

Impact evaluation of the first regional point in time homelessness counts in Belgium.

Nana Mertens, prof. dr. Koen Hermans and prof. dr. Martin Wagener

Since 2020 research teams of LUCAS KU Leuven, University of Liege and UC Louvain intensively collaborated with local services and administrations to organize regional point in time counts on homelessness. Each year at least two regions in Flanders and in Wallonia participated. In 2022, after the second wave of these point in time counts, the research teams set up an impact evaluation to gather information on the impact of the counts and to identify the lessons learned after two succeeding years of organizing local and regional point in time counts on homelessness. All regions who organized a point in time count in 2020 or 2021 contributed to this impact evaluation. First, the local public administrations and a selection of non-governmental services were asked to fill in an online survey (64 participants). Second, the local coordinators from each region were invited to participate in a focus group to discuss and deepen the results from the online survey (10 participants).

Results show mixed outcomes in the different regions. Firstly, to organize a count, it is important to include a wide variety of services and pre-existing collaborations between services. In cities and regions with stronger cooperation between public and non-public services, the organization of the count went more efficiently. More services were reached and these services were more motivated to collect the data. In other words, a dense network of services contributes to the quality of the data. Secondly, participants pointed out that the count initiated and broadened the debate on homelessness. By identifying the number of homeless people and their profile characteristics, the population of homeless people becomes more visible on a regional level. The count provided objective figures on homelessness. These figures verified the 'subjective impressions' of the participants. Thirdly, the need for a long-term approach on homelessness was confirmed. The participants suggested that prevention of homelessness and housing-oriented solutions are essential. In other words, the counts also contribute to increase the awareness that a switch from a crisis-oriented paradigm to a more structured housing-led approach is needed.