

Chapter III

EU Citizens and Homelessness

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Abstract

This chapter provides a description of the implementation of the European citizens' survey, led by the French team from Aix Marseille University, as part of the HOME_EU project. The French team set out to use a telephone survey and quantitative research methods to investigate the opinions and experiences of European citizens in relation to homelessness, in addition to use a contingent valuation method to elicit the value respondents placed on the Housing First model as a potential solution to long-term homelessness. Data collection covered a 10-month period (March to December 2017). The survey produced results for European citizen's knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) in relation to homelessness, willingness to pay (WTP) for the Housing First model, and the prevalence of homelessness among the surveyed population. Some critical reflections on the implementation and management of the Citizens 'survey and the WP2 as a whole close the chapter.

Keywords

Homelessness, Prevalence, Contingent Valuation, Knowledge Attitudes and Practices, Willingness-to-pay

Overview of the European citizens' survey

The European citizens' survey had the objective of investigating European citizen's experience and knowledge of homelessness, as well as their valuation of the Housing First model as a means of reducing or eliminating long-term homelessness. The investigation was part of the broader HOME_EU project, to be led by the French Aix-Marseille University (AMU) team within the HOME_EU consortium, with the team managing all of the data collection centrally. A study protocol was written and sent to each partner as well as to the French legal authorities. The European citizens' opinions survey received a favorable review from the Committee for Information and Liberties - CIL (reference number: 2017-CIL-01) and the Committee of Ethics of Aix Marseille University (reference number: 2016-01-02-01) in February 2017.

Overall design and Aims of the European citizens' survey

The EU citizens' survey aimed to produce recent and comprehensive data for European citizen's knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) towards homeless people, past history of homelessness in the surveyed population, and respondents' valuation of the Housing First programme. These were investigated through representative surveys of eight countries, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. The design of the investigation centered on administering a telephone survey and subsequent statistical analysis of the survey data, using quantitative methods to reach the overall project aims. The survey questions were based on other existing surveys with similar objectives, mainly conducted in the United States (Tompsett, Toro, Guzicki, Manrique, & Zatakia, 2006), which were identified through a literature review conducted at the beginning of the study between November 2016 and January 2017. The final survey included a series of instruments taken from these earlier surveys, in addition to a selection of ad hoc questions to answer the aims specific to this project. Drafts of the questionnaire were discussed within the HOME_EU Consortium study group, and the final English version received the approval of all partners in February 2017. A pilot study was conducted on a sample of 30 individuals (French people) to assess the length of the questionnaire and its intelligibility (face validity).

Subsequently, the questionnaire went through a four-step translation process that included two translations into the targeted native language leading to one consensual version after discussion about discrepancies and input on cultural adaptation provided by each partner within the Consortium. This latter document was translated back into English (back-translation) by two independent professionals, thus producing two back-translations. An expert committee reviewed all the documents mentioned above and the associated reports to produce a final version for the targeted language (Beaton, Bombardier, Guillemin, & Ferraz, 2000).

Data collection was carried-out over a period of 10 months, from March to December 2017. A maximum of three months of investigation were planned in each country, beginning with the French sample and ending with the Swedish sample. A total of 5,631 European citizens completed the telephone survey (see below for details on the data collection process).

The analysis of the data took up the final part of the study design, conducting quality control for the overall database, and calculating missing data for each variable. Statistical weights were applied to address discrepancies between the distribution of age and education variables and census data obtained through the World Bank and Eurostat (Eurostat, 2017; The World Bank, 2017). Data analysis was conducted using R 3.6.0 'Survey' package that allowed us to incorporate a complex sampling design (clustered and weighted data).

Selected measures and outlines of instructions for data collection procedures

Measures:

Measures selected for the citizen's survey were those that would comprise respondents' KAP, valuation of the housing first model, and the prevalence of homelessness among the surveyed population. The survey also collected demographic data, including gender, age, educational level, professional status,

annual household income, marital status, number of dependent children, municipality, and the number of adults in the household. In addition, the number of operational landlines and mobile phones within a household was collected to adjust for selectivity due to telephone/mobile ownership.

Knowledge:

In order to determine the KAP of respondents, knowledge was approached as empirical data relating to homelessness. Initially, five items assessed the respondents' knowledge of the national prevalence of homelessness, of the main sources of funding for homelessness care and housing services, and of health issues among people experiencing homelessness – such as mental disorders and addiction issues. Respondents would have to provide estimates, or select from alternative answers, and responses would be compared to existing national data. However, due to the absence of key data for the majority of the surveyed countries, items addressing health issues among people experiencing homelessness were dropped from the final analysis. Knowledge was measured based on estimates of the number of homeless people in the respondents' country, and healthcare and housing service provision.

Attitudes:

Attitudes were addressed through questions addressing a respondent's perception of the capabilities of people experiencing homelessness, their empowerment, and their integration within their community. Other items drawn from the Eurobarometer 355 on poverty and social exclusion (TNS Opinion & Social, 2010) were added to explore a respondent's perception of the magnitude and cause of homelessness, their inclination to help reduce homelessness, and their opinions on government interventions and spending. Finally, we created an indicator to synthesize the descriptive data on Attitudes using a multiple correspondence analysis. Respondents were grouped into three groups: those with positive or negative attitudes, and those without a set opinion. In a multilevel analysis this indicator provided the analysis with the surveyed population' position, between tolerance of homelessness and desire to contest and challenge its existence.

Practices:

Practices were investigated by questions about past behavior in relation to people experiencing homelessness reported by the respondent, including reported practices of the respondent donating to or volunteering with homelessness organizations, in addition to their interaction with people experiencing homelessness.

Homelessness Prevalence:

The prevalence of a history of homelessness among the surveyed population was assessed through three measures, lifetime, five-year and past-year prevalence, for which data was collected on whether or not the respondent had ever been homeless, and when this had last occurred. For this question, homelessness was defined as having experienced at least one night of rough sleeping or shelter use. This definition encompasses ETHOS 1 and 2 from the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion-ETHOS (Amore et al. 2011). Respondents who reported homelessness were asked a follow-up question to determine the time spent homeless. Sociodemographic data were then addressed to assess correlates of homelessness prevalence using generalized linear models for clustered and weighted samples.

Valuation of Housing First

Respondents' valuation of the Housing First model was investigated by assessing their willingness to pay (WTP) for Housing First as an innovation in social policy using the Contingent Valuation (CV) method (Carson & Hanemann, 2005). This section of the survey started by presenting information about homelessness, on the national prevalence of homelessness and on current solutions to accommodate people experiencing homelessness. Following this a description of the HF model was provided, along with data on the proven effectiveness of the HF model drawn from experiments focused on housing stability in several European countries (cf Greenwood et al., 2013; Martins, Ornelas, & Silva, 2016). To quantify the respondent's willingness to pay a bidding game format was used in which progressively greater monetary amounts were proposed as an additional form of general taxation, and this procedure was introduced and explained briefly. Bids ranged from 10 euros to a maximum of 400 euros; the range had been tested in a small pilot study that included 10 respondents (Carson & Mitchell, 1995; Mitchell & Carson, 1989). Finally, the CV scenario ended with a "cheap talk" i.e., a short explanatory passage that is usually employed to mitigate the effects of hypothetical bias by stressing to the respondent the importance of placing realistic bids. Indeed, as respondents are projecting themselves into a hypothetical situation, their bids may be very different from what they would consider paying in reality (Murphy, Allen, Stevens, & Weatherhead, 2005).

Data Collection

Data collection was undertaken by hiring staff to administer the telephone survey. Bilingual interviewers (those speaking French and the language of the target country) were recruited in France. Two or three bilingual interviewers carried out the telephone interviews for each targeted country. Calls for the telephone survey were placed within the premises of the Faculty of Medicine, at Aix-Marseille University. Call centers were used to carry out the survey in Sweden and the Netherlands, due to difficulties in hiring bilingual interviewers speaking Swedish or Dutch and also because of a tight data collection schedule. The written questionnaire was transferred to the VOXCATI operating system, a software application used to conduct telephone surveys. Each national version was inserted into the software. Tests to make sure that interviews could be implemented through VOXCATI were carried out, and several parameters had to be adjusted with the help of the Information Technology team. The French research unit EA 3279 provided internal training for the interviewers and drew-up a training plan in relation to the field manager. This training considered all technical aspects related to telephone surveys. The first task of the interviewers was to ensure the eligibility of the person contacted by telephone. On the basis of computer-assisted telephone interviews, interviewers were trained to ask questions as they are written on the computer screen, and were trained in different scenarios and uses of fallback statements in the event of the respondent asking questions. On a regular basis, quality control of the interviews was carried out by a methodologist with the opportunity to listen to interviews and to discuss observations with the interviewers and the research team.

Sampling criteria and procedure:

This study included adults (18 years old or older) from eight European countries, namely: France, Ireland,

Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. There was no upper age limit. To be included in the study sample, respondents reached by telephone must have spoken the official language of the country. Respondents were randomly selected from opt-in panels and a quotas sample method was used to be representative of the general population with respect to gender and age.

To determine an adequate sample size, existing environmental and social studies literature, when assessing willingness to pay in the general population, considers a sample size of 300 per country to be appropriate (Arrow et al., 1993). In the case of large target populations ($N > 100\,000$) and for an accuracy of $\pm 5\%$, the sample size is recommended to be a minimum of 400 individuals actually surveyed. We extended the sample size to a total of 700 individuals surveyed in each country, representing a total of 5,600 European citizens across the eight countries.

Critical Reflections on Citizens' survey implementation and management:

At this stage, it is important to reflect on the positive elements of the project as implemented by the French teams, but also the limits that emerged in relation to the structure of the project and the diffusion of the results.

Translation issues

It is clear that in such a research project, involving many countries with different languages, one of the primary difficulties confronted by the consortium was the translation of both working tools and outputs. Even bearing this in mind at the start of the project, on reflection the French team underestimated the impact of this task on their small research team. This topic also lay at the heart of the first consortium meeting – it was necessary to find an approach that would be adequate for the various projects and their objectives, but that would also fit within the budget. Although the choice to use an identical process (back translation) across all of the HOME_EU projects ensured coherence and high quality translations, this nevertheless became an extremely time consuming process for the research teams, and required a larger share of the overall budget than was initially foreseen.

Timeframe of the HOME_EU project

The HOME_EU project was financed by the European Commission (EC) as a Horizon 2020 project, and involved twelve partner organizations. The strict three-year time frame of the funding and the necessities of inter-partner organization brought additional limitations to the fore. The EC calendar included a series of mid-term deliverables that provided their own unique challenges in relation to otherwise ongoing research processes. Such pressures are not easily compatible with the necessary rigor for scientific study, involving robust methodologies and the confident release of results.

The necessity of prioritizing deliverables for the funding organization also impacted the broader functioning and relations of the consortium. The results for the citizens' survey, for example, had to be used first and foremost as data covering all countries as a group, in line with fulfilling the main deliverables for this aspect of the broader HOME_EU project. This inevitably functioned to the detriment of secondary analyses, exploring the data country by country with local teams. Although this ensured unity in the methodology and analyses implemented, and the citizens' survey project successfully

delivered the expected published work on the three aspects of the study (with certain papers still under revision), the hoped-for secondary analyses are unlikely to emerge given the end of financing and with the main objectives achieved. Although it is possible for the consortium partners to maximize the significant potential of the citizens' survey results with data in their respective countries, given the relevant methodologies and analytical plans, it is a shame that this will have to be done outside of the framework of the consortium and will need to find other means of financial support. Although these experiences are far from unique and will be familiar to the scientific community, it is worth highlighting the necessity in projects like this to yield to immediate imperatives and that in doing so something of the global interest may be lost.

Table 1. Measures addressed from the European citizens' survey.

Measures	Description	Source(s)	Methods
Prevalence of homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifetime prevalence • Five-year prevalence • Past-year prevalence 	Tompsett et al. 2006 Toro et al. 1992	Questions being preceded by a definition of homelessness as being either roofless or houseless
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of homeless people in their country, • Percentage of comorbidities in homeless people • Funding sources for caring homeless people 	Toro et al. 1992	
Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magnitude of homelessness • Main causes of homelessness • Who should be mainly responsible for providing homeless services • Level of government spending on homelessness • Intentions to act to reduce homelessness • Satisfaction with homeless services capabilities of homeless • Empowerment of homeless • Community integration of homeless 	Eurobarometer 2010 Sen A. 1993 Rogers et al. 1997 McColl et al 2001	KAP survey approach
Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In person help • Help through organisation • Volunteer work 	Toro et al. 1992 Eurobarometer 2010	
WTP approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to pay for the Housing First • Protest zeros 	Carson & Mitchell, 1995 Mitchell & Carson, 1981	Contingent valuation method using a bidding game format

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