The ETHOS Definition and Classification of Homelessness: An Analysis

Kate Amore, Michael Baker and Philippa Howden-Chapman

Department of Public Health, University of Otago, Wellington, New Zealand

> **Abstract_** *Defining homelessness has long been a topic of debate, but international agreement is elusive, and most of the various definitions of homelessness in use across the world are not conceptually grounded. The two aims of this paper are: to provide an analysis and critique of the validity of the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS), which is arguably the most prominent definition and classification of homelessness with an articulated theoretical foundation in current use; and to propose a modified approach to conceptualising homelessness that the authors have developed. We begin by describing a set of considerations and criteria that can be used for assessing any system of measurement. Two parts of the ETHOS conceptualisation are then examined: the conceptual model, and the typology of subgroups that make up the homeless and housing excluded populations. Each part is found to have conceptual weaknesses that compromise its validity. A modified definition and classification of homelessness, which we think overcomes these weaknesses, is proposed.*

> **Key Words_** *Homelessness; definition; classification; ETHOS; measurement; New Zealand.*

Introduction

How homelessness should be defined is a fundamental and persistent problem. Relatively little progress has been made toward achieving international agreement in the twenty years since Greve and Currie (1990, p. 28) wrote: "what constitutes 'homelessness' and how many people are homeless is a debate which has been running for thirty years or more". A robust definition of homelessness is a necessary basis for the production of meaningful statistics on the size and characteristics of homeless populations, which are of critical importance for informed policy-making. A definition of homelessness can be judged useful if it allows for accurate and reliable identification and classification of homeless people so that policies can be developed to respond to different manifestations of homelessness and monitor the effectiveness of such interventions. At a more basic level, evidence of the size of homeless populations can play a pivotal role in determining whether the problem is included on a government's policy agenda in the first place: "it becomes difficult to urge governments to meet the needs of homeless people if the parameters of the homeless population are unclear" (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1992, p. 274).

Definitions of homelessness vary considerably across the world and few have a conceptual basis. Definitions produced by government agencies with responsibility for addressing homelessness tend to minimise the population and concentrate on those who are publicly visible. Advocates and non-government service providers, on the other hand, who regard the definition as "the connecting link between the problem of homelessness and agency responsibility" (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007, p. 652) (as well as the link to funding), tend to favour broad definitions that maximise the number of people identified as homeless, often by conflating people at risk of homelessness and those who are actually homeless (Widdowfield, 1999). These different framings perform certain functions, but they are unlikely to provide a valid basis for producing accurate homelessness statistics. Hutson and Liddiard (1994, p. 32) observe: "because different professionals have different definitions of homelessness, so they also produce different statistics. In this way, statistics can tell us more about the organisation collecting them than about the phenomena that are being measured".

In most nations, measurement of homelessness is limited or non-existent, and the lack of an international, standard definition of homelessness means that there is no credible benchmark for governments to be held to. Like poverty and unemployment, homelessness is a relative concept, which "acquires meaning in relation of the housing conventions of a particular culture" (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1992, p. 290). Residents of boarding houses, for example, have a relatively high level of security of tenure in some countries and virtually no security of tenure in others. Living situations included in classifications of homelessness will not be

internationally constant, but a valid conceptual definition is necessary to guide consistent decision-making as to which people, within which living situations, should be classified as homeless in each context.

This paper has two aims: first, to analyse and critique the validity of an important and relatively new approach to defining and classifying homelessness – the European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS); and second, to promote comparative discussion and debate, we present a modified approach to defining and classifying homelessness.

Developed by FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) and the European Observatory on Homelessness, ETHOS is both a definition and a typology (or classification) of homelessness; that is, it proposes how the homeless population should be identified and divides the population into discrete subgroups. There are two reasons for focusing on ETHOS. First, it is one of the few definitions of homelessness that is conceptually based, and its conceptual foundation is explained more thoroughly than any other definition. ETHOS has been heralded as offering, "researchers in Europe (and abroad) a thoroughly well conceptualized definition of homelessness and residential instability" (Culhane and Byrne, 2010, p. 9), but thorough critique of its conceptualisation has been lacking. Secondly, the ETHOS approach is increasingly prominent. It has been advocated as providing an appropriate basis for measuring homelessness in Europe (Edgar *et al.*, 2007; FEANTSA, 2008) and is "widely accepted and frequently quoted in almost all European countries" (Busch-Geertsema, 2010, p. 21). The independent jury of the 2010 European Consensus Conference on Homelessness (2010) recommended that this definition be adopted as the official European Union definition of homelessness, and a number of countries have adjusted or refined their national definitions of homelessness to fit more closely with ETHOS.

This paper is structured as follows: we begin by describing a set of considerations and criteria that can be used to assess any system for defining, classifying and measuring phenomena in a quantitative way. The two parts of the ETHOS approach to conceptualising homelessness – the model and classification – are then examined through application of the relevant criteria. Finally, a modified approach to conceptualising homelessness that the authors have developed and believe to be valid is described as a way of identifying potential improvements to the ETHOS approach.

Methods

Defining and measuring any phenomenon involves a large number of factors and considerations. Such measurement questions occur across all areas of public policy and many disciplines, such as public health surveillance. We find it useful to group these considerations into four categories, represented by four C's: Context; Conceptualisation; Case (or operational) definition; and 'Can do'.

Applying these considerations to homelessness, the first C – Context – refers to the institutional, cultural, and governance environment in which a definition of homelessness is embedded. This context includes the nature of the agencies concerned with measuring homelessness and their purposes for carrying out such measurement. A particularly important factor is whether their purpose is policy-orientated (such as setting and monitoring housing policy) or more operational (such as making decisions about how to manage individuals who are currently at risk of homelessness). The context includes some assessment of the importance of measuring homelessness. Arguments for the importance of this activity have been made in the introduction, so we take it as a given that homelessness should be defined and measured.

The second C – Conceptualisation – refers to the validity of the definition and classification of homelessness. Of particular importance is construct validity, which is the degree to which "…the measurement corresponds to theoretical concepts (constructs) concerning the phenomenon under study" (Porta *et al.*, 2008, p. 252). Acceptance of the definition is also likely to be increased by face validity; that is, it "… appears reasonable on superficial inspection" (Porta *et al.*, 2008, p. 91). The conceptualisation stage includes developing the criteria that define the concept and classifying the population identified by these criteria into subgroups according to selected characteristic(s). The criteria should be clearly defined and consistently applied; exceptions to the rules should be defensible. Classification systems have additional requirements, including the need for them to be exhaustive and mutually exclusive (Hoffmann and Chamie, 1999).

The third C – Case (or operational) definition – refers to the need for the concept to be translated into a meaningful description of what is being measured – in this instance homelessness and categories thereof. A case definition stipulates how the dimensions of a concept of homelessness should be applied in the real world. Many variables are continuous, so thresholds usually have to be set, and these should be set in a meaningful and defensible way. A case definition should be accurate, achieving an optimal balance between sensitivity (correctly identifying homeless people in the population as homeless) and specificity (correctly identifying non-homeless people in the population as non-homeless). The case definition should

involve consideration of what duration of exposure to homelessness qualifies a person as homeless (e.g. should a person qualify as homeless if they have been in a 'homeless situation' for an hour, a day, a week, or longer?).

There are also decisions to be made about the statistical measures that will be generated from application of the case definition, particularly about measuring prevalence (i.e. total number or proportion of homeless people in a population at a specified point in time or over a specified period – called point prevalence and period prevalence, respectively), measuring incidence (i.e. number or rate of new cases of homelessness in a population over a given time period), and lifetime measures (i.e. what proportion of the population has been homeless at some stage in their lives). In the homelessness literature, point prevalence is sometimes called 'stock', and incidence referred to as 'inflow' (Edgar *et al.*, 2007). Whichever measure is of interest, the reference period should be consistent; that is, a person must meet the criteria of the case definition on a specified date or during a specified time period in order to be counted as homeless. National level statistics would almost invariably report on point prevalence (prevalence at a specified point in time). It is necessary to specify and standardise these reference period issues to ensure homelessness data are comparable.

The last C – 'Can do' – refers to having a system that makes measuring homeless-ness possible. This consideration includes questions around the practicality, acceptability and affordability of measuring homelessness. A definition that meets these criteria is more likely to be adopted and used, which is an essential require-ment for generating information on the size and characteristics of the homeless population. A highly useable definition is also likely to be used in a consistent way over time and in different places, thus improving reliability. Reliability refers "…to the degree to which the results obtained by a measurement procedure can be replicated" (Porta *et al.*, 2008, p. 214). In other words, any definition of homeless-ness should produce the same results when applied in diverse countries and over time, where the underlying level of homelessness is similar.

There are some obvious tensions between these measurement requirements. Developing a measure that has high validity in the conceptualisation stage and is highly practical in terms of the 'can do' aspect is particularly challenging. The choice of case definition will usually be a compromise between these considera-tions, though such trade-offs are not inevitable. One could argue that a definition that has high face validity is likely to be acceptable and used in a more consistent, and therefore more reliable, manner.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider all the requirements of an effective system for measuring homelessness; instead, we focus only on conceptualisation, but stress that a valid concept of homelessness is the basis of a meaningful case

definition and should guide the development of data collection. The ETHOS model and classification of homelessness will now be assessed for validity according to the criteria described above.

The ETHOS Approach

The conceptual model

The ETHOS conceptual model was developed by the scholars Bill Edgar, Joe Doherty, and Hank Meert. It was first published in the *Second Review of Statistics on Homelessness in Europe* (Edgar *et al.*, 2003), was further refined in the following year's review, and has not changed since then (as per the most recent *European Review of Statistics on Homelessness* (Edgar, 2009)). The model focuses on living situations, and calls an adequate living situation 'a home'. Three domains are identified as constituting a home; living situations that are deficient in one or more of these domains are taken to represent homelessness and housing exclusion. These three domains of home are described as:

> "having a decent dwelling (or space) adequate to meet the needs of the person and his/her family (*physical domain*); being able to maintain privacy and enjoy social relations (*social domain*); and having exclusive possession, security of occupation and legal title (*legal domain*)" (Edgar, 2009, p. 15)

These domains are said to relate to each other as per Figure 1.

Figure 1 ETHOS model for defining living situations as homelessness, housing exclusion, or adequate housing according to physical, legal, and social domains
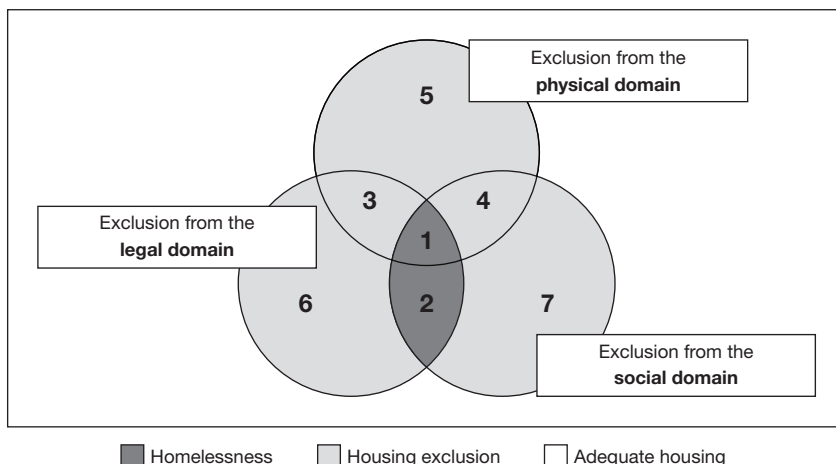
Source: adapted from Edgar, 2009, p. 16.

According to this model, a population can be categorised into three groups at the time of enumeration:

i)   the homeless population (shaded dark grey in Figure 1);

ii) the population experiencing housing exclusion (shaded light grey in Figure 1); and

iii) the adequately housed population (not experiencing homelessness or housing exclusion – represented by the white space outside the circles in Figure 1).

The area within the circles is divided into seven distinct areas according to the way the circles overlap; these are taken to represent seven distinct categories of homelessness and housing exclusion. Despite being a conceptual step up from many previous and existing definitions of homelessness, we consider this model to have two main shortcomings in terms of validity: lack of clear rationale for the threshold between homelessness and housing exclusion; and failure to take account of why people are in a living situation that is inadequate for permanent habitation. These problems will now be discussed in turn.

A seemingly arbitrary threshold
between homelessness and housing exclusion

The first threat to the validity of the model arises from where the threshold is drawn between homelessness and housing exclusion; this seems to be arbitrary, but it should be meaningful.

The three 'domains of home' shown in Figure 1 – physical (physical adequacy), legal (exclusive possession, security of occupation, and legal title), and social (privacy and ability to enjoy social relations) – seem to be reasonable descriptors of the essential elements of a minimally adequate place of human habitation; they are consistent with a rights-based approach. It also seems reasonable that exclusion from two of the three essential elements of a home should be set as the threshold for homelessness, given the three-tiered model of housing adequacy that Figure 1 illustrates. Identifying 'homeless' living situations as those at the most severe end of housing deprivation, whereby a person is excluded from multiple core elements of adequate housing, has strong face validity.

However, Figure 1 shows that homelessness corresponds to living situations in which the residents are excluded from at least two of the three domains, but only if two of these domains are 'legal' and 'social'. Regarding the intersection of these two domains as homelessness, but relegating intersections of the other domains (Categories 3 and 4 in Figure 1) to housing exclusion does not seem to have face validity, and the rationale is not explained.

Category 3 represents living situations that are lacking in both the physical domain (physically inadequate) and the legal domain (residents lack exclusive possession, security of occupation, or legal title); an example of this kind of living situation would be a makeshift shelter on public land. We question why exclusion from these two essential domains should not qualify a living situation as homeless? It does not seem reasonable that a person living in a night shelter should be regarded as homeless (see Table 1), but if they were to move into a makeshift dwelling they would be relegated to the housing exclusion category.

Category 4 represents living situations that are lacking in both the physical and social domains; an example of this kind of living situation would be a legally tenured house without basic sanitary facilities (whereby residents are unable to maintain privacy because they have to go outside of their dwelling or property and into public space to use a bathroom). Again, we question why a person living in this situation (in developed countries at least) should not be included within the definition of homelessness?

No 'circumstances' criterion

The second issue we raise in regard to ETHOS is that the model relates only to people's places of habitation at a given time and not to their circumstances. Not everyone living in a dwelling (or space) that is deemed 'not a home' is homeless or experiencing housing exclusion. At any given time, many people will be staying in temporary or collective accommodation – for example, people on holiday staying in a tent or a hotel, people who have moved to a new town and are staying with friends until they find a home of their own, or people living in student hostels. There are some indications in the ETHOS typology that 'having no other address' and 'lacking housing' are regarded as criteria that distinguish homeless people from others staying in inadequate living situations. All criteria used to define a concept should be explicit in the conceptual model – they should not appear for the first time in a classification. Failing to include criteria in a conceptual model risks inconsistent application (across living situations and across nations); it also obscures these criteria from debate about how they should be defined and operationalised. 'Lack of housing', for instance, is only mentioned as a criterion for assessing people in two types of living situation in the ETHOS typology (medical institutions and staying temporarily with family or friends) (see Edgar, 2009). It is not clear whether 'lack of housing' should be applied consistently to all living situations, and if not, why it should only be applied to these two situations. The question of how 'lack of housing' should be operationalised is given little attention in literature concerning the measurement of homelessness.

The ETHOS Typology

The seven theoretical categories of homelessness and housing exclusion shown in Figure 1 translate into the ETHOS typology, which consists of thirteen categories containing twenty-four discrete living situations (FEANTSA, 2007). These categories are grouped under four headings: roofless, houseless, insecure, and inadequate accommodation. The roofless and houseless categories together define homelessness; insecure and inadequate are categories of housing exclusion. The typology is shown in Table 1 on the following page.

This typology is not intended as a definitive classification of living situations into homelessness and housing exclusion categories, as this will vary according to national (and possibly regional) housing standards, norms, and tenancy law. However, the typology is presented as a guide to classifying living situations according to the conceptual model. The central requirement of this typology, therefore, is that it corresponds to the conceptual model (construct validity) – this will be assessed in the next section. Following this, two other aspects of the typology will be discussed: exhaustiveness and reference period consistency.

Table 1 ETHOS – European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion

	Conceptual category		Operational category		Living situation
Homelessness	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	Homeless hostel
				3.2	Temporary accommodation
				3.3	Transitional supported accommodation
		4	People in a women's shelter	4.1	Women's shelter accommodation
		5	People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1	Temporary accommodation, reception centres
				5.2	Migrant workers' accommodation
		6	People due to be released from institutions	6.1	Penal institutions
				6.2	Medical institutions
				6.3	Children's institutions/homes
		7	People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)	7.1	Residential care for older homeless people
				7.2	Supported accommodation for formerly homeless persons
Housing exclusion	Insecure	8	People living in insecure accommodation	8.1	Temporarily with family/friends
				8.2	No legal (sub) tenancy
				8.3	Illegal occupation of land
		9	People living under threat of eviction	9.1	Legal orders enforced (rented)
				9.2	Repossession orders (owned)
		10	People living under threat of violence	10.1	Police recorded incidents
	Inadequate	11	People living in temporary/ non-conventional structures	11.1	Mobile homes
				11.2	Non-conventional building
				11.3	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

Source: adapted from FEANTSA, 2007

Construct validity

The conceptual model defines a living situation as homeless if security of tenure and private and safe personal space are lacking, or if these two aspects plus physical adequacy are lacking. Looking down the 'Operational category' column in Table 1, there are a number of categories for which the application of these criteria is unclear. People living temporarily with friends or family (due to lack of housing) (Category 8.1), for example, are classified as housing excluded, but it seems likely that in many contexts they would satisfy the homelessness criteria: lacking security of tenure

(legal domain) and lacking private personal space (social domain). The validity of the typology would be improved if the connections between the conceptual model and the stated operational categories were clarified.

The validity of a typology is also compromised if criteria are introduced that are not in the conceptual model. This point has already been discussed in reference to 'circumstances' criteria. Another criterion that appears in the typology but not in the conceptual model is 'targeting'. Institutions targeted to homeless people are included under the roofless and houseless categories, which mean that these living situations do not meet the requirements of the legal and social domains (and the physical domain in the case of night shelters). Accommodation targeted to immigrants is also included under the houseless category. However, many other collective living situations (institutional and non-institutional) are similar to these 'targeted' institutions in terms of legal and social domains. People staying in youth hostels or hospitals, for example, are also unlikely to have security of tenure or private space for social relations. It seems that some types of institutions are exempted from application of the 'three domains of home' concept, or that there is an extra criterion – 'targeted to homeless people or immigrants'. Whatever the case, it should be made clear in the conceptual model.

Exhaustiveness

As a classification system, the ETHOS typology should define mutually exclusive categories and be exhaustive; that is, every living situation should be appraised according to the 'three domains of home' and classified as homelessness, housing exclusion, or adequate accommodation. The typology does describe mutually exclusive categories of living situations, but it lacks exhaustiveness.

Commercial (non-institutional) collective living situations in which multiple households live in the same building or on the same site – such as boarding houses and camping grounds – do not appear in the typology. In many countries, people living in these settings would not be considered homeless because the dwellings are habitable and they have security of tenure. In some countries, however, this is not the case. In New Zealand, for example, camping ground residents have no security of tenure, and tenancy rights for commercial boarding house tenants are significantly weaker than for those in private rental housing. In regard to the social domain, a person living in a dwelling in which they must share a communal bathroom and kitchen with other individuals or families certainly does not have the same level of privacy as someone living in a conventional house. Privacy in a commercial collective living situation might also be compromised by the level of access that a manager has to a person's bedroom or dwelling, compared to private rental accommodation. It is therefore possible that people in these living situations will qualify as homeless according to the ETHOS conceptual model in certain contexts. In

order to promote consistent and exhaustive national classifications of homeless-ness, comprehensive guidance as to how the 'three domains of home' should be interpreted would be useful – particularly for the social domain, which seems to be the least straightforward.

Reference period consistency

When classifying a population into different categories (for prevalence or incidence measures), it is important that the entire population is assessed using a consistent reference period. The ETHOS typology applies different reference periods – past, present, and future – to different categories of the homeless population. For most categories, it is implied that the person must be homeless at the time of enumera-tion to be counted as homeless. But some people who seem likely to *become* homeless (people due to be released from institutions) and some who *used to be* homeless (who are receiving longer-term support) are also called homeless (Categories 6 and 7 in Table 1, respectively). Edgar *et al.* (2007) concede that people in both of these categories are not actually homeless, but justify their inclusion in the definition of homelessness as pragmatic because they are populations that are relevant to homelessness policy and should thus be monitored. While we agree that these populations (at risk of homelessness and formerly homeless people) are relevant to homelessness policy and should be monitored, we think it is necessary to distinguish them clearly, rather than conflate them with the homeless population. It seems obvious that formerly homeless people, whether they receive ongoing support or not, are 'formerly' homeless and not part of the 'current' or 'actual' homeless population. Distinguishing 'at risk' from 'current' populations is more difficult. The rest of this section addresses this distinction, focusing on people due to be released from institutions.

Some countries classify people who are "due to be released from institutions with no home to go to" as homeless (Busch-Geertsema, 2010, p. 25). Edgar *et al.* (2007, p.68) argue that people who stay in institutions may be regarded as homeless "in the strict sense" if they remain there due to lack of housing. A problem with this argument is that it introduces classification based on the subjective assessment of what a person's housing situation *may be in the future*, rather than what it *is* at the time of enumeration. This concept does not appear in the model and is not applied to any other living situation. If no housing has been organised for a person in an institution to be discharged to, then it is appropriate for them to remain in the institu-tion until it is. If a person is usually homeless but is in hospital at the time of enumeration, they should not be counted as homeless. If they are discharged into homelessness and another count is taken, then they will be counted as homeless,

but a person should be homeless at the time of enumeration in order to be classified as homeless. People due to be released from institutions with no home to go to are at risk of homelessness and should be classified as such.

By way of comparison, consider the case of unemployment. Unemployment is a key economic and social indicator with an established (albeit contested) international definition (Thirteenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians, 1982) and measurement guidelines (Hussmanns, 2007). Classifying a population in terms of their position in the labour force is not binary (employed / unemployed), but includes categories such as 'not in the labour force' (cf. housing exclusion). Specific adaptations of the standard definition of unemployment are recommended to take account of national circumstances (Thirteenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians, 1982), which also echoes international variation in standards of adequate housing. To be classified as unemployed, a person must actually be unemployed and be seeking and/or available for work at the time of enumeration (or more accurately, within a short reference period of either one week or one day) (Hussmanns, 2007). If the principle that is applied in the ETHOS typology were applied to unemployment, all those considered at risk of becoming unemployed in the near future would be counted as unemployed, even though they are employed during the reference period. At times of economic recession especially, knowledge of the number and characteristics of people at risk of unemployment is important to inform economic, labour and welfare policy, but this does not justify expanding the definition of unemployment to include those at risk of losing their jobs. If a person is at risk of unemployment they are not unimportant, but they are not (yet) unemployed.

Another argument for including multiple reference periods in the classification seems to be that: "ETHOS… was developed to reflect different pathways into homelessness and to emphasise the dynamic nature of the process of homelessness" (Edgar, 2009, p. 22). Understanding the experiences of homeless people in regard to residential instability and mobility is important. Edgar *et al.* (2007, p. 198) also state: "an understanding of the pathways into and out of homelessness is a necessary basis for policy development". This is also an important point, but these understandings are not relevant to *defining* homelessness. Describing pathways into and out of homelessness requires a definition of what people are entering and exiting. The concept of movement or dynamism is often aberrantly included in definitions of homelessness (even though it is not actually applied as a criterion) (see United Nations, 2008, Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2008 and UNECE/ EUROSTAT, 2006). A homeless person should not have to move around to be classified as homeless; their current living situation is what should be appraised. If a person only stays in a night shelter while they are homeless, for example, they are no less homeless than a person who moves between staying in a night shelter and staying temporarily with friends. Pathways or life-course approaches relate to

patterns of life events over time and cannot logically be the basis for classifying a population as homeless or non-homeless at a point in time. In fact, a robust definition of homelessness is a necessary precursor to being able to identify episodes of homelessness in a housing pathway.

A Modified Approach to Defining and Classifying Homelessness

The definition and classification that we have developed was guided by the ETHOS approach and the *New Zealand Definition of Homelessness* (Statistics New Zealand, 2009a). It seeks to address the perceived weaknesses of ETHOS that have been outlined in this paper.

Conceptual definition of homelessness

Our position is that homelessness should be defined as:

1. Living in a place of habitation (during the reference period) that is below a minimum adequacy standard; and

2. Lacking access to adequate housing.

Both of these criteria should be consistently applied to all people in all living situations, with two exceptions. We follow Chamberlain & MacKenzie's (1992) argument that all institutions, apart from those targeted to homeless people, are 'culturally recognised exceptions' to the minimum adequacy standard, in that it is inappropriate to apply the requirements of tenancy rights and the level of personal private space that a private dwelling affords to institutions such as hospitals and prisons. The second exception is that for institutions targeted to homeless people, the 'lacking access' criterion should not be applied, because being resident in a dwelling of this type is sufficient indication that a person is homeless.

Each of these concepts requires development into more specific criteria to produce a case (or operational) definition. The 'lacking access' criterion will not be developed in this paper, except to say that we think that access to economic resources is a key indicator of access to adequate housing. The first criterion will now be expounded: it relates to the first criticism of ETHOS discussed in this paper – setting a meaningful threshold between 'homelessness' and 'housing exclusion'.

Dividing a population into 'homelessness', 'housing exclusion' and 'adequate housing' categories

Following the ETHOS model, we agree that the physical, legal, and social domains are the three essential elements for defining adequate housing. In contrast to ETHOS, however, we contend that living situations in which residents are excluded

from two or more of these three essential domains, irrespective of which two they are excluded from, should be considered below a minimum adequacy standard. People living in places of habitation that are below a minimum adequacy standard should be considered homeless, provided they also meet the 'lack of access to adequate housing' criterion (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Model for defining a population as homeless, housing excluded, or adequately housed, according to physical, legal, and social domains, and access to adequate housing
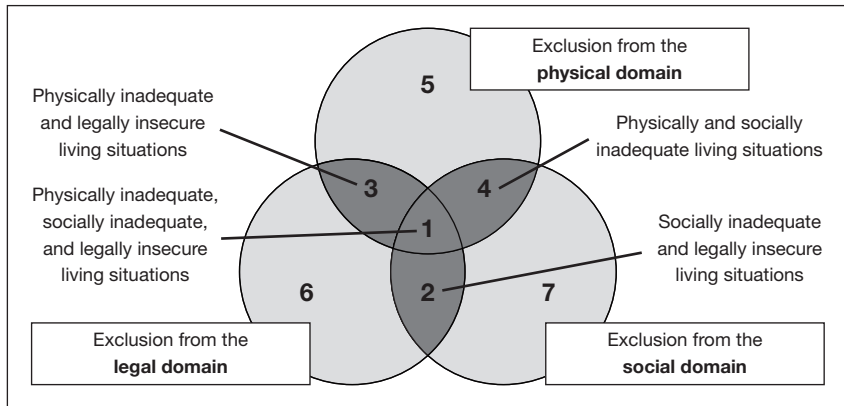
Homelessness: Living in a place of habitation that is below a minimum adequacy standard (exclusion from two or more domains) AND lacking access to adequate housing

Housing exclusion: Living in a place of habitation that is at or above a minimum adequacy standard but not fully adequate (exclusion from one domain) AND lacking access to adequate housing

Adequate housing: Living in a place of habitation that satisfies all three domains

Source: adapted from Edgar, 2009, p. 16.

Four broad categories of living situations below the minimum adequacy standard are identified at the areas of intersection in Figure 2:

Intersection 1: Physically inadequate, socially inadequate, and legally insecure living situations

Intersection 2: Socially inadequate and legally insecure living situations

Intersection 3: Physically inadequate and legally insecure living situations

Intersection 4: Physically and socially inadequate living situations

In New Zealand, Intersection 1 is called 'Without accommodation', Intersection 2 contains 'Temporary accommodation' (institutions targeted to homeless people and commercial collective dwellings) and 'Sharing accommodation' (staying with

friends or family), and Intersection 4 is called 'Uninhabitable housing'. In the New Zealand context, Intersection 3 is deemed non-applicable, because people living in places of habitation that lack basic physical requirements (defined as a roof and/ or enclosing sides and/or basic amenities) will always also be considered excluded from the social domain because they lack an adequate level of privacy. For this reason, we would locate makeshift dwellings (without basic amenities) in Intersection 1. Internationally, however, there are likely to be places of habitation that would correspond to Intersection 3.

Classification

Table 2 shows how the four broad conceptual categories derived from Figure 2 correspond to specific living situations – again using New Zealand as an example. These living situations were identified by systematically applying the three domains to the official standard classification of places of habitation in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2009b).

Table 2 Classification of the homeless population by living situation in the New Zealand context (provided the 'lack of access to adequate housing' criterion is also met)

Broad homelessness category	Living situation	Domains that define housing adequacy		
		Physical (Habitability)	Social (Privacy)	Legal (Security of tenure)
Without accommodation	a. Living rough	✗	✗	✗
	b. Improvised dwelling	✗	✗	✗
Temporary accommodation	c. Night shelter	✓	✗	✗
	d. Women's refuge	✓	✗	✗
	e. Accommodation for the homeless	✓	✗	✗
	f. Camping ground / motor camp	✓	✗	✗
	g. Commercial collective accommodation (e.g. boarding houses, motels, hotels)	✓	✗	✗
	h. Marae (Māori meeting house)	✓	✗	✗
Sharing accommodation	i. Sharing a permanent private dwelling (staying with friends or relatives)	✓	✗	✗
Uninhabitable housing	j. Legally tenured dwelling without adequate amenities	✗	✗	✓

The major difference between the ETHOS classification of homelessness and this classification is the inclusion of the categories 'sharing accommodation' and 'uninhabitable housing'. This difference arises because, in contrast to ETHOS, we

consider both of these living situations to involve exclusion from the social domain. We have not attempted to define or classify housing exclusion or the population at risk of homelessness. In regard to this latter category, we stress that the population at risk of homelessness should be specifically defined, measured and reported – including those due to be released from institutions into homelessness, and possibly other categories such as those due to be evicted into homelessness.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that ETHOS has provided a useful framework for comparing homelessness statistics produced according to disparate national definitions of homelessness across Europe (Edgar, 2009). Members of FEANTSA have clearly found ETHOS useful in highlighting that homelessness is not limited to people living rough, for drawing attention to populations at risk of homelessness, and in providing a common language for advocates.

However, the ETHOS definition and classification is perceived as a valid definition of homelessness to the extent that it is recommended as the official European Union definition of homelessness. Although ETHOS may not have originally been intended as a model for defining and classifying homeless populations, it is being used in this way, and as such should be expected to provide valid guidance.

For comparison, and to encourage further debate, we have described the basics of our approach to conceptualising homelessness, which starts from the ETHOS concept of 'three domains of home'. We think that this definition overcomes the main shortcomings of the ETHOS conceptualisation highlighted in this paper. This modified approach is not without weaknesses, and criticism is welcomed, but we hope that it provides an example of clear articulation of both the concept of home-lessness and a classification that is demonstrably derived from the systematic application of this concept.

In regard to improving the validity of the ETHOS approach, we have four recom-mendations. First, the rationale for the threshold between homelessness and housing exclusion should be clarified, which may involve a finer definition of the 'three domains of home'. Secondly, the conceptual definition of homelessness should include all of the criteria necessary to identify a homeless population – in particular, a 'circum-stances' or 'lack of access to adequate housing' criterion. Thirdly, the classification should reflect consistent and exhaustive application of the conceptual model using a consistent reference period. And finally, an 'at risk of homelessness' definition and classification should be developed. This should be linked to the definition and clas-sification of homelessness but should not be within it.

› **References**

Busch-Geertsema, V. (2010) Defining and Measuring Homelessness, in:
E. O'Sullivan, V. Busch-Geertsema, D. Quilgars and N. Pleace (Eds.) *Homelessness Research in Europe: Festschrift for Bill Edgar and Joe Doherty* (Brussels: FEANTSA).

Chamberlain, C. and MacKenzie, D. (1992) Understanding Contemporary Homelessness: Issues of Definition and Meaning, *Australian Journal of Social Issues 27*(4), pp. 274-297.

Chamberlain, C. and MacKenzie, D. (2008) *Counting the Homeless 2006* (Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics).

Culhane, D. P. and Byrne, T. (2010) Preface, in: E. O'Sullivan, V. Busch-Geertsema, D. Quilgars and N. Pleace (Eds.) *Homelessness Research in Europe: Festschrift for Bill Edgar and Joe Doherty* (Brussels: FEANTSA).

Edgar, B. (2009) *2009 European Review of Statistics on Homelessness* (Brussels: FEANTSA).

Edgar, B., Harrison, M., Watson, P. and Busch-Geertsema, V. (2007) *Measurement of Homelessness at a European Union Level* (Brussels: European Commission, Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG).

Edgar, W., Doherty, J. and Meert, H. (2003) *Second Review of Statistics on Homelessness in Europe* (Brussels: FEANTSA).

European Consensus Conference on Homelessness (2010) *Policy Recommendations of the Jury* (Brussels: European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity).

FEANTSA (2007) *FEANTSA Proposal: A Retrospective Module on Homelessness for Household Surveys* (Brussels: FEANTSA).

FEANTSA (2008) *2011 Round of Population Censuses: FEANTSA Recommendations for the enumeration of homeless people on census night* (Brussels: FEANTSA).

Greve, J. and Currie, E. (1990) *Homelessness in Britain* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation).

Hoffmann, E. and Chamie, M. (1999) *Standard Statistical Classifications: Basic Principles* (New York: United Nations).

Hussmanns, R. (2007) *Measurement of Employment, Unemployment and Underemployment – Current International Standards and Issues in their Application* (Geneva: International Labour Organization Bureau of Statistics).

Hutson, S. and Liddiard, M. (1994) *Youth Homelessness: The Construction of a Social Issue* (London: Macmillan).

Minnery, J. and Greenhalgh, E. (2007) Approaches to Homelessness Policy in Europe, the United States and Australia, *Journal of Social Issues* 63(3), pp.641-655.

Porta, M., Greenland, S. and Last, J. M. (Eds.) (2008) *A Dictionary of Epidemiology* (5th ed.) (New York: Oxford University Press).

Statistics New Zealand (2009a) *New Zealand Definition of Homelessness* (Wellington: Statistics New Zealand).

Statistics New Zealand (2009b) *Statistical Standard for Occupied Dwelling Type* (Wellington: Statistics New Zealand).

Thirteenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians (1982) *Resolution Concerning Statistics of the Economically Active Population, Employment, Unemployment and Underemployment* (Geneva: International Labour Organization).

UNECE/EUROSTAT (2006) *Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing* (New York and Geneva: United Nations).

United Nations (2008) *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2* (New York: United Nations).

Widdowfield, R. (1999) The Limitations of Official Homelessness Statistics, in: D. Dorling and S. Simpson (Eds.) *Statistics in Society: The Arithmetic of Politics* (London: Arnold).