangements.

The strategy identifies a number of performance indicators including:

- > The number of homeless households
- > The number of people becoming homeless
- > The number of homeless households settled successfully out of homelessness
- > The average length of time homeless and the number of people remaining homeless for longer than six months
- > The number of rough sleepers
- > Compliance by homeless services with quality standards
- > Trends in expenditure on emergency accommodation

Since 1999, there has been continued development and improvement in the methods used to assess homelessness in Dublin. The Homeless Agency, including the four Dublin local authorities, has refined a survey method (published as Counted In 1999, 2002 and 2005) that provides a robust assessment of those using homeless services. The survey method involves a questionnaire being completed by every person (or household) in touch with homeless services and/or registered with a local authority over the course of one week. It uses a unique identifier for each household to avoid duplication and provides a reasonably comprehensive picture of homelessness. In addition, because the same method is applied with consistency in each assessment, trends and comparisons can be made over time.

The housing policy statement Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities (2007) recognises the shortcomings of the existing models of housing needs and homelessness assessments and provides for them to be addressed through the development of a new approach to housing need assessment at an individual, household and area level. The homeless strategy aims to address these shortfalls and to put a more robust national information framework in place.

The Data Sub-Group of the National Homeless Consultative Committee will monitor the Homeless Agency’s experience in utilising the ETHOS methodological toolkit, and will consider the feasibility and usefulness of rolling out this approach nationally.

The Review of Homelessness (Fitzpatrick and Associates, 2006) made 21 recommendations including the proposal that “the definition of homelessness should be revisited in order to produce a clearer, unambiguous understanding of what homelessness means for measurement and funding purposes. This should be used as the basis for a common information gathering system establishing the causes, extent and nature of homelessness and rolled out to all areas of the country” (recommendation 18).

4.2.6 ENGLAND

The **English** strategy to end rough sleeping (“No one left out”, 2007) aims to end rough sleeping by 2012. The strategy makes several references to the approach to be adopted to monitor the number of people sleeping rough. Previous strategies required local authorities to undertake annual counts of rough sleepers. While the new strategy will keep the local counts as a useful measure, it argues that the counts provide only a limited snapshot and suggests that they should be the start of the process not the end. The strategy aims to use the counts and other sources of data to bring together a fuller picture of the different needs of people sleeping rough, the services offered and the outcomes achieved in order to ensure that people are getting the help that they need. For this reason, the strategy launched three new approaches to information monitoring:

- > a new approach to help local authorities monitor progress and track people sleeping rough, ensuring that counts are not just an opportunity to identify levels of need but more importantly, to do something about it
- > it introduced “Street Needs Audits” to give a much better understanding of the needs of people on the streets, and
- > it aimed to develop new ways of using data to understand and monitor outcomes for people who have slept rough.

The strategy recognised that regular counts of rough sleeping provide an effective way of tracking progress over time and maintain focus on the issue. However, the strategy document argues that snapshot counts cannot tell the whole story and suggests that it is necessary to understand the pattern of the constant flow of people on and off the streets. The CHAIN database (Combined Homeless Action and Information Network) records all interactions between homeless services and people sleeping rough in the capital. This database provides the evidence that while there is a constant flow of people coming to the streets, most do not stay there long. The proportion of people who are seen bedded down more

than ten times in the course of a year is, according to the database evidence, less than one per cent. The database is a continuous recording system which shows that these proportions have remained consistent, year on year, for a three year period.

4.2.7 FINLAND

The **Finnish** programme to reduce long-term homelessness focuses on the 10 biggest urban growth centres, where also most of the homeless are to be found. The main priority, however, is the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, and especially Helsinki itself, where long-term homelessness is concentrated. The programme is structured around the ‘housing first’ principle. The programme’s objectives are:

- > To halve long-term homelessness by 2011
- > More effective measures to prevent homelessness. For a detailed description of the programme see Tainio and Fredriksson (2009). The programme to reduce long-term homelessness is part of the housing policy programme for the period 2008-2011. As well as involving the main municipalities, the programme relies on measures implemented by the Ministry of Environment, the Housing Finance and Development Centre, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Criminal Sanctions Agency. While the main evidence base for the programme has relied upon the annual housing market survey, it has been argued that data from the central population register can be used to monitor the programme since this can be used to establish the duration of homelessness for individuals as well as their demographic profile (Statistics Finland, 2009).

4.2.8 FRANCE

In **France**, an Action Plan (2007) specified three main aims to focus on:

1. the implementation of the enforceable right to housing
2. to develop efforts in broadening access to social housing
3. to alter the conditions for admission to emergency accommodation.

These latter two aims specify targets to be accomplished. Thus, assisted rental loans for integration (PLAI) and rental loans to finance the construction, acquisition and improvement of rented housing for people with limited resources who need social support (PLUS) should be increased to 80 000 per annum. In addition, 27 100 new places in accommodation centres of different types are to be provided.

4.2.9 PORTUGAL

An inter-institutional group was formed in May 2007 (co-ordinated by the Institute of Social Security under the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity) which included representatives from various public and private stakeholders involved in homelessness to define a national strategy which was approved in March 2009 (“National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People – Prevention, Intervention and Follow-up – 2009-2015”). The strategy addresses the areas of prevention, intervention and follow-up in order to ensure that not only those who fall within the agreed definition of the concept of the homeless are covered, but also all those who are at risk of becoming homeless (for whatever reason) or who, whilst not currently homeless, may revert to that state.

A key component of the strategy is a nationally-agreed definition to be employed by all agencies and services. The implementation of the strategy is to be carried out at local level based on specific homelessness plans which take into account identified local needs and intervention principles.

The strategy is organised around two main strategic axes aiming at:

1. achieving more evidence-based knowledge on homelessness, namely by the use and dissemination of an agreed definition of homelessness and of shared information and monitoring systems
2. promoting the quality of the provision of homelessness services and responses by:
 - a. eliminating the need to sleep rough
 - b. increasing the quality of temporary accommodation
 - c. addressing the lack of accommodation and support upon discharge from an institution
 - d. reinforcing permanent housing solutions
 - e. improving access to social benefits and (mental) health care services
 - f. promoting training and qualification opportunities of workers in this field
 - g. drafting of local homelessness plans.

The strategy defines three specific areas to be tackled by the different measures proposed under the two strategic axes:

1. a focus on preventative actions in order to avoid homelessness situations arising, namely from eviction or from discharge from an institution

2. direct intervention in homelessness situations (focussing on the clarification of procedures and responsibilities within a specific intervention model and also on experimentation using innovative projects)
3. follow-up of the situations ensuring the continuity – when needed – of support after resettlement, achieved within the local partnership network.

The document also establishes an organisational structure for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the measures and targets established both at a national level (e.g. executive and consultation bodies) and at a local level (e.g. executive units, co-operation with local social networks). As the co-ordinating body, the Institute is responsible for administration of the social network programme information system, an on-line database which is being implemented throughout the country and which can be accessed by all local council social services departments. It contains information on the following:

- > Names and descriptions of local council institutions
- > Social responses and specific programmes and projects implemented by different institutions
- > Tools used in local council strategies (social diagnosis, social development plan and local council action plans)
- > Links between local council strategies and National Action Plans for Inclusion, the National Action Plan for Employment and the National Action Plan for Equality.

However, it has not yet been determined whether this will be the system used to gather and share information on the homeless. The possibility of including a client register and allowing access for all institutions involved in social work in this area is still being considered. Another hypothesis being studied is the possibility of migrating data from existing databases, provided that they include the variables that are considered essential.

In the municipalities of Lisbon, Porto, Coimbra, Braga, Águeda, Leiria, Figueira da Foz, Guimarães and Loures some co-ordinated work specifically directed towards the homeless is being undertaken and a municipal plan is being prepared. However, the existing practices vary widely and use different tools and types of information technology. The strategy expresses the intention to standardise these different approaches through the use of a computerised system, both in terms of characterising and defining services and registering clients.

4.2.10 DENMARK

The Danish national strategy to reduce the number of homeless people has defined four objectives:

1. The number of homeless people sleeping in the streets must be reduced
2. For young homeless people (below 24 years) better options than placement in a homeless hostel have to be given
3. The average time spent in a homeless hostel must be reduced to 3-4 months for people who are ready to move to a dwelling with necessary support
4. Solutions for housing problems have to be made prior to release from prison and treatment centres.

The Danish government has set aside funding over a 4-year period starting in 2009 for the implementation of the strategy. One part of the funding will be distributed to selected municipalities with the largest homeless populations on the basis of negotiations between central government and municipalities. Another part of the funding will be reserved for initiatives like housing support in other municipalities.

Each municipal council in the selected municipalities will adapt a municipal action plan including specific goals in order to reduce homelessness in the municipality within one or more of the four objectives. Initiatives will be designed to match the objectives. This action plan also includes an obligation to continue the initiatives after the 4-year period.

The strategy both involves monitoring on an individual level in terms of documentation of the effectiveness of methods developed and initiated, and monitoring on an aggregate level in terms of monitoring of the development of homelessness on national and municipal levels.

An important part of the strategy is that methods have to be developed and tested by the public authorities and suppliers of services. The initiatives should take a point of departure in existing knowledge of interventions in the field of homelessness. Both support in housing and specialised supported housing are among initiatives which can be established under the programme. The aim is to develop methods with documentation of their effectiveness and to distribute this knowledge to municipalities in other parts of the countries.

On the aggregate level, a national count on homelessness was made in week 6, 2007 and was repeated in week 6, 2009. The count is based on a subset of categories from the ETHOS definition adapted to the national context. The count sets a baseline for the national strategy and will be repeated in 2011. Also, data from the national client monitoring system in §110 homeless hostels are used to give information on length of stays in shelters and the number of young people staying in shelters.

Figure 4.4 Summary of Homeless Strategies in Europe

Country	Strategy Title	Ministry Responsible	Date
Scotland	The Housing (Scotland) Act, 2001	Scottish Government	2001
Norway	The Pathway to a Permanent Home – Strategy to Prevent and Combat Homelessness. 2005-2007	Norwegian Government (1)	2006
The Netherlands	Strategy Plan for Social Relief of 4 Major Cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht)	Dutch Government 4 Major Cities	2006 (February)
France	Plan d’action renforcé du dispositif d’hébergement et de logement des personnes sans abris (PARSA)	Ministry of Employment, Social Cohesion & Housing	2007 (January)
Sweden	Homelessness, Multiple Faces, Multiple Responsibilities – A Strategy to Combat Homelessness and Exclusion from the Housing Market, 2007-2009	Government Offices	2007
Ireland	The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland, 2008-2013	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	2008 (August)
England	No One Left Out: Communities Ending Rough Sleeping	Communities and Local Government	2008 (November)
Finland	Programme to Reduce Long-term Homelessness, 2008-2011	Ministry of the Environment	2008 (February)
Portugal	National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People – 2009-2015	Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity	2009 (March)
Denmark	Afskaffelse af ufrivillig hjemloshed	Ministry of Social Welfare	2009

Source: FEANTSA, <http://www.feantsa.org/code/en/pg.asp?Page=1169> (date 15 May 2009)

4.3. Governance Issues affecting Data Collection

The current underpinnings of the European debate on homelessness strategies highlight the need:

- > To develop national strategic policies on homelessness that involve all relevant stakeholders including all relevant Ministries
- > To identify mechanisms for local delivery of policy
- > To have clear responsibility for co-ordination and implementation
- > To have clear targets and mechanisms for measuring outcomes against a baseline of reliable information
- > To have evidence-based policies.

It has been argued that the collection of data on homelessness is most effective when it is developed as a component part of an integrated strategy to tackle or prevent homelessness (Edgar *et al.*, 2007). The brief review of homeless strategies described above shows that only a small proportion of member states have a defined national strategy. The lack of national strategic policies on homelessness points to an inherent weakness in the approach to data collection on the phenomenon. Our review of those strategies that do exist also illustrates that some do not make explicit reference to the mechanisms for data collection to monitor the implementation of the strategy.

As identified by our review above, the locus of responsibility for homeless policies, programmes and strategies differs between member states. At national (or regional) level different ministries of government have a role to play both in the development and implementation of homelessness strategies and in the collection of the data required to monitor progress. This review of strategies identifies that responsibility for (data collection on) homelessness lies either with ministries with housing responsibilities (Finland, Ireland, Norway, England) or with responsibility for social welfare (Sweden, Netherlands, Portugal, France). In those countries which have specified targets to prevent evictions or prevent homelessness following prison discharge, the judiciary or enforcement departments have been involved in data collection (Sweden, Netherlands, Norway). Co-ordination and joint responsibility between key ministries has been a feature of the development of strategies in Norway, Ireland, Sweden and Finland. Elsewhere co-ordination in relation to data collection has taken longer to develop.

Where responsibility for the delivery of homelessness strategies is devolved to regional or local authorities then central government has a role in improving the capacity and compe-

tence of those authorities in managing the collection of information on homelessness. For example, the recent Peer Review of the Norwegian national strategy to prevent homelessness identifies that a co-ordinating agency (the Housing Bank) has been given responsibility for the co-ordination, implementation and promotion of the strategy (Edgar, 2006). One aspect of this role includes the provision of competence grants to municipalities and the organisation of regional and local networks and forums to improve the capacity of municipal authorities in delivering the strategy.

In a few countries, national or regional statistical offices have been involved in the collection of data on homelessness (e.g. France, Spain and Germany). While it is not necessary in any case that the production of such data is organised and carried through by national statistical offices directly, and while it is essential that intensive co-operation with experts in service provision for the homeless and with other experts in this field is procured, it has been argued that national statistical offices should be involved in compiling and reporting the national data for the European level (Edgar *et al.*, 2007). They should have responsibility to secure the quality and reliability of national data and should be involved in strategies to improve the comparability of homelessness data between member states.

The EU study (Edgar *et al.*, 2007) has argued that the homelessness strategy should develop a homelessness monitoring information strategy. In relation to the governance of homelessness strategies, it is relevant at this point to stress the need for the strategy to incorporate specific mechanisms for monitoring progress. Different approaches are possible for this purpose. For example, the Scottish Executive has established a Homelessness Monitoring Group consisting of all relevant stakeholders who meet on a regular (quarterly) basis and whose role is to examine all sources of information on the implementation of the strategy. The Norwegian Peer Review describes that the responsible Ministry (in collaboration with five other Ministries involved) funded homelessness surveys and has also promoted the development of a specific information system implemented by the Housing Bank. Ireland has established a data sub-group of the National Homeless Consultative Committee. Sweden has commissioned the National Board of Health and Welfare to prepare a plan for the continuous monitoring of information on homelessness which has identified specific responsibilities for the key agencies involved.

4.3.1 TRENDS IN HOMELESS STRATEGIES – IMPLICATIONS FOR DATA COLLECTION

This brief overview of the available strategies highlights a number of common features or trends with regard to the objectives of the strategies which have implications for the approach to data collection.

The reviewed strategies illustrate, especially in the Nordic countries, how national surveys were used to underpin the definition of the key issues to be addressed by the strategy. Norway used the national survey to evidence the high percentage of ex-offenders among the homeless population. Sweden used the national survey of 2006 to specify objectives related to evictions and people in the secondary housing market. Finland refers to the long-term trends highlighted by their annual surveys to focus on the need to address the issue of long-term homelessness.

The strategies identify the need for the continued use of such surveys (e.g. the local authority counts of rough sleeping in England, the annual Housing Market Surveys in Finland). Indeed, the Swedish plan for monitoring homelessness concludes that, since “there is no authority... with an overarching responsibility for the homeless issue” (NBHW, 2009; p32), surveys on a national level will continue to be needed. However, there is also evidence of a shift towards greater reliance on continuous recording methods even in the context of street homeless (see the CHAIN system implemented in England).

The use of client registers to collate national or regional information on homeless people to provide counts and profile data has been developed for some time in Denmark (see Edgar *et al.*, 2006; Stax, 2004) but has been slow to develop elsewhere. See Edgar *et al.*, (2007) for a detailed account of client recording systems. However, the review of the available strategies suggests an increased reliance upon register data (and administrative data) especially for eviction data from the courts and discharge data from prisons, child care and health institutions in a number of countries. This indicates a closer degree of co-operation between relevant agencies in the compilation and use of data for monitoring purposes.

Two national strategies (in Ireland and Sweden) have undertaken an explicit review of data collection methods as part of the strategy. In the case of Ireland, this review of data collection on homelessness is also linked to a review of local housing needs assessments.

There is a clear shift in many strategies towards an overarching *aim of prevention*. This may relate to preventing people from becoming homeless as a result of eviction or discharge from an institution or prison (e.g. Norway, Netherlands, Sweden), prevention of rough sleeping (e.g. England, Ireland), or the prevention of long-term homelessness (e.g. Finland, Ireland). In other contexts, the aim is more broadly defined to prevent homelessness by widening access to (social) permanent housing for homeless people and vulnerable groups (e.g. France, Scotland).

The shift towards prevention strategies raises some significant issues in relation to data collection. The focus on “at-risk” groups leads on the one hand to more targeted monitoring (e.g. on evictions, on institution discharge), but on the other hand it raises questions about the definition of homelessness. While the broad typology of ETHOS allows for the specification of specific categories, the understanding of socially excluded groups who are vulnerable in the housing market becomes more diffuse.

The focus on prevention has, in a number of countries, been linked explicitly to “*Housing First*” policies which have led to a revised understanding of the nature and purpose of temporary and emergency accommodation.

This shift to “Housing First” approaches was described above in relation specifically to the Finnish strategy, but similar examples can be found elsewhere (Ireland, Germany; see Busch-Geertsema and Fitzpatrick, 2008 for a detailed debate). However, Finland has probably the most developed policy in this respect with the aim of abolishing night shelters and hostels by 2015. The use of normal housing with support, and of designated supported accommodation, rather than emergency hostels and temporary accommodation means that people who are housed in this manner are not *strictu sensu* homeless. In this situation is there a policy purpose to monitor the number and profile of people receiving such housing and support?

This overview also illustrates the approach adopted of linking very specific objectives to clear targets which are capable of evidence-based monitoring and evaluation.