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Measuring Homelessness and Housing Exclusion in Northern Ireland

A test of the ETHOS typology

Nicholas Pleace and Joanne Bretherton

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Nicholas Pleace and Joanne Bretherton.

Centre for Housing Policy, University of York

www.york.ac.uk/chp/

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive or any other agency. Responsibility for any errors rests with the authors.

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Key points

- The European Typology of Housing Exclusion and Homelessness (ETHOS) is a framework which was developed to encourage measurement of homelessness and housing exclusion in a standardised and comparable way across the European Union.
- ETHOS is the most prominent standardised measure of homelessness in the world and has been recommended as a standard at European level. ETHOS has influenced the measurement of homelessness and housing exclusion in several EU countries, in Canada and New Zealand.
- This research explored the possible use of ETHOS in Northern Ireland. The research looked at the utility of ETHOS as a means of understanding homelessness and housing exclusion, the practicality of populating an ETHOS measure for Northern Ireland and the potential to use ETHOS to compare and contrast with other countries and regions. The research was designed to complement the *Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland: 2012-2017*.
- Data collection on homelessness and housing exclusion varies between countries in Europe. This is because homelessness and housing exclusion receive more policy attention in some countries than in others and because historical, cultural and societal factors have produced differing ideas about what homelessness is. ETHOS was developed to produce a clear, comparable set of basic data on homelessness and housing exclusion across the European Union. This means ETHOS is strategic guidance to create a broad set of comparable data; it is not a detailed administrative database nor is it an outcome monitoring system.
- Data on homelessness and housing exclusion in Northern Ireland are relatively extensive and high in quality. There is a better understanding of the nature and extent of these social problems in Northern Ireland than in many other European countries or regions.
- It was possible to largely populate an ETHOS measure for Northern Ireland using existing data. While a range of longitudinal data were available, many data were point in time estimates generated through sample surveys.

- There were some limitations in the available data on mobile populations that had only intermittent or no contact with services. This includes people sleeping rough, people who are squatting and households that are in situations of concealed or hidden homelessness, such as sofa surfing. However, these populations are inherently difficult to count and no country or region has entirely robust or complete data on these groups. Some Northern Ireland data were based on service contacts and excluded households and individuals that had not used those services, other data were based on sample surveys rather than population-wide information.
- Some categories of homelessness recorded by ETHOS had only limited applicability to the Northern Ireland context. ETHOS assumes homeless people are living in a given set of situations that does not entirely reflect the patterns of homelessness in Northern Ireland. As ETHOS focuses on where people are living, it does not account for differing experiences of homelessness and differing support needs, including women's experiences of homelessness, chronic and transitional homelessness and youth homelessness.
- Adopting ETHOS would not significantly enhance the range of data available in Northern Ireland. ETHOS lacks the detail needed for operational use or strategic monitoring within any one country. ETHOS has been criticised for not defining some groups, such as sofa-surfers (hidden or concealed homeless households) as being homeless. ETHOS is incompatible with some aspects of the statutory definitions of homelessness in Northern Ireland.
- ETHOS has considerable potential to be used to compare Northern Ireland with other countries and regions in the EU. Comparative analysis based around ETHOS could be a very useful way of exploring both the nature of homelessness and housing exclusion and the effectiveness of policy interventions. It would also not be a major undertaking to largely complete ETHOS for Northern Ireland using existing data. However, ETHOS is not yet a universally recognised standard for measuring homelessness and housing exclusion.

1 The Research

Introduction

This first chapter describes the goals of the research and presents an overview of the methodology. The chapter concludes with an overview of the contents of the remainder of the report.

About the Research

This research was undertaken to look at the utility of employing the European Typology of Housing Exclusion and Homelessness (ETHOS) in Northern Ireland. ETHOS is a framework which was developed to encourage measurement of homelessness and housing exclusion in a standardised and comparable way across the European Union (EU). The research aimed to explore how effective ETHOS would be, both as a measure of homelessness and housing exclusion for Northern Ireland itself, and as a means ofcontrasting homelessness policy outcomes in Northern Ireland with those in comparable countries or regions.

The research was designed to complement the development of new strategic responses to homelessness and housing exclusion in Northern Ireland as detailed in the *Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland: 2012-2017* [1] .The homelessness strategy seeks to ensure that long term homelessness and rough sleeping are eliminated by 2020, focusing specifically on:

- Minimising the risks of homelessness through effective preventative measures.
- Enhancing interagency cooperation to improve services to the most vulnerable homeless households.

The Strategy has four objectives, which have been summarised as:

- To place homelessness prevention at the forefront of service delivery.

[1]http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/corporate/strategies/homelessness_strategy.htm

- To reduce the length of time households and individuals experience homelessness by improving access to affordable housing.
- To remove the need to sleep rough.
- To improve services to vulnerable homeless households and individuals.

Development of the homelessness strategy for Northern Ireland drew on wider experience across the European Union (EU). Representatives of EU member states discussed new directions in homelessness policy at the 2010 *European Consensus Conference on Homelessness*, at which an appointed jury drew on an evidence review[2] on best practice in preventing and reducing homelessness and made a series of recommendations[3]. The Consensus Conference jury also recommended the use of ETHOS as a means by which to understand and compare levels of homelessness and housing exclusion in EU member states. The Northern Ireland homelessness strategy drew upon this recommendation and this research was commissioned to explore the possible use of ETHOS in Northern Ireland.

The *Housing Related Support Strategy 2012-2015*[4] is linked to the 2012-2017 Homelessness Strategy because a range of housing-related support funded through Supporting People is directly targeted at preventing and reducing homelessness. In March 2012, Supporting People funding was helping provide 114 short term homelessness services offering 1,780 places in supported temporary accommodation for homeless people and a further 35 floating support services offering 2,150 places[5].

In common with Ireland and much of the Northern EU, 'Housing First'[6] solutions are beginning to be explored in Northern Ireland[7]. The Housing First approach was developed in the United States and is founded on the

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[2] Busch-Geertsema, V., Edgar, W., O'Sullivan, E. and Pleace, N. (2010) *Homelessness and Homeless Policies in Europe: Lessons From Research*, Brussels: FEANTSA.

[3] European Consensus Conference on Homelessness (2011) *Policy Recommendations of the Jury* Brussels: FEANTSA http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article327&lang=en

[4] http://www.nihe.gov.uk/housing_related_support_strategy.pdf

[5]Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2012) *Housing Related Support Strategy 2012-2015* Belfast: NIHE, p. 14.

[6]Pleace, N (2012) *Housing First*, DIHAL; Busch-Geertsema, V. (2013) *Housing First in Europe: Final Report*http://www.socialstyrelsen.dk/housingfirsteurope/copy4_of_FinalReportHousingFirstEurope.pdf; http://www.homelessagency.ie/Dublin-Homeless-Action-Plan/Housing-First.aspx

[7]Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2012) *Homeless Strategy for Northern Ireland 2012-2017* Belfast: NIHE, p. 10.

principle that housing is a basic human right. The model provides permanent accommodation for people straight from the street, with no preconditions of addressing wider social care and support needs.[8] This move away from established hostel-based services and towards Housing First responses is being combined with a new emphasis on homelessness prevention.

The utility of ETHOS as a means to measure, monitor and compare homelessness and housing exclusion must be considered within the wider policy context of agencies and service providers in Northern Ireland seeking to prevent and reduce homelessness in new ways. The goal of the research was to test whether ETHOS, a 'European' model to measure homelessness and housing exclusion, was a good fit with what Northern Ireland is seeking to achieve in preventing and reducing homelessness.

The specific aims of the research were to:

- Explore the possible development of an ETHOS-based measurement framework for Northern Ireland using existing data sources.
- Identify data gaps in populating a possible ETHOS-based measurement framework and make recommendations for filling them.
- Attempt to populate an ETHOS-based measurement framework as fully as possible in order to produce a current and quantified view of the extent of homelessness in Northern Ireland.
- Explore the development of a system that enables future time series measurement using an ETHOS-based measurement framework.
- Test and report back on the utility of a possible ETHOS measurement framework, from the perspectives of homeless people and key informants from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), Department for Social Development (DSD), the Health and Social Care Board (HSCNI) and from homelessness service providers in the statutory and voluntary sectors.

[8]See Shelter: *Housing First – A Good Practice Briefing* (http://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/policy_library_folder/housing_first_-_a_good_practice_briefing) and Pathways to Housing http://pathwaystohousing.org/

Methods

The research team at the Centre for Housing Policy (CHP), University of York recommended a methodological approach incorporating four elements:

- A critical review of ETHOS looking at both the existing use of ETHOS and commentary on the ETHOS typology.
- A review of existing data in Northern Ireland, including the availability and suitability of data for time series (longitudinal) analysis.
- Consultation with key agencies to determine the extent to which ETHOS is able to help meet their needs.
- The production of a 'draft' ETHOS-based measurement framework for comment and review by key agencies, and interviews with homeless households to determine how they 'fit' into the categories within the framework.

This methodology was recommended because ETHOS is not a measurement system in its own right, but is instead a set of *guidelines* on the range of needs that a measurement system for homelessness and housing exclusion should attempt to record (see Chapter 2). This distinction is an important one, because ETHOS is a strategic monitoring *framework,* not a working population measurement or outcome monitoring *system.* The possible introduction of an ETHOS-based system in Northern Ireland would therefore involve looking at whether existing monitoring systems, including monitoring of homelessness levels and the performance of homelessness systems and services, needed to be adapted, augmented or (theoretically at least) replaced if an ETHOS-based set of measures were to be adopted.

In practice, it was found that Northern Ireland has comparatively rich data on homelessness and housing exclusion. The research found that the data needed to populate an ETHOS-based approach were already largely in place (see Chapter 3).

The research was originally designed to explore whether an ETHOS-based system could be developed. As it was found that, for the most part, an ETHOS-based system could be delivered, the exploration of whether ETHOS was suitable for Northern Ireland became a core concern of the research.

The research team worked closely with and received extensive support from NIHE. It had originally been intended that part of the role the research team would take would be to collate and review existing data. In practice, the research team received considerable help from NIHE staff who essentially led them to the existing data they would need and provided the research team with access to those data. This meant that the research team could concentrate their efforts on reviewing existing data and exploring any gaps in information.

The research team undertook a review of the existing uses of ETHOS. This included ETHOS-derived monitoring and measurement systems and policy and academic assessments and critiques of ETHOS. The research team drew on the bibliographic resources of the University of York and also the reports and research which are available online.

The research team also sought opinion on the effectiveness of ETHOS as a way to define and represent homelessness and whether ETHOS fully reflected the experience and nature of homelessness in Northern Ireland. Interviews were conducted with the following groups:

- Key staff from NIHE
- Key staff from DSD
- Key staff from HSCNI
- Representatives from the Council for the Homeless in Northern Ireland
- Representatives from five major homelessness service providers
- One to one interviews with 32 homeless people using a day centre
- A focus group with eight homeless women lone parents who, with their children, were using a supported temporary accommodation service at the time of the research.

Forty homeless people who were using a day centre and emergency accommodation in Belfast agreed to take part in the research. Most of the participants took part in one-to-one interviews with the research team, and there was, in addition, the focus group with women lone parents. Participants were recruited on a random basis during short visits, which meant it was not possible to send them the ETHOS typology in advance. By contrast, homelessness professionals often had a good idea of what ETHOS was and it had also been possible to send a PDF of the ETHOS typology to those professionals prior to their participation in a focus group, face to face or telephone interview, giving them time to look over ETHOS in detail in advance of the discussion.

Homeless people had less time to acquaint themselves with ETHOS, although they were given a broad explanation of the typology and asked to comment on whether their own current situation, alongside any previous experience of homelessness and housing exclusion, fitted within the ETHOS typology. In practice, the interviews with homeless people often focused primarily on how they perceived their own homelessness. Much of the direct comparison between the views of homeless people and the interpretations of homelessness within ETHOS was undertaken by the research team.

There were some limitations to the approach taken. A working ETHOS-based data collection system was not piloted. Instead, the research explored the practicalities, limits and possible strengths of a working ETHOS-based system from a theoretical perspective, including exploring the opinions of homeless people and various agencies involved in homelessness service strategy, commissioning and delivery.

The research took place between January and May 2013 with support for the work being provided by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The bulk of the fieldwork, including the interviews with commissioners, strategic authorities, service providers and homeless people took place in March and April. Most interviews took place in and around Belfast. In a few instances it was not possible to arrange interviews when the research team were in Northern Ireland and in these cases telephone interviews were employed as an alternative.

The report

The remainder of the report is divided into four chapters. Chapter 2 briefly explores the history behind the development of ETHOS before moving on to describe the ETHOS typology and present and discuss tables which summarise the ETHOS approach. Chapter 3 looks at the fit between existing data and the requirements of the ETHOS typology, and is an annotated exercise in attempting to populate an ETHOS-based measure of homelessness and housing exclusion for Northern Ireland. Chapter 4 presents a review of the strengths and limitations of ETHOS, drawing on existing reviews and critiques, including assessments of how effectively ETHOS has been used to inform measurement of homelessness and housing exclusion in other countries, including Canada and New Zealand. Chapter 4 also draws on the opinions of homeless people, strategists, commissioners and service providers

on the utility of using an ETHOS-based approach to monitor homelessness and housing exclusion in Northern Ireland. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the conclusions and recommendations from the research.

2 ETHOS

Introduction

This chapter briefly describes the development of the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS), the assumptions that underpin it and the data the typology seeks to capture. Towards the end of the chapter, summary tables, which have been developed to explain and act as broad guidance for the delivery of an ETHOS-based system of monitoring homelessness and housing exclusion, are presented and described.

The Development of ETHOS

Different countries often measure homelessness and housing exclusion in different ways and sometimes collect little or no data on these issues. On one level, there is a degree of consensus, in that many economically developed countries define people living on the street and usually – though not always – people in emergency accommodation as being 'homeless'. Beyond this, consensus breaks down and the lines between what is regarded as 'homelessness' and what is regarded as 'housing exclusion' are not consistent. Five areas in which there is a lack of consensus are:

- What constitutes housing, with some definitions of homelessness excluding people in *any* sort of settled accommodation, regardless of whether that accommodation is ordinary housing, a single room, or a bed in a communal institution.
- Whether or not, and/or at what point, a household or individual should be regarded as experiencing concealed homelessness, hidden homeless or sofa-surfing, i.e. when and if arrangements by which an individual or household is living with friends or relatives because they have no access to alternative accommodation, should be regarded as homelessness.
- What constitutes temporary accommodation in terms of security of tenure and duration of residence, centring on whether people who stay in an accommodation for several months or more should be regarded as homeless.

- Whether or not, and if so at what point, overcrowding and/or unfitness of existing housing reaches a level at which an individual or household should be regarded as being homeless.
- What constitutes a state of being at risk of homelessness, including at what point imminence of homelessness should be regarded as effectively being a state of homelessness. Examples include when to define existing housing as insecure and which people leaving institutions, such as prison or long stay hospitals, should be regarded as being at risk of homelessness. Beyond this, there is variation in whether even immediate risk of homelessness is interpreted as being homelessness at all, and in whether or not an effort is made to attempt to count households and individuals at risk of homelessness.

Data collection on homelessness is also subject to marked variation depending on the extent to which homelessness is recognised as a social problem and, in turn, whether local, regional or national governments determine they have any *responsibility* to prevent or reduce homelessness. How and whether homelessness is measured is caught up in ideological, cultural and policy differences centred on understanding, prejudices and beliefs about homelessness causation. Whether homelessness is seen as a self-inflicted social problem for which government is not directly responsible, or as the result of (unmet) health and social care needs due to welfare system failures and/or as a result of perceived housing and labour market imperfections, can influence the extent to which homelessness is measured or if it is measured at all. The extent to which municipal, regional and central governments decide to develop policies to counteract homelessness can be a major determinant of what is measured, as development of a homelessness policy often creates an imperative to measure and test the effectiveness of that policy[9].

Countries that have extensive homelessness services do not necessarily have highly developed or uniform systems for monitoring homelessness. Germany for example, has a highly developed welfare system, but while homelessness is monitored in some parts of the country, other areas collect little or no

[9]Meert, H.; Edgar, B. and Doherty, J. (2004) 'Towards an Operational Definition of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion' Paper presented at the *European Network of Housing Research* Conference, 2nd – 6th July, 2004, Cambridge.

homelessness data. Some EU countries have historically made little or no effort to understand the extent of any homelessness within their boundaries[10].

Variation in what is measured, variation in definitions and variation even in whether *any* attempt is made to measure homelessness was the context in which the European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) was developed. The objectives of those who designed ETHOS included:

- Ensuring that the full extent of homelessness and housing exclusion was measured in EU member states.
- Promoting the collection of standardised, comparable data on homelessness and housing exclusion, including in those EU member states that had little or no existing data collection on homelessness.
- Developing a clear and accurate picture of homelessness and housing exclusion in order to facilitate better comparative analysis and, in turn, inform the development of more effective policy to prevent and reduce homelessness.

ETHOS was promoted on the basis that data collection on homelessness and housing exclusion was not an end in itself. The academics who created ETHOS were members of the *European Observatory on Homelessness*, which operated under the auspices of the *Fédération Européenne d'Associations Nationales Travaillant avec les Sans-Abri* (FEANTSA), the European federation of national organisations working with homeless people[11]. The goals of ETHOS were described in the following terms[12]:

> *The purpose is to provide the information necessary to improve the provision of services 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 Strategy to Combat Poverty, should be developing strategies to:*

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[10]Baptista, I., Benjaminsen, L., Pleace, N. and Busch-Geertsema, V. (2012) *Counting Homeless People in the 2011 Housing and Population Census*, EOH Comparative Studies on Homelessness 2, Brussels: FEANTSA

[11]FEANTSAwas established in 1989 as a European non-governmental organisation to prevent and alleviate the poverty and social exclusion of people threatened by or living in homelessness http://www.feantsa.org

[12]Edgar, B.; Meert, H. and Doherty, J. (2004) *Third Review of Statistics on Homelessness in Europe* Brussels: FEANTSA, p. 3.

- *prevent homelessness;*
- *tackle the causes of homelessness;*
- *reduce the level of homelessness;*
- *reduce the negative effects on homeless people and their families.*

ETHOS was therefore always intended as a means by which to inform, develop and monitor policy and strategy responses to homelessness. A number of specific objectives were being pursued that included:

- Making all forms of homelessness visible to policy makers and service providers. In some EU member states this meant extending existing measures beyond people sleeping rough and living in emergency accommodation, and in a few instances it meant persuading countries to start collecting data on homelessness.
- Developing accurate monitoring of the numbers of homeless households over time, such monitoring being necessary to assess whether numbers were increasing or decreasing and to determine and compare policy and service effectiveness.
- Eliminating the need to sleep rough in the EU. Again, this required that consistent data were available on levels of rough sleeping and monitoring of whether they were changing over time.
- Reducing the duration of homelessness, which required monitoring of the levels of homeless people spending time in hostels, supported housing and temporary accommodation.

It is important to note that ETHOS does not represent a deliberate attempt to entirely harmonise national definitions of homelessness across the EU. Welfare systems and responses to homelessness were thought to be too divergent within the EU for this to be practical. ETHOS has instead been described as a way of promoting a 'common language' of homelessness, through which national definitions and data on homelessness and housing exclusion can be explored and, importantly, compared (see Chapter 4).

As a typology designed to provide standardised and comparable data across different EU member states, ETHOS has to be useable in states that are highly socioeconomically and culturally diverse. ETHOS therefore includes some categories of homelessness that are widespread in some EU member states

and practically non-existent in others. This need to be useable in different contexts means ETHOS has to be generic. The ETHOS typology is therefore not designed to meet the specific data collection needs of any one country (see Chapter 4).

ETHOS is not the only attempt that has been made to develop standardised data collection on homelessness. There have been exercises at EU level to try to develop standardised definitions of homelessness to enhance and unify data collection[13]. However, it is arguable that ETHOS is the most developed and most widely accepted homelessness and housing exclusion typology at the time of writing[14].

The definitions used by ETHOS

Defining homelessness

ETHOS defines homelessness in reference to three 'domains' which are defined as constituting a 'home'. The domains are referred to as the physical domain, the social domain and the legal domain and are defined in the following terms:

> *In order to define homelessness in an operational way, we identified three domains which constitute a home, the absence of which can be taken to delineate homelessness. Having a home can be understood as: having an adequate dwelling (or space) over which a person and his/her family can exercise exclusive possession (physical domain); being able to maintain privacy and enjoy relations (social domain) and having legal title to occupation (legal domain)*[15].

These three domains of the physical, social and legal are used as a conceptual framework to structure how to think about the measurement of homelessness, which includes seven broad types of homelessness.

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[13]Brousse, C. (2004) *The production of data on homelessness and housing deprivation in the European Union: survey and proposals*European Commission/Eurostat: Luxembourg; European Commission (2007) *Measurement of Homelessness at European Level* Brussels: European Commission, Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG.

[14]Busch-Geertsema, V. (2010) 'Defining and Measuring Homelessness' in Busch-Geertsema, V. *et al* (2010) op cit, pp. 19-39.

[15]Edgar, B. *et al* (2004) op cit, p. 5.

At one extreme, a situation of living rough means exclusion from the physical, social *and* legal domains. Someone sleeping rough has no living space of their own over which they have any degree of control and they are excluded from the social domain because they have no private space: nowhere to be with a partner, family or friends, or even on their own. In addition, they are excluded from the legal domain, because they have no legal title: no security of tenure to any form of housing or accommodation. ETHOS defines this group as 'roofless' people.

Someone is still 'homeless' in terms of the ETHOS definition if they are excluded from both the *legal* and *social* domains. Thus if someone lacks private space in the social sense and security of tenure in the legal sense, they are still 'homeless'. Homeless people in this situation, without legal title to accommodation or private personal space, are defined as 'houseless' people.

Defining housing exclusion

Housing exclusion is defined by ETHOS as applying to households and individuals who are living in inadequate housing and lack security of tenure (excluded from the physical and legal domains of home). Housing exclusion also applies to people who are in inadequate housing with no privacy (excluded from the physical and social domains of home). In addition, people in housing situations in which they are excluded from *one* of the physical, social or legal domains are also defined as being in a situation of 'housing exclusion'.

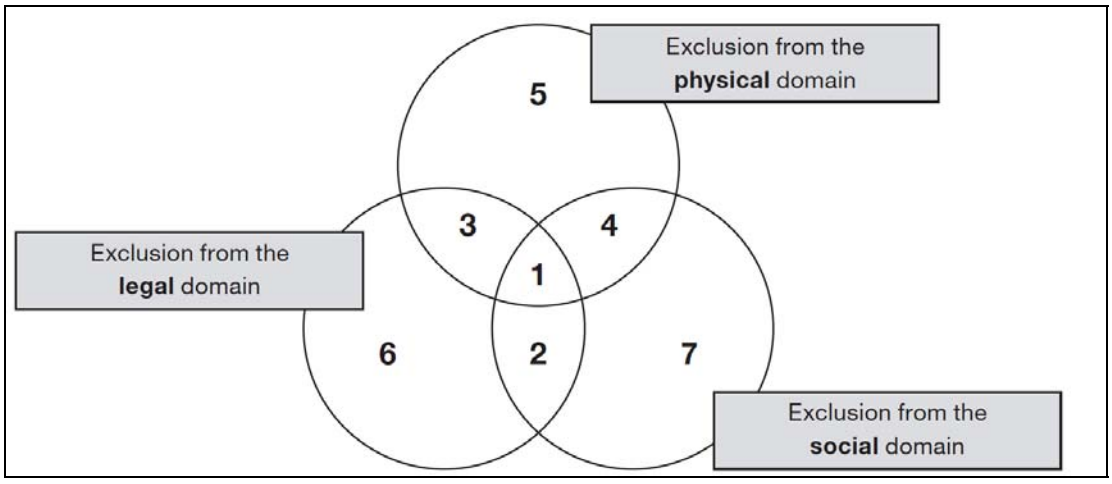
Summarising the ideas used to develop ETHOS

Graphic 2.1 summarises the seven theoretical categories of homelessness and housing exclusion used to develop ETHOS. The exclusion from the physical, legal and social domains for people sleeping rough is shown as 'rooflessness' (category 1). Homeless people who are excluded from the legal and social domains are shown as 'houselessness' (category 2). People who are in situations of 'housing exclusion' because they are excluded from the physical and legal domains, or from the physical and social domains, are shown as categories 3 and 4. Finally, those in situations of housing exclusion because they are excluded from the physical, legal or social domains are shown as categories 5, 6 and 7. Graphic 2.2 shows these different categories relative to the physical, legal and social domains.

Graphic 2.1: Theoretical categories of homelessness and housing exclusion[16]

		Conceptual Category	Physical Domain	Legal Domain	Social Domain
Homelessness	*1*	**Rooflessness**	No dwelling (roof)	No legal title to a space for exclusive possession	No private and safe personal space for social relations
	2	**Houselessness**	Has a place to live, fit for habitation	No legal title to a space for exclusive possession	No private and safe personal space for social relations
Housing exclusion	3	**Insecure and Inadequate housing**	Has a place to live (not secure and unfit for habitation)	No security of tenure	Has space for social relations
	4	**Inadequate housing and social isolation within a legally occupied dwelling**	Inadequate dwelling (unfit for habitation)	Has legal title and/or security of tenure	No private and safe personal space for social relations
	5	Inadequate housing (secure tenure)	Inadequate dwelling (dwelling unfit for habitation)	Has legal title and/or security of tenure	Has space for social relations
	6	Insecure housing (adequate housing)	Has a place to live	No security of tenure	Has space for social relations
	7	Social isolation within a secure and adequate context	Has a place to live	Has legal title and/or security of tenure	No private and safe personal space for social relations

Graphic 2.2: ETHOS domains of homelessness and housing exclusion[17]



[16]Source: FEANTSA.

[17] Source: FEANTSA

The ETHOS table

The ETHOS typology, which was developed to provide guidance on how different situations of homelessness and housing exclusion should be defined, is summarised in Graphic 2.3. This table is intended to inform governments, commissioners and service providers on how to use the ETHOS typology to define homelessness and housing exclusion. The summary of ETHOS shown in Graphic 2.3 has been translated into many languages[18].

Graphic 2.3: ETHOS[19]

Situation	Conceptual category	Operational category			Living situation
Homeless	Roofless	1	People living rough	1.1	Public space or external space
		2	People staying in a night shelter	2.1	Night shelter
	Houseless	3	People in accommodation for the homeless	3.1 3.2 3.3	Homeless hostel Temporary accommodation Transitional supported accommodation
		4	People in women's shelters	4.1	Women's shelter accommodation
		5	People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1 5.2	Temporary accommodation or reception centre Migrant workers' accommodation
		6	People due to be released from institutions	6.1 6.2 6.3	Penal institution Medical institution Children's institution or home
		7	People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)	7.1 7.2	Residential care for older homeless people Supported accommodation for formerly homeless persons
Housing Exclusion	Insecure	8	People living in insecure accommodation	8.1 8.2 8.3	Temporarily with family or friends No legal (sub)tenancy Illegal occupation of land
		9	People living under threat of eviction	9.1 9.2	Legal orders enforced (rented) Repossession orders (owned)
		10	People living under threat of violence	10.1	Police-recorded incidents
	Inadequate	11	People living in temporary or non-conventional structures	11.1 11.2 11.3	Mobile home Non-conventional building Temporary structure
		12	People living in unfit housing	12.1	Occupied dwelling unfit for habitation
		13	People living in extreme overcrowding	13.1	Highest national norm of overcrowding

The ETHOS typology (Graphic 2.3) identifies 13 operational categories and 24 different living situations. Homeless people are defined as being within two 'conceptual categories'. The first of these conceptual categories is *Roofless people* which, referring back to graphics 2.1 and 2.2, contains homeless people

[18]http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article120&lang=en

[19] Source: FEANTSA

outside the physical, legal and social domains. The second conceptual category refers to *houseless* people, who are defined as homeless because they are excluded from the legal and social domains (see graphics 2.1 and 2.3).

People in situations of housing exclusion, i.e. excluded from the physical and legal domains or from the physical and social domains, or from any of the physical, social and legal domains, are within two further conceptual categories. These conceptual categories are 'insecure' and 'inadequate' housing.

Guidance, which gives generic definitions, has been provided to explain the various subcategories in ETHOS. These are as follows (definitions shown in italics are quotes from the guidance)[20]:

- People living rough (public space or external space): people *living on the streets or public spaces, without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters.*
- People in emergency accommodation for the homeless (night shelter): *people with no usual place of residence who make use of overnight shelters or low threshold shelters.*
- People in accommodation for the homeless (homeless hostel, temporary accommodation, transitional supported accommodation) *where the period of stay is intended to be short term.*
- People in women's shelters (women's refuges), i.e. *women accommodated due to experience of domestic violence and where the period of stay is intended to be short term.*
- People in accommodation for immigrants (temporary accommodation/ reception centres, migrant workers' accommodation), i.e. *immigrants in reception or short-term accommodation due to their immigrant status.*
- People due to be released from institutions (penal institutions, medical institutions, children's institutions/homes) including people with *no housing available prior to release* (for ex-prisoners), people *staying longer than needed due to lack of housing* (for people in medical institutions) and young people leaving care with *no housing identified (for example by 18th birthday).*

[20]Source: FEANTSA.

- People receiving longer-term support due to homelessness, such as residential care for homeless people or supported accommodation for formerly homeless people, including people in *long stay accommodation with care for formerly homeless people (normally more than one year)*.
- People living in insecure accommodation (temporarily with family or friends, no legal (sub)tenancy, illegal occupation of land) including people *living in conventional housing but not the usual place of residence due to lack of housing* (temporarily with family or friends), *occupation of a dwelling with no legal tenancy, illegal occupation of a dwelling* (no legal (sub)tenancy) or *occupation of land with no legal rights* (illegal occupation of land).
- People living under threat of eviction (legal orders enforced (rented)/ re-possession orders (owned)) *where orders for eviction are operative* (rented), *where mortgagee has legal order to possess* (owned).
- People living in temporary/non-conventional structures (mobile homes, non-conventional buildings, temporary structures) that are *not intended as usual place of residence* (mobile home), are a *makeshift shelter, shack or shanty* (non-conventional building) or are a *semi-permanent structure, hut or cabin* (temporary structure).
- People living in unfit housing that is *defined as unfit for habitation by national legislation or building regulations.*
- People living in extreme overcrowding (highest national norm of overcrowding) that is *defined as exceeding national density standard for floor-space or useable rooms.*

Graphic 2.3 does not contain all the guidance and discussion that is available on ETHOS[21], but it does summarise the essence of the approach. ETHOS is centred on which data on homelessness and housing exclusion should be collected: it does not provide methodological or logistical guidance.

[21] There is another form of ETHOS called 'ETHOS light'. ETHOS light was intended as a simplified homelessness measure that was compatible with the recommendations of European statisticians for the 2011 censuses. (For more information see Busch-Geertsema, V. (2010) op cit).

3 Populating ETHOS for Northern Ireland

Introduction

This third chapter presents the results of an exercise to 'populate' the ETHOS typology of homelessness and housing exclusion for Northern Ireland. The chapter begins by presenting an ETHOS table and then proceeds to detail the source, strengths and limits of the data available for each of the 13 operational categories and 24 different living situations. The chapter draws on a review of existing data conducted by the research team with support from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and also the results of fieldwork in which the availability and strengths of existing data were discussed with representatives of key policy-making and service-providing agencies.

Producing an ETHOS measure

ETHOS could be used as a framework for either a *stock* or a *flow* measure. A stock measure collects statistical data that show the composition of the homeless and housing-excluded population at a given point in time. A stock (or 'point-in-time') measure is inherently inaccurate because the homeless population is known to be in flux: people become homeless and exit from homelessness constantly[22]. However, a point-in-time measure can be repeated to look at broad trends, for example by collecting data annually, can give an overview of the scale of homelessness and housing exclusion, and can be relatively cost-effective to collect[23].

A flow measure captures information on the number of people experiencing situations of homelessness and housing exclusion over a given time period, for example one year. Flow measures are generally more accurate, because they track the population experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion over time and give a much better picture of the total scale of these social problems. However, because these measures involve accurately tracking

[22] Busch-Geertsema, V. 'Defining and Measuring Homelessness' in Busch-Geertsema, V. *et al* (2010) *Homelessness and Homeless Policies in Europe: Lessons from Research* Brussels: FEANTSA http://www.feantsaresearch.org/IMG/pdf/fea_020-10_en_final.pdf

[23] Denmark (http://www.sfi.dk/publications-4844.aspx?Action=1&NewsId=3301&PID=10056), Finland http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=8180&langId=en and the US Federal Government https://www.onecpd.info/resources/documents/2012AHAR_PITestimates.pdf all conduct annual point-in-time surveys on homelessness. These surveys allow policymakers to look at trends and assess policy effectiveness and estimate the total numbers of homeless people.

people over time the necessary data are more difficult and expensive to collect, both in terms of logistics and because they effectively involve tracking people over multiple database systems, which requires adherence to data protection and privacy laws.

Graphic 3.1 shows a 'populated' ETHOS measure based on existing data which was produced with assistance from NIHE. The totals shown are an estimated point-in-time measure, an approximation of the number of people in different situations of homelessness or housing exclusion on any given *day*.

Unlike many countries and regions, Northern Ireland possesses extensive longitudinal data on homelessness within the administrative systems used to monitor the operation of the homelessness legislation and the provision of housing-related support by homelessness services. However, the data on housing exclusion and some forms of homelessness analysed for this research were often point-in-time statistics, which meant the balance of the data available was weighted toward point-in-time statistics. Where data were longitudinal, estimates have been used to approximate the situation on any given day. The data were not all collected at the same point, with the most recent available data at the time of writing being employed.

Several gaps in the data are apparent. These occur for two reasons, which is either that the numbers involved are likely to be very low or the information is not currently available. Where figures seem very low, this is because Graphic 3.1 is an attempt to show the level of homelessness and housing exclusion on a given day, with the annual levels of people experiencing these situations being higher[24].

Most of the remainder of this chapter is dedicated to explaining how the figures show in Graphic 3.1 were sourced, estimated or derived. In addition, the chapter explores the strengths and limitations of the data shown.

[24]See below for a detailed discussion of how these figures were calculated.

Graphic 3.1: A populated ETHOS using point in time and estimated data[25]

Operational category			Living situation	Households
1	People living rough	1.1	Public space or external space	At least 9*
2	People in emergency accommodation	2.1	Nightshelter	See text
3	People in accommodation for the homeless	3.1	Homeless hostel	1,780*
		3.2	Temporary accommodation	4,571
		3.3	Transitional supported accommodation	87
4	People in Women's shelters	4.1	Women's shelter accommodation (refuge)	191
5	People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1	Temporary accommodation/reception centres	104
		5.2	Migrant workers' accommodation	See text
6	People due to be released from institutions	6.1	Penal institution	Approx.1*
		6.2	Medical institution	See text
		6.3	Children's institutions/homes	Approx.1*
7	People receiving longer-term support due to homelessness	7.1	Residential care for older homeless people	See text
		7.2	Supported accommodation for formerly homeless people	21
8	People living in insecure accommodation	8.1	Temporarily with family/friends	11,057
		8.2	No legal (sub)tenancy	See text
		8.3	Illegal occupation of land	See text
9	People living under threat of eviction	9.1	Legal orders enforced (rented)	At least 8*
		9.2	Re-possession orders (owned)	At least 10*
10	People living under threat of violence	10.1	Police recorded incidents (domestic violence)	At least 2*
11	People living in temporary/non-conventional structures	11.1	Mobile homes	See text
		11.2	Non-conventional building	See text
		11.3	Temporary structure	See text
12	People living in unfit housing	12.1	Occupied dwellings unfit for habitation	7,200*
13	People living in extreme overcrowding	13.1	Highest national norm of overcrowding	403
	Homeless (households)			6,765
	Housing Exclusion (households)			18,680
	All households in situations of homelessness and housing exclusion			25,445

* Estimate, see following text on the sources, strengths and limits on the data used to populate this table.

The following section of the report discusses the sources, strengths and the limits of the data used to populate the ETHOS table for Northern Ireland shown in Graphic 3.1. Each data source is reviewed in turn.

[25]Sources are discussed in the text. Contains estimated figures which are also described in the text.

Homeless people

Roofless people

People living rough

The figure shown in Graphic 3.1 is based on point-in-time data provided by NIHE and refers to rough sleeping contacts during a single day from the street outreach service in Belfast. Within Belfast, the total number of people sleeping rough would probably be greater, because some groups, such as women or older people, may keep themselves concealed for safety reasons. Outreach services also do not cover the entirety of the city. As the data only cover Belfast, total numbers of people sleeping rough across Northern Ireland would almost certainly be greater.

One alternative way of assembling data on people living rough would be to attempt to survey them. However, there are a number of inherent difficulties in counting people living rough. Street counts tend to be partial, in that they may miss people, may not cover all areas and are generally point-in-time exercises conducted over a day or two, a difficulty because people move on and off the street, from emergency accommodation on one or several nights and back on the street. In England, the Office for National Statistics determined that the street counts used in the 2001 Census were inherently inaccurate, and opted instead for the 2011 Census to try to find people sleeping rough using emergency accommodation and day centre/day time services for homeless people[26]. Inherent methodological limitations in street counts have also been noted in the US[27]:

> *…conducting a count of sheltered people can be relatively straightforward while conducting accurate counts of unsheltered people can be very challenging. Street count methodologies differ greatly by CoC*[28] *and year, and even marginal changes to these methodologies can result in substantial impacts on the counts. Finally, inclement weather*

[26]Baptista, I., Benjaminsen, L., Pleace, N. and Busch-Geertsema, V. (2012) *Counting Homeless People in the 2011 Housing and Population Census*, EOH Comparative Studies on Homelessness 2, Brussels: Feantsa

[27]Cortes, A.; Khadduri, J.; Buron, L. and Culhane, D.P. (2010) *The 2009 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress*Washington DC: Department of Housing and Urban Development, p. 11.

[28] Continuums of Care (CoC) are local planning bodies in the USA that are responsible for coordinating the full range of homeless services.

conditions can hamper CoCs abilities to conduct thorough street counts on any given year, and thus lead to considerable changes in their counts of unsheltered homeless persons.

Street counts are, however, still widely used, for example in Dublin[29] and London[30], as a means of attempting to monitor progress in interventions to reduce the levels of rough sleeping, and despite their shortcomings, there are arguments in favour of using measures of visible street homelessness to assess the effectiveness of policy that is explicitly designed to *reduce* visible street homelessness.

Opinion among homelessness professionals[31] in Northern Ireland was that counting people living rough was often difficult because there was a lack of clarity around the point at which someone should be regarded as a 'rough sleeper'.

I suppose the definition of what is a rough sleeper, I mean is it a rough sleeper if they sleep two nights a week out, one night?

There were also thought to be issues around location. Data were not generally available outside Belfast and Derry, and numbers were difficult to guess at in other predominantly rural areas. Data collection was thought to be most practical in areas where outreach, night shelter, day centre and direct access services were likely to operate.

The data collection is very difficult, we don't do it per se, there are certain groups, the like of the [agency] *who would have outreach…very small numbers and really Belfast, Derry based, the rest of it there, it is nigh on impossible to catch…*Statutory agency staff member.

We would have some data, but I am sure it is no better or worse than most other European authorities and some of it is hidden, to a certain extent. It is only when someone interacts with the statutory side and when I say 'interact' I mean present themselves at A&E or present themselves at our local

[29]http://www.homelessagency.ie/Facts/Homeless-Figures.aspx

[30]Estimates for London also now draw upon the CHAIN database covering services for street-using populations, see DCLG (2012) *Rough Sleeping Statistics England - Autumn 2012 Experimental Statistics* London: DCLG.

[31]i.e. those planning, commissioning, managing or directly delivering homelessness services.

> *office seeking accommodation, or indirectly, through one of our funded organisations, but there would be folk that would fall outside all of that, you know. They are not on the grid, they are not on the radar, you know, how do you catch them?* Homelessness service provider.

Within Belfast, data on people sleeping rough were thought to be better. However, there were thought to be some limitations to existing data, centred on possible double counting and, again, difficulties in counting people living rough who did not approach services.

> *There are many people, you know the major rough sleepers, the kind of ones who would be sleeping outside in public spaces, they don't come in to be counted and they are very much going to ground, and it's their idea not to be found really.* Homelessness service provider.

People in emergency accommodation

Some data was available for emergency "crash" accommodation, which suggested around 15 people in Belfast would typically be in this accommodation on any one night, with a further 544 bed-spaces being described as 'direct access' by Homeless Northern Ireland[32].

Generating a figure that fits ETHOS is difficult because the types of services that correspond to the definition of emergency accommodation used by ETHOS have become unusual in Northern Ireland. Night shelters, which essentially offer a bed and food for a night, have declined. Instead, emergency accommodation has become more likely to offer support services, self-contained flats or individual rooms and be within accommodation-based services. As the more basic end of emergency accommodation has been replaced by accommodation-based services offering more extensive support, the line between what ETHOS separately defines as 'night shelters' and 'homeless hostels' has become blurred.

In this instance, the generic, EU-wide nature of ETHOS means that it refers to a subset of the homeless population that is not particularly numerous in the Northern Ireland context. This is essentially because ETHOS defines an element of the homeless population based on the type of emergency

[32]http://www.homelessni.org/

accommodation they are living in and that type of emergency accommodation has now become unusual (see Chapter 4).

People in accommodation for the homeless

Homeless hostels

The administrative requirements of the Supporting People programme and collection and maintenance of data on bed spaces and rooms in these forms of service meant that data was generally good. There is a clear picture of the extent, nature, capacity and occupation rates of the available accommodation, as well as the characteristics of the people in the 'homeless hostel' living situation that broadly matches the ETHOS definition. The data shown in Graphic 3.1 refer to Supporting People funded hostel services as at March 2012[33].

Again, there is a difference between how ETHOS describes homelessness services and the practice of service delivery in Northern Ireland. While hostels exist, they are often better described as accommodation-based services which are funded through Supporting People[34]. These services are likely to offer support at higher levels than might be associated with the idea of a (traditional) homeless hostel, which primarily functioned as emergency accommodation or as de facto long-stay provision for homeless populations who were unlikely to find homes of their own[35].

Northern Ireland has accommodation-based services for homeless people that are hybrids building on and extending previous service models. Services might, for example, combine congregate supported housing (small flats) with onsite support, also using dispersed flats and/or providing floating support services. Homeless people might be using a 'hostel' service in several different ways and there are questions around what sort of placement in such services should be regarded as 'hostel' or as 'transitional' supported accommodation, which is another ETHOS category. As with emergency accommodation, ETHOS defines an element of the homeless population according to where they are living, but the nature of homelessness services in Northern Ireland

[33]Source: Northern Ireland Housing Executive.
[34]NIHE (2012) *Housing Related Support Strategy* 2012-2015 op. cit.
[35]Macgregor-Wood, S. (1976) 'Camberwell Reception Centre: a consideration of the need for health and social services of homeless, single men' *Journal of Social Policy* 5, 4, pp. 389-399.

does not always fit easily with the definitions of homelessness services used by ETHOS (see Chapter 4).

Temporary accommodation

Temporary accommodation for homeless people in Northern Ireland has a specific meaning and function which is directly related to the operation of the homelessness legislation. Households accepted as homeless, i.e. Full Duty Applicants, are housed in temporary accommodation when they need to await re-housing, and individuals or households may also be placed in temporary accommodation while their homelessness application is assessed. Statistics on the households in these situations are collected as part of the administration of the homelessness legislation and are robust. The figures shown in Graphic 2.3 relate to the households in temporary accommodation as at the end of February 2013 and were provided by NIHE.

More detailed data are available on the households in temporary accommodation: the overall figure shown in Graphic 2.3 comprised 2,351 individuals and 2,220 families, and regional data are also available.

Transitional supported accommodation

Data from Homeless Northern Ireland indicate there are 87 bed-spaces in transitional housing[36]. Transitional housing combines accommodation with support and is sometimes also called 'move-on' accommodation. One model is to provide someone with a flat, or sometimes a room in a shared house, to which support is attached. The intended role of a transitional service is to resettle homeless people with support needs and when someone is thought ready to live independently, they leave both the accommodation and the support behind them. Unlike floating support services, the support is attached to specific housing and remains with that housing: it does not follow the service user when they leave.

Another issue around definition arises in relation to the use of floating (mobile) support services. This concerns the situation when someone leaves a hostel or transitional housing and continues to receive mobile support in their new, independent, housing. In terms of ETHOS, the physical and legal domains of being housed are present, as is the social domain. Yet if retention of housing *depends* on on-going mobile support from a hostel or transitional

[36]http://www.homelessni.org/

housing, albeit for the short or medium term, should that person or household be regarded as housed or as still in an effectively transitional situation?[37]

Further, when someone homeless is *immediately* placed in ordinary social rented or private rented housing, without a stay in hostel or transitional housing, and receives floating (mobile) tenancy sustainment service support, questions arise as to whether that person should be regarded as in a different housing situation from someone in a hostel. This question again arises because floating support services of this sort are used *instead* of hostels for the same target population of homeless people.

In 2012, there were 35 floating support services providing 2,150 homeless people with support[38]. The point here is the same: the physical, legal and social domains of being 'housed' are present, but, again, if the physical, legal and social domains of having a home are dependent on tenancy support services, is that household housed or are they in a transitional state? If the people receiving floating support services were added to the transitional total, it would increase that figure to 2,237 and bring the total of homeless people at any one point to 8,915, raising the ETHOS total for Northern Ireland at any one point to some 27,595 households.

Women in shelters

Homeless professionals reported that there were good data on refuges and other accommodation-based services for women at risk of domestic or gender based violence. Any woman (and her children when they are with her) who is in a refuge is regarded as homeless in Northern Ireland. The 191 figure shown in Graphic 3.1 is data on available spaces (both for lone women and women with children) reported by Homeless Northern Ireland[39].

> *…we have very good data on women's shelters, because we have that as a specific client group.* Statutory agency staff member.
>
> *We would, for a variety of reasons, treat anyone actually staying in a women's refuge as homeless or threatened with homelessness, that's just de facto…if you have to stay there,*

[37]See Chapter 2.
[38]Source: Northern Ireland Housing Executive.
[39]http://www.homelessni.org/

> *automatically it would be high priority, or local offices would treat it as a homelessness application.* Statutory agency staff member.

Two further issues about the differences between ETHOS and Northern Ireland definitions of homelessness arise here. While existing information suggests that the overwhelming majority of people at risk of domestic or gender based violence are women, there is evidence from England that men also experience such violence, albeit in much smaller numbers[40]. However, ETHOS does not consider data collection on this group.

The second issue is potentially more significant and this relates to the use of alternative service provision to meet the needs of women at risk of homelessness due to domestic or gender based violence. Northern Ireland is beginning to develop 'sanctuary' schemes which reflect similar developments in England[41]. Sanctuary schemes use a combination of physical security, support and, to varying degrees, legal enforcement to enable women at risk of violence to remain in their own homes. As with floating support services, such as tenancy sustainment services, continued residence in their housing is arguably, at least initially, closely linked to the provision of support services. Again, there are questions as to whether households in this situation should be regarded as housed or as homeless and whether they should be counted within ETHOS. These questions would become more important if the use of sanctuary schemes expands in Northern Ireland.

People in accommodation for immigrants

Temporary accommodation and reception centres

ETHOS parts company with much of the EU when it comes to defining entire populations in accommodation for immigrants as being homeless. In common with practice elsewhere, Northern Ireland does not have a single definition of what an 'immigrant' is. There are several categories:

- Undocumented, i.e. illegal, migrants.

[40]Quilgars, D. and Pleace, N. (2010) *Meeting the Needs of Households at Risk of Domestic Violence in England: The Role of Accommodation and Housing-Related Support Services*, London: Communities and Local Government.

[41]Jones, A., Bretherton, J. *et al* (2010) *The Effectiveness of Schemes to Enable Households at Risk of Domestic Violence to Remain in Their Own Homes*, London: Communities and Local Government.

- Asylum seekers
- European citizens
- A2 European citizens
- Refugees.

There is no country in the EU that, in policy terms, regards an undocumented, (i.e. illegal) migrant without a settled home as being a homeless person. People who lack a right to reside in Northern Ireland, including those not given leave to remain, are not seen in official terms as homeless; they are illegal migrants and the policy response is to repatriate them. The response in other EU member states is the same[42]. ETHOS may, effectively, define undocumented migrants who are homeless as being within the homeless population, but no EU member state is in agreement with that definition. Across the EU, what matters is the *illegal* status of an undocumented person, which means that they are seen as requiring removal from the country, not the provision of housing to end their homelessness.

Asylum seekers are provided with accommodation in Northern Ireland. Their situation is distinct from that of homeless people in temporary accommodation. If given leave to remain, asylum seekers can access the same services as any citizen, though it should not be assumed that they will become homeless. If they are not given leave to remain, they will be repatriated where possible and would have no recourse to public funds if they did find a way to remain in Northern Ireland. Thus the figure given in Graphic 3.1 for 104 asylum seeker households in temporary accommodation and reception centres[43] is arguably problematic on two levels. First, it cannot be assumed that they are or will become homeless and second, at least some are destined to be repatriated.

European citizens can access the support available to other homeless people[44] and would be recorded when services are monitoring country of origin. Although the rules were about to change, this was not the case at the time the research was conducted for A2 nationals, i.e. people from Bulgaria and

[42]Pleace, N. (2011) 'Immigration and Homelessness' in E. O'Sullivan (Ed) *Homelessness Research in Europe* Brussels: FEANTSA, pp. 143-163.
[43]Source: NIHE, total as at 28th February 2013.
[44] Restrictions on labour market participation people from the A8 countries, i.e. the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia ended in May 2011.

Romania, who faced restrictions on working and claiming benefits and limits on access to housing and homelessness assistance.

Although EU citizens, for the most part, have rights to assistance, there is a tendency in some parts of the Western and Northern EU to use 'reconnection' (i.e. encouraged repatriation) services to respond to homelessness among people from Eastern Europe. For example several London boroughs[45] use these services, as does Dublin[46].

Refugees can access homelessness services, should they require them, in the same way as any citizen. Again, it should not be presumed that all refugees are at heightened risk of becoming homeless.

At the time of the research, Northern Ireland did not have a significant amount of dedicated accommodation for migrant workers. There was anecdotal evidence of sometimes overcrowded and poor conditions among low income migrant workers living in the private rented sector, some of whom may have been in situations of housing exclusion as defined by ETHOS.

For some homelessness professionals in Northern Ireland, questions existed around who ETHOS was referring to when it defined people in accommodation for immigrants as homeless. This related both to whether ETHOS was including populations that would not be defined as homeless in Northern Ireland, and also which people should be included in this category.

> *The immigrants is a bit more difficult. When they talk about immigrants is that legal, or illegal or is that a combination of the two?* Statutory agency staff member.
>
> *What's accommodation for immigrants? What is that exactly?* Statutory agency staff member.

Among homelessness professionals, there was a concern that homeless economic migrants from the EU who had lost the work that they had originally come to Northern Ireland to do were sometimes not being recorded. This was thought to be because they did not know where or how to seek help, or could not access support, because they did not speak English[47].

[45]http://www.barkauk.org
[46]http://barkaie.org
[47]At the time of writing A2 migrants had limited rights to assistance.

I would say people who have the language difficulty, you know English is not their first language or they have difficulties in communicating for whatever reason…they are living in overcrowded accommodation because they do not know how to access systems. Homelessness service provider.

We would have, I suspect here, a lot of migrant workers that are off the grid and are homeless. Homelessness service provider.

People due to be released from institutions

Penal institutions

Data were not complete, but a total of 216 former prisoners, equivalent to less than the one per day, as shown in Graphic 3.1, presented as homeless in the year to February 2013[48]. There are two limitations to this figure. First, it refers to households presenting as homeless at release from prison[49]. This includes people who may not have been found to be homeless. Second, the data are confined to former prisoners seeking help under the homelessness legislation, whereas some former prisoners might seek assistance from other homelessness services.

Some homelessness professionals thought that the rate at which former prisoners were experiencing homelessness was relatively low because systems were in place to reduce levels of homelessness among ex-prisoners. This included the placement of homelessness officers in some prisons and specific arrangements for people who had committed serious offences. Not all homelessness professionals shared this view. Some reported the presence of a

[48]The figure is rounded up to an estimate of 1 per day in the graphic to enable an overall estimate for ETHOS to be generated. These data, covering 16,072 households in total, were incomplete as the reason for homelessness was not recorded in 2,200 cases (source, NIHE).

[49]A household that approaches the NIHE for assistance under the homelessness legislation is described as 'presenting' as homeless. Someone presenting as homeless is subject to a number of assessments to ensure they are owed the Full Duty (i.e. is a Full Duty Applicant). If someone seeks assistance under the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 they must demonstrate they have no accommodation that they can reasonably be expected to occupy or will lose their accommodation within 28 days. They must also demonstrate that they have not made themselves homeless through deliberate action or inaction (they are not intentionally homeless) and are within a priority need group, which includes households containing or about to contain a dependent child and/or containing a person or people whose 'vulnerability' means they cannot be expected to secure housing (old age, mental health problems, learning difficulty or disability). Young people at risk of exploitation and women at risk of domestic/gender based violence are also in priority need groups.

marginalised population of homeless people that moved between homelessness, precarious housing settings and short-term prison sentences.

> *…our experience has been that we have had individuals who have re-offended, simply because they want to get back in, because it's a secure environment, three meals a day and a roof over their head…* Homelessness service provider.

Medical institutions

There were no data on potentially homeless people in medical institutions. ETHOS has a category of people who are effectively homeless because they have to stay in medical institutions or face having no accommodation. Homeless professionals did not think this group existed in Northern Ireland, because medical institutions, such as hospitals or psychiatric wards, had a longstanding policy imperative to move people back into the community as soon as possible.

> *I don't know if people do get stuck in institutions with nowhere to go, they just get discharged.* Homelessness service provider.

Rates at which people leaving long stay hospital or psychiatric wards in hospital experienced homelessness were thought by some homelessness professionals to be very low. There were no figures available on the rate at which people discharged from long stay hospital became homeless. Some homelessness professionals drew attention to the Bamford Review[50] which had promoted arrangements to ensure people with mental health problems were not discharged from hospital into a situation in which they had nowhere to go.

Children's institutions/homes

The number of young people leaving care and becoming homelessness was again thought to be low by homelessness professionals. Data supplied by NIHE showed that 71 young people had presented as homeless and been defined as 'child ex-care' in the year to February 2012, a rate equivalent to less than one young person a day (Graphic 3.1)[51].

[50]http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/bamford/published-reports.htm

[51]These data, covering 16,072 households in total, were incomplete as the reason for homelessness was not recorded in 2,200 cases (source, NIHE).

These data referred to young people presenting as homeless, some of whom may have been found not to be homeless. The data also only referred to young people with a history of care who sought help under the homelessness legislation. As with former offenders, young people with a history of care who did not seek this assistance would not have been recorded in these statistics. Annual statistical reports are issued on the status of care leavers in Northern Ireland aged between 16 and 18. In 2012, a report on 233 young people did not suggest they were experiencing significant rates of homelessness[52]. Similarly, homelessness professionals did not report that high numbers of care leavers were becoming homeless.

People receiving longer-term support due to homelessness

Residential care and supported accommodation

Residential care that was specifically designed for homeless people was not used and although formerly homeless people may have been placed in residential care by social care and health services, data were not collected on this.

In common with other regions and countries in the North and West of the EU[53], there were intensive, supported housing services for homeless people that offered longer-term support. The figure given in Graphic 3.1 is a point-in-time statistic provided by the NIHE on a single day in February 2013. The data cover one project, an intensive 'wet'[54] hostel in Belfast that was specifically designed as medium to long stay accommodation.

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[52] Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety (2013) *Northern Ireland Care Leavers Aged 16-18 Statistical Bulletin 2011/12* Belfast: DHSSP.

[53] There are examples of long stay, supported housing in Denmark (the 'Skaeve Huse' model), Finland (the communal Housing First model) and in England, for example the medium and long stay supported housing offered by organisations like St Mungo's in London.

[54] An accommodation based service for homeless people with problematic use of alcohol that allows drinking. Such services follow a harm reduction approach which seeks to help and enable people towards reductions in drug and alcohol use rather than using an abstinence-based approach. There is strong international research evidence that harm reduction approaches may be more effective in promoting housing sustainment among formerly homeless people than abstinence based services, though evidence about the effectiveness of either service model in ending problematic drug and alcohol use among long term homeless people is mixed (see Pleace, N. (2008) *Effective interventions for homeless people with a history of substance abuse: Lessons from a review of the Global evidence base for Scotland* Edinburgh: Scottish Government).

Overview of data on homeless people

Data on people living rough were limited in several respects, including only being available for Belfast. One group of roofless people as defined by ETHOS, those in emergency accommodation, did not exist in significant numbers because emergency accommodation in the form of basic night shelters had been replaced with other, more intensive, accommodation-based services.

Northern Ireland had good data on the accommodation-based services, i.e. hostels and transitional housing that were provided to homeless people. Equally, data on women's shelters and refuges were thought to be good. Homelessness professionals had general confidence in the data collected on the homeless people using these forms of service.

> *We have information on our hostels, the temporary accommodation, some of our hostels would be temporary, some would be transitional supported accommodation…We would collate data on that.* Homelessness service provider.

One possible limitation of the data on accommodation-based services was that there was some risk of double counting. A few homelessness professionals were concerned that some people using accommodation-based services were particularly mobile, i.e. moved rapidly between services, and might be recorded twice. While double counting was an issue in terms of longitudinal monitoring of the flow of people using accommodation-based services, it would not have affected point-in-time data, as each person would be resident in only one service on a given day.

> *There's a feel for it ok, but there is a risk of double counting individuals when they move around services. It's very reliant on the information being kept up to date and recorded accurately and I think there are a number of people who do slip under the net. I don't think that it accounts for people who are very transient in nature.* Homelessness service provider.

Other issues concerned differences in patterns of service delivery compared to the definitions used in ETHOS. For example, ETHOS would define people who were permanently settled into ordinary housing, but still required floating (mobile) support services to sustain their tenancy, as not being homeless. However, the extent to which they should be regarded as 'housed',

while still *reliant* on floating support services is perhaps debatable, given that they would arguably be in a situation comparable to people in transitional housing.

Definitional ambiguity existed around what was meant when ETHOS referred to immigrant homelessness, as it did not account for differences in migration status. With regard to people leaving prison, procedures were in place to try to ensure that former offenders were housed, although there was evidence that some members of this group were presenting as homeless. Similarly, young people with a history of staying in children's homes were in systems that aimed to ensure they were housed at the point they left care, but it appeared that they sometimes experienced homelessness. As in the case of ex-prisoners, this was only recorded when they sought help under the homelessness legislation.

Some groups that are listed in ETHOS were thought to be relatively uncommon in Northern Ireland. For example, homelessness professionals noted that a population facing longer than necessary stays in medical institutions due to lack of housing options did not really exist in the region. In addition, there were relatively few services designed to provide supported accommodation to homeless people for more than 12 months.

People experiencing housing exclusion

People living in insecure accommodation

People living temporarily with family and friends

The data shown in Graphic 3.1 were provided by NIHE. The figure was a snapshot of statistics covering early February 2013 and was based on the number of households applying for social housing with NIHE. The Housing Selection Scheme[55] awards points to applicants who are sharing certain facilities, in recognition of the housing need associated with being part of a concealed household. The total of 11,057 households who had points for sharing are listed, just over one quarter of whom were in the 'higher' category (26% with 30 points or more, i.e. 2,874 households)[56].

[55]www.nihe.gov.uk/index/advice/apply_for_a_home/housing_selection_scheme/the_points_system.htm

[56] Five points are awarded for sharing facilities such as a lounge, kitchen or bathroom with another households. Ten points are awarded for each bedroom a household is lacking. Higher categories lack

Data on people living temporarily with friends or family, whether they are defined in those terms or referred to as 'concealed' or 'hidden' homeless households, are confined to those people seeking social housing. Homelessness professionals thought the data on people living temporarily with family or friends gave an incomplete picture. They also thought people who moved relatively frequently between precarious living arrangements with different friends or family members would be particularly difficult to count.

> *You'll catch the families, the overcrowded families will be caught, because they are going to get straight on to homelessness and will be treated as homeless. The sofa surfers are more often than not singles, who will not qualify as homeless under our legislation, you may catch them in the housing selection scheme, but because of the dearth of affordable accommodation in some places for singles and young singles, the chances of catching them are very poor as well.*
>
> *And then there's the sofa surfers as well, who are not actually captured in any of that, who are moving around from family member to family member and again…there's quite a significant number of those.*

Some homelessness professionals thought it was more likely that families would be able to access social housing because the presence of dependent children would enhance their chances of moving up the waiting list, while lone homeless people would be less likely to apply for social housing, because it was widely known that they would face a very long wait or might never get access to social housing, particularly if they had low support needs.

> *They*[lone adults] *are not going to apply for Executive accommodation because they know they are going to be so far down the list, there's no point in applying so you can't catch them in the system.* Statutory agency staff member.

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two or more bedrooms, see:
http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/advice/apply_for_a_home/housing_selection_scheme/the_points_system.htm

> *No, you'll never catch them*[lone adults], *because they know themselves they are not going to get on the social housing ladder…they will flit between their family home and friends' homes. In terms of the definition, absolutely, in terms of data capture, impossible, I don't know how.* Statutory agency staff member.

Research from Ireland has indicated that homeless women often move from one often-precarious informal living arrangement with family and friends to another over a sustained period, rather than enter emergency accommodation, hostels or sleep rough[57]. There is also some evidence from England that shows a very similar pattern[58]. In addition, research, including within Northern Ireland, has shown that young people often rely on 'sofa-surfing', as a way to avoid staying in hostels or sleeping rough, for considerable periods of time[59].

Research conducted in England[60] and the USA[61] suggests that homeless women, families and young people may reach a point where they 'exhaust' informal arrangements with friends and family. Homeless professionals in Northern Ireland agreed that this can be the case, and that it is only at this point, when the other options are no longer available, that households may seek assistance, either from homelessness services, under homelessness legislation or by applying for social housing. This has to be balanced against the possibility that some households, for example younger lone people in good health, might decide not to seek social housing on the basis that they are unlikely to be eligible for it.

> *They could be homeless for a long period of time and be bouncing from family to friend and only eventually come to the attention of the Executive when that breaks down or they've exhausted all those options.* Homelessness service provider.

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[57]Mayock, P. and Sheridan, S. (2012) *Women's Homeless 'Journeys': Key Findings from a Biographical Study of Homeless Women in Ireland. Research Briefing 1. Women and Homelessness in Ireland.* Dublin: School of Social Work and Social Policy and Children's Research Centre.

[58] Pleace, N. *et al* (2008) *Statutory Homelessness in England: The Experience of Families and 16-17 Year Olds* London: Department for Communities and Local Government

[59]Quilgars, D. *et al* (2008) *Youth Homelessness in the UK: A Decade of Progress*? York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

[60]Pleace, N. *et al* (2008) op. cit.

[61]Weitzman, B.C., Knickman, J.R and Shinn, M.(1990) 'Pathways to Homelessness Among New York City Families' *Journal of Social Issues,* 46, 4, pp. 125–140

People with no legal (sub) tenancy

Although data were not available (and are not captured in any systematic way) on households without a legal tenancy or sub-tenancy, it is almost certain that such arrangements exist. As it is illegal to function as a social or private landlord without using a legal tenancy arrangement, such activity is highly likely to be concealed. The numbers involved in such arrangements cannot be reliably estimated.

Illegal occupation of land

The numbers involved in illegal occupation of land were thought by homelessness professionals to be very small, to the point at which only a few individuals would be in this sort of situation. Reliable data on this group were not available. There is a Roma/Traveller population, but this group of people actively exercises a choice to live in a certain way, and while they may sometimes occupy land illegally, they are not generally regarded as homeless. ETHOS does not define Roma/Traveller populations as homeless and this is the convention across much of the EU[62].

> *In my view the travellers are not homeless, that is a lifestyle choice, they are not homeless.*

People living under threat of eviction

Legal orders enforced (rented)

Good quality data were available on evictions in the social rented stock managed by NIHE. Between 1st April 2012 and 3rd March 2013, 938 possession orders[63] were granted to NIHE due to rent arrears, with a further eight possession orders being granted for anti-social behaviour[64]. The actual number of possessions was much lower than the number sought: 5,153 possession orders were sought for rent arrears by NIHE between April 2012 and March 2013, more than five times the 938 possession orders that were actually granted. The eviction process stops if tenants who receive a notice seeking possession opt to pay their outstanding rent, or seek help with rent arrears and reach a payment agreement. In other instances, a tenant might leave an NIHE property before they are actually evicted, meaning there is no

[62]http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/index_en.htm
[63] Legal permission to physically evict a household
[64] Source: NIHE.

need for a possession order to be granted. In the year to February 2013, 71 households presented as homeless because they had lost an NIHE tenancy[65].

Data on eviction from the private rented sector were more restricted. There are issues around definition, in that when the relatively short (six month and 12 month) fixed term tenancies that are widely used in the private rented sector end, existing private rented tenants may sometimes have to leave even if they do not want to (for example, if a landlord decides to sell a property, or if the tenant breaks the terms of a tenancy). One way to assess the extent to which private rented sector evictions may be associated with homelessness is to look at 'loss of private rented accommodation' as the reason given by households presenting as homeless. It should be noted that not all households who present for this reason will necessarily be found homeless (e.g. someone who breaks a tenancy agreement may be found intentionally homeless), and the statistics only record households seeking assistance under the homelessness legislation. In the year to February 2013, 2,030 households presented as homeless following loss of private rented accommodation. This would include evictions as well as households whose fixed term private tenancy simply came to an end, meaning that they had to leave.

The total for households facing eviction shown in Graphic 3.1 is an approximation. The annual total would be some 2,976, equivalent to at least eight households a day.

Re-possession orders (owned)

From January to March 2013, the Northern Ireland Courts Service[66] reported that 666 orders related to actions for possession had been made for owner occupied homes, which broke down into 456 possession orders, 155 suspended possession orders[67] and three suspended possession combined orders. ETHOS focuses on re-possession orders served, which, based on provisional statistics for the first quarter of 2013, was likely to be in the region of 450 every three months or around 1,800 during the course of the year.

[65] Source: NIHE.

[66] Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (2013) *Statistical Press Release: Mortgages: Actions for Possession January– March 2013* Belfast: Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service. Note: Figures are provisional.

[67] A court may postpone the date for delivery of possession if it is satisfied that the defendant is likely within a reasonable period of time, to pay the outstanding sum owed on a mortgage, or to remedy any other breach of the obligations that exist in their mortgage. A suspended possession order cannot be enforced by a bank or other mortgage lender without the permission of the court, which is only granted after a further hearing.

Cases of actions for possession on mortgages coming before the courts numbered 3,964 in 2012, but a smaller number than this actually reached the point where a possession order was issued and a home was possessed. In the year to February 2013, 389 households were recorded as presenting as homeless to NIHE due to 'mortgage arrears', the equivalent of just over one a day. The statistics for presentations for assistance under the homelessness legislation indicated that people who were owner occupiers were less likely to become homeless than people who were renting.

People living under threat of violence

Data are collected by NIHE on people who present as homeless, seeking assistance under the homelessness legislation, because they are under threat of violence. As with other data on presentations, these households may not always be found to be homeless and the figures exclude households at risk of violence which do not approach NIHE for assistance.

ETHOS defines threat of violence in a particular way, using the phrase 'where police action is taken to ensure a place of safety for victims of domestic violence'. There is evidence from the Republic of Ireland[68] and England[69] that domestic violence is a very significant cause of lone female and also lone female parent (and child) homelessness. The figure in Graphic 3.1 shows the 668 households that presented seeking assistance under the homelessness legislation on the grounds that they were at risk of domestic violence during the year to February 2013.

However, there are associations between other forms of violence and homelessness which are not directly recorded by ETHOS. Alongside the 668 households presenting as homeless due to domestic violence in the year to February 2013, another 484 households presented as homeless because of various forms of external violence and intimidation. Some homelessness professionals reported the view that a definition centred on domestic violence which was used by ETHOS was too narrow, as it did not give a full description of homelessness which was associated with violence and threatened violence.

[68] Mayock, P. and Sheridan, A. (2012) op. cit.
[69] Pleace, N. *et al* (2008) op. cit.

People living in temporary or non-conventional structures

Data were not available on the level of squatting or the use of non-conventional shelters. Homelessness professionals made the point that some of the categories ETHOS defines as inadequate, non-conventional housing, such as self-built shanty accommodation, are not widely present in Northern Ireland. This does not mean that people do not sometimes live in these situations, but, according to homelessness professionals, the numbers involved would be small. ETHOS included these categories of accommodation because it was designed to function as a pan-European, comparative guideline to measurement, which could be used in any European country and therefore needed to encompass a very wide variety of housing circumstances (see Chapter 2).

People living in unfit housing

ETHOS defines the measure of unfitness that should be used as the one set by national legislation or building regulations. For Northern Ireland, the statutory definition of unfit housing includes housing that is in disrepair, is damp, has an inadequate water supply, no dedicated space for food preparation or does not have adequate toilet or bathroom facilities. In summary, to be 'unfit', housing has to lack certain facilities and/or have a significant problem with issues such as damp or disrepair[70]. Data on the extent of unfit housing were available from the most recent Northern Ireland House Condition Survey, which estimated that one per cent of the occupied dwelling stock was unfit in 2011. This is not an exact figure so the point-in-time estimate of 7,200 households living in unfit housing shown in Graphic 3.1 should only be seen as indicative.

People living in extreme overcrowding

ETHOS terms 'extreme' overcrowding as the highest national norm. Data on households on the waiting list for social housing were used for this measure, as the Housing Selection Scheme captures information on levels of overcrowding that are viewed as unacceptable. There are two forms of overcrowding within this category: the first occurs when there are simply too many people in too little space, and the second when inappropriate sharing of

[70]http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/corporate/housing_research/house_condition_survey.htm

bedrooms is necessary, for example between children of different genders above a certain age, which is determined with reference to the bedroom standard[71].

The caveats noted for other categories which used waiting list data also apply here, centring on households that have not sought NIHE social housing not being recorded on the system. As at February 2013, 403 households awaiting NIHE housing were living in overcrowded conditions, of whom 189 (47 per cent) were defined as being 'extremely' overcrowded[72].

Populating ETHOS

While it may at first glance seem that an attempt to produce an ETHOS-based measure for Northern Ireland using existing data has been only partially successful, three points are very important to note:

- Some categories for which there are gaps in data only involve very small groups of people. This is not to suggest these people do not exist or do not have real needs, but ETHOS is a strategic level measure, designed to give a broadly comprehensive overview of homelessness (see Chapter 2). As ETHOS is designed for pan-European use, the typology records forms of homelessness and housing exclusion which may be relatively widespread in other European regions or countries, but are not prevalent in Northern Ireland.
- While it is not possible to fully, or to entirely accurately, 'populate' ETHOS for Northern Ireland, no region or country in Europe really has comprehensive and truly reliable and accurate data on every ETHOS category[73].
- Northern Ireland is much closer to being able to populate ETHOS than some other comparable regions and EU member states. Administrative

[71] As originally modelled, the Bedroom Standard assesses the notional number of bedrooms allocated for each household in accordance with its composition by age, gender, marital status and relationships of family members. Adults identified as partners are assumed to be sharing a bedroom. Any third adult aged over 21 is also assumed to need a separate bedroom. Within the Bedroom Standard, any two children (under 10) and two adolescents aged 10-20 of the same gender are assumed as being able to share a bedroom. A younger child (under 10) can also share a bedroom with an adolescent of the same gender. Unpaired children or adolescents of different genders aged over 10 are assumed to require separate bedrooms. This standard is then compared with the actual number of bedrooms (note that this includes bed-sitting rooms) available for the "sole use of the household".

[72] i.e. lacking more than one bedroom, Source: NIHE.

[73] European Commission (2007) op. cit.

and survey data on homelessness and housing exclusion are relatively good in Northern Ireland.

To expand on the second point, while it was sometimes the case that data were not available on some households, Northern Ireland is not alone in lacking data on these groups because some are inherently difficult to measure. In areas such as the measurement of households with no legal (sub) tenancy or people who are squatting, or in the precise measurement of people sleeping rough, every EU member state lacks entirely reliable data. More widely, measurement of homelessness in OECD countries that are not part of the EU is both variable in extent and never entirely robust nor comprehensive[74].

Looking at the third point, while Northern Ireland is not able to provide complete data for ETHOS, it is nevertheless possible to complete ETHOS to a greater extent than is the case in many EU member states. In comparison with many other EU countries or regions, Northern Ireland's homelessness and housing exclusion data are *extensive*. A recent review of homelessness across the EU noted[75]:

> *Broadly speaking, countries in Western and Northern Europe have a longer-standing policy focus on homelessness, which has led to more thorough statistical data collection, the production of political strategies and documents, as well as more extensive research and an academic focus on homelessness. The national experts in these contexts were therefore able to draw on relatively rich data and information. In contrast, countries in the South of Europe tend to have less comprehensive data and research, reflecting the fact that homelessness is less established as a strategic priority. In Central and Eastern Europe, policies and services are generally more restricted and the data and research available more limited.*

Northern Ireland's level and detail of homelessness data generally *exceeds* that typically collected in much of the North and West of the EU, i.e. those countries and regions that have more extensive welfare systems and

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[74]Richardson, D. (2009) *Extreme Poverty and Vulnerability in OECD countries: A Scoping Review* DELSA/ELSA/WP1(2009)6 OECD: Paris.
[75]FEANTSA (2012) op. cit.

homelessness policies. Northern Ireland has administrative data from the operation of the homelessness legislation, as well as data collected by homelessness services funded through Supporting People. Data in Northern Ireland are more extensive than is the case for France, which is reliant on periodic sample surveys of homelessness, or Germany, where data collection varies by region[76].

> *We're a high percentage there anyhow, with those types, both the legal, physical and the social, we would be inline, most of that driven by the statutory homeless approach, which has been reflected by Supporting People. Supporting People has complemented that a bit. I think we've got the data.* Statutory agency staff member.

The capacity to track entire populations using register-based systems is increasing, although big data has some limits in that not everyone remains within the sight of such systems[77] and there are limits around privacy and data collection in respect of data merging. Sample survey data are never going to be entirely representative and are expensive to collect, which creates some limits on that source as well. Statistical data on homelessness and housing exclusion may improve, but are unlikely to be entirely perfect. The limitations in Northern Ireland's data must be properly contextualised, because relatively more is recorded, counted and therefore understood about homelessness than is the case for many comparable regions and countries in the European Union.

In many respects, Northern Ireland can either complete, or come relatively close to completing, an ETHOS typology of homelessness using existing data. The questions which follow from how practical it is to complete ETHOS centre on what *utility* there may be from completing ETHOS. Having discussed whether or not ETHOS can be completed in this chapter, the report moves on to discuss the merits and demerits of completing ETHOS in Chapter 4.

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[76] Baptista, I. *et al* (2012) op. cit.

[77] Savage, M. and Burrows, R. (2007) 'The Coming Crisis of Empirical Sociology' *Sociology* Volume 41, 5, pp. 885–899.

4 The Strengths and Limits of ETHOS

Introduction

This chapter explores the case for using ETHOS in Northern Ireland. The chapter explores the debates around the strengths and limits of ETHOS as a means of measuring and monitoring homelessness and housing exclusion. Alongside drawing on international experience and critiques, the chapter explores the views of homeless people and homelessness professionals. The chapter begins by exploring the comparative potential of ETHOS, moves on to discuss views on ETHOS as a means of defining and enumerating housing exclusion and homelessness, and concludes by looking critically at the definitions used within ETHOS.

The comparative potential of ETHOS

Use within the European Union

The creation of ETHOS was driven by what was seen as a policy need within the EU, centred on a perceived lack of shared definitions of homelessness and housing exclusion (see Chapter 2). In 2007, a report from the European Commission noted the following[78]:

> *It is impossible to enumerate homelessness if it is not defined. It is equally impossible to compare 'levels' of homelessness unless there is a common definition and sub-definitions to allow for national and regional population differences. Homelessness can be defined narrowly to include only people without a roof over their heads or it can be defined more broadly. As policies focus more on prevention then broader definitions that include risk of homelessness become more appropriate. In this context, it has been argued that the continuing use of narrow definitions in many countries makes it impossible for those countries to develop programs and policies that acknowledge the range of different groups, the pathways and trajectories into and out of homelessness…*

[78]European Commission (2007) op cit, p. 43.

ETHOS has been widely seen as a solution to this perceived policy need, as a means by which better enumeration and understanding of homelessness can be established by using a shared set of guidelines. There have been a number of developments since ETHOS was introduced which include:

- Reference to ETHOS when measurement of homelessness and housing exclusion is undertaken in some EU member states[79]. A recent working document from the European Commission noted that seven EU member states were using definitions of homelessness that are *a broad definition of homelessness following the logic of the ETHOS definition*[80]. The same document notes that ETHOS is already being used as reference point across the EU.
- The Jury for the 2010 European Consensus Conference on homelessness recommended that the ETHOS typology be used as a *common framework definition of homelessness at EU level*, also recommending that *this common framework definition should underpin an overarching, integrated EU homelessness strategy*[81].A recent roundtable discussion of EU ministers with responsibility for homelessness noted: *The European Consensus Conference on Homelessness recommended the adoption of the ETHOS typology of homelessness and housing exclusion. A common framework would greatly aid and synergise understanding of the problem within and between different countries*[82].
- ETHOS was drawn upon when Canada and New Zealand reviewed and modified their measurement of homelessness and housing exclusion. ETHOS was also referenced in the development of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness[83].

The *Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland: 2012-2017* lists an objective to collect and analyse the data for ETHOS, which directly resulted in the

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[79]Busch-Geertsema, V. (2010) op. cit.

[80] European Commission (2013) *Commission Staff Working Document: Confronting Homelessness in the European Union*Brussels, 20.2.2013 SWD(2013) 42 final, countries listed as Germany, Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Sweden.

[81]European Consensus Conference on Homelessness (2010) op. cit.

[82] Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU *Roundtable Discussion of EU Ministers with responsibility for Homelessness* Leuven, 1 March 2013 Draft Discussion Paperhttp://eu2013.ie/events/event-items/roundtablediscussionofeuministerswithresponsibilityforhomelessness-20130301/

[83]http://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/ExpertsBriefs_All5Workgroups.pdf

production of this report. In parallel with developments in Northern Ireland, ETHOS has also been increasingly referenced in policy responses to homelessness in Ireland[84].

There are evidently trends towards using ETHOS as both a reference point and also the basis for an EU-wide, and perhaps even global, set of standards for measuring homelessness. The ETHOS typology is increasingly looked to when governments consider policy questions around homelessness and housing exclusion, often as a reference point from which to define the scope and nature of problems in a society. One result of this prominence in wider debates about homelessness was that most homelessness professionals had heard of the typology and knew broadly what it was, even if they were not always very familiar with the details of ETHOS.

Among some homelessness professionals in Northern Ireland, there was a view that ETHOS offered what was potentially considerable comparative power. Similar regions and countries could, in their view, theoretically be compared with Northern Ireland using ETHOS, both in terms of the kinds of housing exclusion and homelessness problems those other areas faced and in terms of how effective their policy solutions were.

> *In terms of the concept, bringing it forward, and this is something we've had difficulty with in the past, doing our benchmarking, in terms of what we're doing. And I think if you did have a European approach in terms of justification of our funding and our approach, that it would be useful to have common data sets that you can do useful comparisons with, consistency in how these things were reported…that would be a useful thing for us to justify what we're doing at the minute, or indeed getting justification for doing something extra.*
>
> *The benefit of it generally would be, and again from an organisational perspective, the benefit would be that obviously we could compare with what's happening elsewhere and we can benchmark what is happening elsewhere…and that's*

[84]Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government (2008) *The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008 – 2013* Dublin: DEHLG; O'Sullivan, E. (2012) *Ending Homelessness – A Housing-Led Approach*Dublin: Environment, Community and Local Government.

probably lacking at the moment…this would help us in that way.

Yet while there are some trends towards using ETHOS as a standard, there is also evidence that reference to ETHOS can be variable. While six EU member states, alongside Northern Ireland and Britain, are identified as close to ETHOS in how they define and measure homelessness, another six EU member states use narrower definitions and a further nine have not yet begun to use a standardised definition of homelessness and housing exclusion[85].

Canada and New Zealand

The Canadian definition of homelessness, while developed with *reference* to ETHOS, differs significantly[86], defining the following groups as homeless:

- *Unsheltered, or absolutely homeless* and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation.
- *Emergency sheltered*, including people staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for people at risk of domestic violence.
- *Provisionally accommodated*, referring to people whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure.
- At *risk of homelessness*, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.

The Canadian definition stresses that homelessness is not a static state, but a fluid experience that can change dramatically and frequently. In addition, the Canadian approach assumes that different groups can have differing experiences of homelessness and differing needs, and includes young people, women with experience of domestic/gender based violence, ethnic minorities and – specific to the situation of Canada – aboriginal homelessness[87] as

[85] European Commission (2013) op cit, p. 4.

[86]Canadian Homelessness Research Network (2012) *Canadian Definition of Homelessness*. Homeless Hub: www.homelesshub.ca/CHRNhomelessdefinition/

[87]Echenberg, H. and Jensen, H. (2012) *Background Paper: Defining and Enumerating Homelessness in Canada* Library of Parliament Publication No. PRB 08-30E.

subgroups. The Canadian definition also restricts itself to homelessness and the risk of homelessness[88].

The New Zealand definition of homelessness makes more direct reference to ETHOS and notes[89]:

> *The concepts and definitions of homelessness have been adapted from the European typology of homelessness and housing exclusion.*

Statistics New Zealand identifies four 'homeless living situations' which are as follows[90]:

- *Without shelter* covers living situations that provide no shelter or only makeshift shelter. These include living situations such as living on the street or in a hut or car.
- *Temporary accommodation* covers overnight shelters and short-term hostels, transitional supported accommodation and women's refuges. People staying long-term on camping sites and in boarding houses (B&Bs), which are both designed for short term use, are also within this category.
- *Sharing accommodation* covers living situations that provide temporary accommodation for people through sharing someone else's private dwelling, i.e. concealed households or hidden homelessness (insecure accommodation).
- *Uninhabitable housing* covers people residing in a dilapidated dwelling that is considered uninhabitable.

A key difference by comparison with ETHOS is the concept of 'usual residence'. This means that anyone who usually resides in, for example, residential care, hospitals and prisons or other institutions is *not* considered homeless. This does not match the way in which ETHOS records people due to be released from institutions as homeless (categories 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3, see chapters 2 and 3).

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[88]Canadian Homelessness Research Network (2012) op. cit.

[89]Statistics New Zealand (2009). *New Zealand definition of homelessness* Wellington: Statistics New Zealand, p.4.

[90]Statistics New Zealand (2009) op cit, p. 6-7.

Neither the Canadian nor New Zealand definitions categorise people in accommodation for immigrants as homeless. This reflects practice across Europe[91] (see Chapter 3).

ETHOS has sometimes served as a starting point from which different ways of thinking about and measuring homelessness have been developed, but it has not been used in its original form as the sole basis for a system of data collection. Limits to the influence of ETHOS were also illustrated by the very limited reference to the typology when the 2011 population censuses took place across the EU, with homelessness being enumerated using a range of different definitions and methodologies[92].

Homelessness professionals identified perceived limits to the extent to which ETHOS could be used for comparative purposes. These limits centred on what were thought to be the ambiguity of some definitions and also the extent to which other countries were actually using ETHOS-based monitoring of homelessness and housing exclusion.

> *If you look at number 12[93], unfit habitation, defined as unfit habitation by national legislation, you're going to have how many pieces of national legislation? So again, it goes back to the purpose of this, if you are wanting this to compare one with another…*Statutory agency staff member.

> *What's the purpose of it going to be then? If it's a European typology that isn't actually used across Europe? You then wonder* [what the] *value of it turns out to be, I can see it is valuable for that sort of comparison reason.* Statutory agency staff member.

ETHOS as a description of homelessness

Many arguments in favour of ETHOS, including those made by the European Commission[94], stress how the typology promotes a comprehensive view of

[91]Pleace, N. (2011) op. cit.
[92] Baptista, I. *et al* (2012) op. cit.
[93]People living in unfit housing. See chapters 2 and 3.
[94]European Commission (2013) op. cit.

homelessness and housing exclusion. The *Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland: 2012-2017* notes[95]:

> *The statutory definition of homelessness is rather narrow and does not capture the various forms of homelessness or its complex nature. The statutory definition throws little light on the different entry routes into homelessness or exits (pathways). FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations working with the homeless has provided a 'European Typology of Homelessness' known by the acronym ETHOS and calls for it to be used as a common framework definition of homelessness at EU level.*

Views on the descriptive power of ETHOS varied between homelessness professionals. Northern Ireland had comparatively broad definitions of homelessness and housing need, collecting considerable amounts of administrative data on people seeking assistance under the homelessness legislation, people awaiting social housing and people using Supporting People funded homelessness services. For homelessness professionals, ETHOS was not generally seen as widening the existing definition of homelessness and housing exclusion. However, as the definitions in use were not entirely standardised, some homelessness professionals thought there may be potential to use ETHOS to harmonise different data collection processes.

Some homelessness professionals repeatedly emphasised that if ETHOS were to be used in any way it would need to fit alongside existing administrative and logistical requirements. ETHOS was sometimes seen as delivering only broad data that were not specific enough to be operationally useful.

> *I suppose my feeling would be that, if we are going to look at a system, we should try and make it compatible with the systems that are already in operation.* Homelessness service provider.

> *It comes back to the purpose of this. If the purpose of this is generic research, to say here's what happened here, here's what happened there, good stuff. But if your purpose is to use that*

[95]http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/corporate/strategies/homelessness_strategy.htm, p. 11.

> *information practically, to achieve something or deliver for the people in these categories, you probably have to drill down a lot more into the categories.* Statutory agency staff member.

One concern among homelessness professionals was that ETHOS would widen the definition of homelessness and housing exclusion in some respects. One issue centred on the compatibility of ETHOS and the homelessness legislation but, more generally, there was sometimes a concern that ETHOS would use a broader definition of 'need' than could be comprehensively met within existing resources. These concerns had to be seen in the context of Northern Ireland already having a relatively broad definition of homelessness.

> *That's the potential outcome of this really, that that happens, is there a danger effectively…of actually raising expectations among people of what can be delivered, because if you're broadening the pool, if you like, of what's considered to be homeless, which potentially this could do, it works both ways. It identifies the problem but then part of that identification is people maybe have expectations that a problem can be resolved.* Homelessness service provider.

The views of homeless people

A definition of homelessness has to reflect the views of people who are living in situations defined as homelessness. For ETHOS to be truly an effective basis for monitoring homelessness, it would need to be clear that the typology includes people in Northern Ireland who see themselves as homeless. Equally, ETHOS should not define people as homeless when they generally do not regard themselves as being so.

Without exception, homeless people who participated in the research defined homelessness in relation to what ETHOS refers to as the *physical* domain (see Chapter 2). Homelessness always included living rough and living rough was often seen as the most extreme form of homelessness. For a few homeless people, homelessness referred only to this literal state of being without any form of shelter.

> *Nowhere to go, no fixed abode. In hostels, you're not homeless because you have somewhere, where if you're on the streets, you have nowhere to go.* Homeless man 20s.

> *If you're in a hostel you're not homeless, but it's different when you're sleeping rough and on the streets. You've got a bed, you get your meals whereas if you're out on the streets you've nothing.* Homeless man, 40s.
>
> *Could be homeless yes, but at least they've got somewhere to stay at nights, a roof over their head…you're not living out on the streets, you're in a warm place, you've got a bed.* Homeless man, 30s.

However, a larger number of homeless people also regarded living in emergency accommodation and hostels as being a state of homelessness. This larger group talked in terms of lacking control over their own space and not having guaranteed access to a private space within emergency accommodation. Hidden homelessness, or sofa-surfing, in the housing of friends or relatives, was also seen as homelessness because of a lack of private space. This broadly equated to a state of homelessness including exclusion from the *social* domain, which is again defined by ETHOS as an aspect of homelessness (see Chapter 2).

> *Basically a steady roof over your head, somewhere you know you can always go back to…your own space, for getting yourself back on your feet.* Homeless woman, 30s.
>
> *Aye big difference like, in a hostel there's rules, you have to be in at a certain time...in your own place you have more freedom…better off if you had your own place, like.* Homeless man 20s.
>
> *You're crashing on someone's settee or spare room, it's always in the back of your head that this isn't mine, I can't do this I can't do that…when you have your own space, your own place, you can.* Homeless man, 50s.
>
> *Until you have your own place, you're displaced.* Homeless man, 50s.
>
> *Oh yeah, I think you need your own space, everybody needs their own space, just a normal house or flat, not looking for a palace…you've got to feel safe, for sure, gives you peace of mind.* Homeless man, 30s.

Finally, homelessness people also discussed homelessness in terms that ETHOS would define as exclusion from the *legal* domain (see Chapter 2). For many homeless people a sense of home was closely associated with a sense of security of tenure, a place of their own that would not be lost because it was not legally secure or only had a short tenancy.

> *You've no permanent place to call your own, you've got no address…for me that's what qualifies as being homeless, you've not got your own place. You've got your own front door, your own place, your own rules: that for me is not being homeless.* Homeless man, 30s.

> *Places that aren't permanent I would say* [people in them] *are homeless…just because you have a bed doesn't mean that you're not homeless.* Homeless woman, 20s.

> *Homelessness is anything that isn't a home… it's where the word comes from.* Homeless man, 20s.

The definition of homelessness at the core of ETHOS, which centres on exclusions from the physical, social and legal domains of housing, was in line with how homeless people themselves viewed homelessness. However, there were other aspects of what they regarded as being a state of homelessness that were not directly encompassed by ETHOS.

The first of these additional aspects of being homeless was isolation and stigmatisation. Research has often shown homelessness to result in boredom, isolation, poor access to emotional support, economic exclusion and encountering widespread prejudice, making homelessness a state in which someone is both cut off from and rejected by society[96]. This appeared to be the experience of many homeless people.

> *What it means is no self-esteem. You've no self-esteem. You don't feel part of the community, you feel like an outcast…it's just really disheartening you know, you can end up in the*

[96]Pleace, N. (2000) 'The New Consensus, the Old Consensus and the Provision of Services for People Sleeping Rough' *Housing Studies* 15, 4, pp. 481-594; O'Sullivan, E. (2008) 'Pathways through Homelessness: Theoretical and Policy Implications', in: J. Doherty and B. Edgar (Eds.) *'In My Caravan, I Feel Like Superman': Essays in Honour of Henk Meert, 1963–2006*, pp.71–100. FEANTSA: Brussels.

> *wrong company, things can get really chaotic.* Homeless man, 20s.
>
> *You've nowhere to go, no-one to turn to.* Homeless woman, 20s.
>
> *You feel marginalised, compared to the rest of the society, yeah, you feel like an outcast compared to everyone else, everybody looking down at you…second class to everybody else.* Homeless woman, 20s.
>
> *…oh they must be right into drugs and thieving and all the rest of it, and they won't be a nice, decent citizen, you know, it's not always the case, but you get looked down upon, you know? You must be a sort of criminal, you know? Like you're the dregs of society, you know?* Homeless man, 30s.
>
> *In a nutshell like, not having any family or friends or anywhere to stay. Just having nowhere really… no roof, no support, no help.* Homeless man, 40s.

Some research has suggested that there are difficulties in 'passing' as a person who is not homeless and thus avoiding stigmatisation. Living on the streets and in emergency accommodation may over time create challenges in maintaining a 'normal' appearance and sometimes being known to be living at a 'homelessness' service can elicit a prejudicial response[97].

Homelessness was also discussed in terms of what might be called *precariousness*. For some homeless people, homelessness was less about where one happened to be living at a given moment than it was about having been in one insecure housing situation after another. Homelessness could be a situation in which someone had been *continually* in insecure accommodation for a sustained period.

> *What do you call homelessness, what do you call home? That's a really hard thing for a homeless person to say because many homeless people have never really had a home or somewhere settled…*Homeless woman, 20s.

[97]Pleace, N. (2000) op. cit.

> *Hostels, hostels, hostels, jail, jail, hostel, hostel, then homeless: no spaces.* Homeless man, 40s.
>
> *Being homeless is a mixture…it means you don't know where you're going from one day to the next, you're not secure and you're under a lot of stress and pressure.* Homeless woman, 20s.

There was also another dimension, which was an association between homelessness and support needs. For some homeless people, homelessness was closely tied into other support needs, which could include mental health problems and also sometimes problematic use of drugs and alcohol. Support needs were most strongly associated with homelessness when they were unmet and were perceived, again, as contributing to a situation of on-going precariousness.

> *People like myself that have had drug related issues……people sleeping rough or sleeping in crisis facilities…people get in a cycle and they just can't get out of it, do you know what I mean?* Homeless woman, 20s.
>
> *It's basically losing your direction… it's losing the will to carry on and you don't know what your options are… It's not just about sleeping rough, it's all the things that come with it, could be alcoholism, drugs, getting into bad crowds.* Homeless woman, 20s.

ETHOS was not designed to capture isolation or stigmatisation, nor does it capture those households moving between different forms of homelessness and housing exclusion on a *sustained* or *recurrent* basis. Equally, ETHOS does not record those unmet support needs that may be associated with frequent or long term experience of homelessness. Instead ETHOS records those who it defines as homeless, at risk of homelessness or in situations of housing exclusion based on where those people are living. This point, that ETHOS may not record enough about *experiences* of homelessness, is revisited below.

ETHOS and existing data on homelessness

ETHOS has been developed and promoted as a way to develop comparable, standardised, data on homelessness across the EU. Alongside promoting the collection of comparable data, ETHOS is also designed to encourage at least broad monitoring of the nature and extent of homelessness and housing

exclusion in EU countries that do not collect standardised data at national level or which collect only partial or very limited data. ETHOS is not intended as a replacement for operational data, i.e. it is not designed to fulfil the specific monitoring and outcome assessment of strategies to counteract homelessness and housing exclusion, nor is ETHOS intended to act as outcome monitoring for individual services. ETHOS can be used to look at strategic and service outcomes in a broad sense, because patterns of homelessness and housing exclusion can be contrasted by tracking changes over time *within* a country and also by comparing changes in levels *between* countries.

ETHOS can potentially enhance data collection in contexts where little or no data are being collected on a systematic basis. In Northern Ireland, where data on homelessness and housing exclusion are extensive compared to many other regions and countries in Europe, adopting ETHOS would not significantly enhance existing knowledge. Operationally and strategically, while it is possible and practical to (largely) populate ETHOS, the typology does not always record homelessness using the definitions, or the level of detail, that are necessary for internal monitoring of homelessness, housing exclusion and strategic and service outcomes within Northern Ireland.

The robustness of ETHOS reflects the quality of data that are available to populate the framework. In the case of Northern Ireland, as noted in the last chapter, ETHOS can be populated with a considerable amount of relatively high quality data. As and when data collection is enhanced, for example by the addition of more longitudinal data, ETHOS could also be enhanced. Comparatively, ETHOS would always need to use data that were close to the data being collected in the country or countries with which a comparison was being made.

ETHOS as a 'value laden' measure

ETHOS has been the subject of some criticism which asserts that the definition and measurement within the typology is not value neutral, i.e. ETHOS reflects the political and/or cultural beliefs and context in which it was developed. The most systematic critique of what is perceived as the 'value laden' nature of ETHOS to date has come from New Zealand. ETHOS has taken a very direct role in helping shape how homelessness and housing exclusion are

defined in New Zealand, a process that has brought the ETHOS typology under close scrutiny. For Amore *et al*,[98] ETHOS is characterised by:

- A seemingly arbitrary threshold between homelessness and housing exclusion, which specifically relates to homelessness being defined by ETHOS as exclusion from the social and legal domains (lack of private space over which one has control and lack of security of tenure, see Chapter 2). ETHOS does not define homelessness as being exclusion from the physical and legal domain (lack of housing and no security of tenure, see Chapter 2). This means that ETHOS places someone living in a makeshift structure on illegally occupied land as being in a situation of housing exclusion, rather than homelessness. There is also some inconsistency in how the domains are used. For example, someone who is sofa surfing fits within the ETHOS *housing exclusion* category of living temporarily with family or friends. However, as they lack both private space (social domain) and any security of tenure (legal domain), they also technically fall within the ETHOS definition of *homelessness* (see Chapter 2).
- ETHOS is not truly exhaustive and, in addition to not always being clearly related to the three domains, some categories potentially overlap. For example, a household can be in a temporary structure on illegally occupied land (categories 8.3 and 11.3, see chapters 2 and 3) or living in housing that is both unfit and overcrowded (categories 12.1 and 13.1, see chapters 2 and 3).
- ETHOS combines measurement of people who are *experiencing* homelessness with those interpreted as potentially *at risk* of homelessness, an issue which is described as a lack of 'reference period consistency'. Amore *et al* argue that in not clearly differentiating between past, present and future homelessness, ETHOS lacks precision[99].

[98]Amore, K.; Baker, M. and Howden-Chapman, P. (2011) 'The ETHOS Definition and Classification of Homelessness: An Analysis' *European Journal of Homelessness* 5,2, pp. 19-37.

[99]Amore, K. *et al* (2011) op. cit.

Amore *et al* suggest an alternative approach to defining homelessness, as living in places of habitation below minimum standards of 'adequacy' and lacking *access* to adequate housing[100].

This logic is reflected in the New Zealand approach to homelessness measurement which was described above. Housing exclusion is defined as living in habitation that is at or above the minimum standard of adequacy but not fully adequate, while lacking access to housing that is fully adequate. However, the element of being 'at risk' of homelessness, an important concept in the operation of the homelessness legislation in Northern Ireland, is not subject to the same level of attention as in the ETHOS framework[101].

Some further criticism can also be directed at the location-based approach that ETHOS uses. For example, ETHOS does not include formerly and potentially homeless people being supported in ordinary housing by tenancy sustainment services. This group could arguably be said to be in a transitional *state*, i.e. not yet at the point where they can live without support, albeit that they are not living in transitional *housing*. This distinction raises questions about how 'homelessness' is defined and measured in regions such as Northern Ireland, where a significant element of what are regarded (and funded through Supporting People) as 'homelessness services' are floating support services providing tenancy sustainment (see Chapter 3). This relates back to the criticism from Amore *et al* that ETHOS relates to people's place of habitation at a given time and not to their circumstances[102].

Some homelessness professionals also took the view that ETHOS was built around a set of assumptions about what homelessness was. There was considerable overlap between what the homelessness professionals regarded as 'homelessness', what the homelessness legislation defined as 'homelessness' and ETHOS. However, some of the categorisations of homelessness within ETHOS were questioned by homelessness professionals, who also thought there could be overlap between some ETHOS categories.

> *It all goes back to your definition of homeless, I mean an elderly person in our accommodation could be considered*

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[100]Amore, K. *et al* (2011) op. cit., p.32

[101]Sahlin, I. (2012) 'The Logos of ETHOS' *European Journal of Homelessness* 6,2, pp. 227-234.

[102] Amore, K. *et al* (2011) op. cit.

homeless if they've inappropriate facilities in their accommodation…if they can't make the stairs and they've an upstairs toilet or whatever, they do apply to ourselves for accommodation and are housed as homeless applicants and we would have significant numbers of those.

There are value judgements. They may be insecurely housed in a family member's house, but if they can continue to stay for any length of time are they homeless? Never mind whether you can create a coherent data set, what is this data set for?

Do your thirteen categories add up to your overall total or are there going to be people in two categories at one time?

ETHOS and different groups of homeless people

Chronic and transitional homelessness

Homelessness was long seen as a problem facing vulnerable people with high support needs who had limited rationality as a consequence of severe mental illness and problematic drug and alcohol use[103]. When academics in the USA began to collect longitudinal data that tracked homelessness over time, rather than point-in-time surveys covering a single day, a different pattern of homelessness became apparent.

Recent research in two major cities in the United States showed that homeless people there fell into two main categories. The largest, *transitionally* homeless group was not made up of people with high rates of severe mental illness or drug and alcohol use, but instead consisted of people who experienced homelessness linked to relationship breakdowns and poverty, and who did not generally stay homeless for very long.. This transitionally homeless group existed alongside a smaller group of chronically homeless people: people with high support needs who were living rough and/or in emergency shelters either *repeatedly* or on a *near-permanent* basis[104]. The chronically homeless people consumed a lot of resources, because their homelessness was often not

[103] O'Sullivan, E. (2008) op. cit.

[104]Culhane, D.P. and Kuhn, R. (1998) 'Patterns and Determinants of Public Shelter Utilization among Homeless Adults in Philadelphia and New York City' *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 17,1, pp. 23-43.

being resolved, resulting in their using emergency services repeatedly or for sustained periods of time[105].

Awareness of the two distinct types of homelessness led to a revision of Federal policy, centred on the use of Housing First to try to prevent and reduce 'chronic' homelessness[106]. There is *limited* evidence that a similar pattern of chronic homelessness may exist across some EU countries, though with the exception of some recent work in Denmark, the data are less robust than in the USA[107].

Some homelessness professionals took the view that there is a population of people with high need circulating around hostels in Northern Ireland, who experience sustained and recurrent homelessness. This population closely resembled what the Americans describe as chronically homeless people.

> *It's also people who move round the different hostels. You know, it's important to recognise that people stay in one hostel till maybe their placement is withdrawn and they've breached and there's been a warning and they've moved to the next and moved to the next: there's a bit of a conveyor belt between the different hostels.*

Supporting People services for homeless people in Northern Ireland also include services for people who would be described as chronically homeless in the US. These include services for homeless people presenting with co-morbid problematic drug and alcohol use and severe mental illness, alongside poor physical health and other support needs. Vulnerability is also integral to the ways in which homelessness is understood and responded to in the homelessness legislation and by homelessness services in Northern Ireland.

Some homeless people talked of their own experiences of sustained precariousness in moving between one situation of homelessness and housing exclusion. In addition, people experiencing homelessness drew attention to

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[105]Culhane, D.P. and Kuhn, R. (1998) op cit; Culhane, D. (2008) 'The Costs of Homelessness: A Perspective from the United States' *The European Journal of Homelessness*, 2, pp. 97-114.
[106]http://www.usich.gov
[107]Benjaminsen, L. (2013) 'Testing a Typology of Homelessness Across Welfare Regimes' presentation given at the *International Homelessness Research Conference: Advancing the Policy and Practice of Crisis Response Systems*, University of Pennsylvania, 4th-5th June, 2013 http://www.sp2.upenn.edu/ihrc ; Jones, A. and Pleace, N. (2010) *A Review of Single Homelessness in the UK, 2000-2010*. London: Crisis.

what they saw as links between some forms of homelessness and high support needs.

> *Addictions would be a biggie…Sleeping on the streets or in hostel accommodation, for years and years, because sometimes of their addictions.* Homeless Man in 30s.

Gender and homelessness

There is growing evidence that the experiences of homeless women may often differ from those of men. There are gender variations in homelessness causation – women are much more likely to experience male domestic/gender based violence – and there is also some evidence of variations in experience, as women may be more likely to rely on 'sofa surfing' arrangements with friends and relatives for sustained periods. Evidence on the experience of homeless women in Northern Ireland is limited, as is the case for the evidence base on homeless women across Britain and the EU member states more generally. However, patterns around domestic violence as a major cause of women's homelessness, alongside reliance on friends and relatives when homelessness occurs, appear to be widespread[108] and recent research in Ireland identified similar issues (see Chapter 3).

Some more recent work[109] has suggested that when women experience chronic homelessness it can take a different form from that experienced by men, in terms of where that homelessness happens. A male chronically homeless person with high support needs cycles in and out of emergency accommodation, supported housing and living rough. By contrast, homeless women with high support needs may cycle in and out of arrangements with friends and relatives, spending less time living rough or in emergency accommodation or supported housing.

Family homelessness

The particular concerns around family homelessness centre on three broad risks to child health and well-being and child development. The first is simply the effect of poor or inadequate housing: if a child has nowhere safe to play inside a house or flat, no green space or garden they can use and lacks

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[108]Baptista, I. (2010) 'Women and Homelessness' In E. O'Sullivan, V. Busch-Geertsema, D. Quilgars and N. Pleace (Eds) *Homelessness Research in Europe*. Brussels: FEANTSA. pp. 163-186.; Jones, A. (1999) *Out of Sight, out of Mind: The experiences of homeless women*, London: Crisis.
[109]Mayock, P. and Sheridan, S. (2012) op. cit.; Baptista, I. (2010) op. cit.

privacy (both in terms of having their own space and somewhere that can be used for homework) there are risks to their well-being and development. Child health can also be potentially undermined by poor housing conditions such as damp and cold. The second set of risks centre on precariousness: if a family is effectively sofa surfing there may be a lack of continuity in schooling. Third, children can experience disruption in their lives and/or education if they have to move some distance, for example as a result of homelessness caused by male domestic/gender based violence.[110].

Women experiencing homelessness with their children who were interviewed for this research reported worries about what their children's future would be like. While the number of interviews with homeless families was quite small, their experiences reflected the results of large scale research in England[111].

> *It's very stressful for a parent to see their child without a home. It's pretty tough to be honest with you…*Homeless Mother, 20s.

Youth homelessness

There is a longstanding association between experience of the care system and youth homelessness, although progress has been made in developing specialist services to break this link[112]. Young people may also be highly vulnerable to economic downturns and recessions, as their economic position often tends to be poor when labour markets contract, which then disadvantages them in housing markets. Since 2008, rates of youth unemployment in the EU have tended to exceed levels among those aged over 25[113].

As is the case with child homelessness, youth homelessness represents a threat to individuals across their life course and can steer a young person into a life of precariousness, marginalisation, poor health and well-being, worklessness and perhaps also criminality. Quilgars *et al* highlighted the need to avoid the risk of youth homelessness, both as a damaging start to someone's life course and a fracturing of what should be their *pathway* to

[110]Pleace, N. *et al* (2008) op. cit.
[111] Ibid.
[112]Quilgars, D. *et al* (2008) op. cit.
[113]http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics

housing and independence[114], and American research suggests associations between youth homelessness and later chronic homelessness[115].

ETHOS and different types of homelessness

ETHOS does not record differing experiences or types of homelessness, which could be viewed as a limitation. By focusing on the *locations* of homeless populations, the typology fails to record the differing forms of need that can exist within them, including the distinction between those at risk of sustained homelessness and those whose homelessness is only short term. Youth homelessness, women's homelessness, family homelessness and the extent and nature of any chronically homeless population are not directly recorded by ETHOS, although some of the location-based measures (women in refuges, young people about to leave care) collect partial data.

For strategic purposes, Northern Ireland already has a fairly good understanding of chronic homelessness from data covering the administration of the homelessness legislation and the operation of Supporting People funded homelessness services. Given the different aspects of homelessness, operational and policy concern (not only in Northern Ireland), one criticism that could be aimed at ETHOS is that it records little information on the differential experience, and potentially varied effects, of homelessness. As one homelessness professional noted:

> *A lot of this* [ETHOS] *takes into account the accommodation people are living in, rather than their reasons for being homeless…we're used to measuring homelessness not purely based on where the person's living but their circumstances.*

The strengths and limits of ETHOS

ETHOS has strengths and limits. In considering its utility for Northern Ireland, it is important to consider the likely direction of policy and practice on how to enumerate homelessness and housing exclusion and compare outcomes in preventing and reducing homelessness. ETHOS is, by some distance, the most developed typology that is available and it is influential at international level. At the very least, ETHOS is often a reference point: at most it is being

[114]Quilgars, D. *et al* (2008) op. cit.
[115]Culhane, D.P.; Metraux, S.; Byrne, T.; Stino, M. and Bainbridge, J. (forthcoming 2013) 'The Aging of Contemporary Homelessness Contexts.

advocated as an international standard. Should a shared international definition of homelessness and housing exclusion be developed, it is likely to draw heavily on ETHOS or even use the framework in its current form..

In defining homelessness with reference to the three domains of physical, social and legal exclusion from housing, ETHOS also defines and conceptualises homelessness in ways that reflect how both homeless people and homelessness professionals in Northern Ireland view these social problems. Much of what ETHOS describes as homelessness and housing exclusion is recognised as such, including by the people who are living in these situations.

Although the ETHOS framework has been the subject of criticism, there are counter-arguments against some of the criticisms levelled at it. For example, it has been argued that while ETHOS may not be entirely representative of all forms of homelessness and uses a range of assumptions, no definition of homelessness is 'scientific'. How a society defines an unacceptable housing situation is influenced by ideology, custom, culture and general living standards. There are minimum standards of course, such as those defined by the United Nations Housing Rights Programme (UNHRP), but the definition of an acceptable housing situation will always vary between countries[116]. It must also be remembered that ETHOS is not, and was never intended to be, a detailed monitoring system that can be used to assess service and strategic outcomes at national or regional level, as each strategy, service and programme will have specific goals that are not encompassed by ETHOS.

The location-based nature of ETHOS has also been defended, on the basis that homelessness and housing exclusion are essentially about being in the wrong locations. Academic critiques of a framework essentially designed as a means to provide a consistent, comparable overview of homelessness and housing exclusion have also been viewed as inappropriate: they attack ETHOS for lacking precision when this was not something it was seeking to achieve in the first instance[117]. This is because the goal of ETHOS was to establish a consistent overview of homelessness that was clear and simple enough to be replicable across different regions and countries, facilitating comparison. ETHOS has been designed to use clear, simple measures that can be

[116]www.unhabitat.org/

[117]Roman, N. (2012) 'ETHOS: A perspective from the United States of America' *European Journal of Homelessness* 6, 2, pp. 235-237.

consistently translated to generate comparable data from sometimes radically different regional and national contexts[118].

However, questions remain about why certain lines are drawn between 'housing exclusion' and 'homelessness' in ETHOS. Central to these questions are the categorisations of groups such as sofa-surfing households, people living in temporary dwellings on land they do not have any right to occupy and people in unfit/overcrowded housing as *not* being homeless. The second group may be very unusual in Northern Ireland, but the sofa surfing households and those in unfit or overcrowded housing are present and are regarded as being homeless. Further, ETHOS focuses on *where* people are, rather than *who* they are and, particularly, whether their homelessness is transitional or chronic and whether they may have other, specific, support needs as a woman, young person or child. This is important for Northern Ireland, because policy and practice is centred on the idea that different groups of homeless people exist and require specific types of assistance. Innovative US, Canadian and European Policy is also centred on careful targeting of specific sets of support to meet specific needs[119].

[118]Edgar, B. (2012) 'The ETHOS Definition and the Classification of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion' *European Journal of Homelessness* 6, 2, pp. 219-225.

[119]Busch-Geertsema, V. *et al* (2010) op. cit.

5 Conclusions

Introduction

This final chapter considers the case for introducing ETHOS in Northern Ireland. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first discusses the issues around populating ETHOS and the second section considers the broad case for ETHOS. The third and final section sets out the main conclusions of the research.

Populating ETHOS

Chapter 3 looked in detail at populating ETHOS. While there are limits to the data that are available, Northern Ireland is far closer to being able to populate an ETHOS typology than many other regions and countries within the EU. As noted in Chapter 3, Northern Ireland encounters the most difficulty in counting those populations that are inherently difficult to count accurately. No EU member state or region, nor any OECD member state, has an *entire* picture of living rough, 'hidden' homelessness or squatting, nor of other mobile and hard to find groups of people experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion.

In Northern Ireland, the additional work needed to populate ETHOS is quite limited. Much of the necessary data is already collected for administrative reasons, which means that generating ETHOS would have low opportunity costs.

ETHOS is not intended as a scientific exercise in enumeration nor is it a hypothesis about homelessness to be tested, a monitoring system or a database architecture. Instead, it is intended as a way to broadly define and generate figures on the extent of homelessness and housing exclusion. ETHOS is a way to introduce a standardised strategic overview that will broadly harmonise data on homelessness and housing exclusion in the EU. ETHOS seeks to compare the broad nature of housing problems and the effectiveness of various responses to those problems using a shared basis of understanding (see Chapter 2). In a scientific sense, ETHOS will never be truly accurate, but it is intended as a strategic overview, not as a census. With Northern Ireland as close as any other region or country in the EU to generating the data needed to at least provide indicative figures across much

of ETHOS, the question becomes whether there is any utility in actually using the framework. The next section of this final chapter considers this question.

Making a case for ETHOS

If ETHOS is to be used, then the relationship between ETHOS and wider policy needs to be made clear. The situations of homelessness and housing exclusion described by ETHOS are similar to, but do not entirely reflect, the ways in which the homelessness legislation and wider policy on access to social housing in Northern Ireland define and prioritise situations of homelessness and housing need. ETHOS is broadly a good fit with how problems of homelessness and housing exclusion are already defined, but if the typology is to be used, the relationship between ETHOS, legislation and existing policy and practice needs to be clearly and carefully defined.

This raises the question of whether the typology could – or should – be modified to fit more closely with existing practice in Northern Ireland. There are good reasons to modify the basic approach and good reasons – chiefly the potential utility of ETHOS for comparative purposes – to leave it alone as far as is possible.

Key issues include the inclusion of a relatively ill-defined group of 'migrants' and the line between what is and what is not defined as 'homelessness', particularly the criticism that people living in uninhabitable housing or sharing accommodation are *not* defined as homeless by ETHOS (see Chapter 4). In addition, there are questions around whether chronic homelessness, women's homelessness, family homelessness and youth homelessness warrant separate enumeration. There is also the issue that ETHOS does not count as homeless people who are being resettled or having homelessness prevented by mobile/floating support services, but does count those in a resettlement process within hostels and supported housing (see Chapter 4).

Ultimately, judgements on which circumstances constitute homelessness are policy decisions, as is the wider decision as to whether or not to use ETHOS to enumerate and understand homelessness. The broad conclusions of this research can be summarised in five points:

- ETHOS provides a widely accepted definition of homelessness and housing exclusion. The ETHOS typology is designed to provide a

standardised overview of data for broad regional and international comparison. ETHOS is insufficiently detailed and also too generic to be used for administrative or outcome monitoring purposes within any one country or region.

- Northern Ireland has relatively good data on homelessness. However, some populations are inherently difficult to count and data are less extensive on some groups than on others. Other countries and regions face the same challenges and encounter the same limitations when collecting data on some of the harder to find groups of homeless people.
- The costs of producing ETHOS for Northern Ireland would be relatively low, and it would not be a major undertaking to assemble existing data to *largely* complete ETHOS. As noted, assembling an entirely complete and accurate ETHOS typology is not possible, because some of these populations will always be difficult to count.
- If ETHOS is to be used and referred to, particular care must be taken to maintain a clear relationship between the ETHOS typology, the homelessness legislation and the wider definitions of housing need used in Northern Ireland. It must be borne in mind that ETHOS does not account for differing experiences and differing needs within the homeless population.
- Any proposal to modify ETHOS to better fit the situation and the definitions of homelessness used in Northern Ireland would need to be balanced against the potential utility of ETHOS for comparison. Where ETHOS is potentially most useful is in comparing the nature of homelessness and housing exclusion in Northern Ireland with other areas using a widely understood and accepted typology. In addition, if and when ETHOS becomes more widely used by administrations, regions and EU member states, the typology has considerable potential to compare the broad outcomes from Northern Ireland's strategies and policies with those of other areas.