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THE RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ACADEMY
OF NATIONAL ECONOMY
AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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The conceptualization, definition and
measurement of homelessness: case of Russia

The conceptualization of homelessness

- No general concept of homelessness and who should be considered homeless
- No generally accepted definition
- Words "homeless" and "homelessness" are used rarely, and mostly by NGO's

USUALLY

- Reference to the lack of a fixed place of residence and occupation ("person of no fixed abode and occupation");
- Term "vagrancy" ("person engaged in vagrancy" or "person engaged in vagrancy and begging")
- Statistics compiled by the police refer to so-called "persons living without registration at a place of residence and place of stay"
- In everyday life and mass-media – "BOMZH"

Official definitions

- **Person is in need of social services** if there are the following conditions that reduce or may reduce standard of living: inability of self-care; disabled person in family; child with problem in social adaptation; family conflict and violence; **no place of residence**; unemployment and other (law on social services, 2013)
- **Person without permanent place of residence** – a person who does not have registration at a place of residence as owner, renter or on other reasonable grounds or who can not live in the place of residence for reasons beyond his control (national standard on social services definitions, 2005)

Measurement of the extent of homeless persons

- All Russian population census
- 2002: 68,000 homeless households (143 000 persons)
- 2010: 34,000 homeless households (64 000 persons, incl. 60 000 in cities and 4,000 in rural area)

Moscow – 3 400; Saint-Petersburg – 2 900; Sverdlovskaya obl – 14 000

Homeless households – roofless households, members of households carry their belongings with them, sleep on the streets, in communal entrance hallway and other occasional places.

Not included in “homeless households”

- Persons without registration at the place of residence were recorded at the place where they lived at the time of census
- 1,8 mln people in the state social shelters (for children, disabled, old people), hospitals, prisons, monasteries were recorded as living in “collective households” (2010)

The profile of homeless persons

- 1995-2002: statistics of Moscow Representative Office of "Medecins sans frontiers"
- 2005: interregional study (7 Russian regions, small sample)
- Statistics of state shelters about service users
- Statistics of several NGO's about service users (Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, Ekaterinburg,)

Conclusion

- No general concept of homelessness
- Too broad definition in law on social services
- Low priority of the homelessness problem thus homeless persons usually are invisible for law system
- Invisibility produces lots of barriers in access to services in any sphere
- No reliable data on a number of homeless despite attempts to include homeless in census
- Mosaic info on the profile of homeless persons while main trends are known (sex, age, causes and so on)

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THANK YOU!