

DATA ON CHILDREN ASSISTING HOMELESS PEOPLE COUNTED IN NATIONAL HOMELESS COUNTS AND SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY IN POLAND BY MRPIPS IN 2013 AND 2015

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In 2013, the Sociodemographic Survey of Homeless People conducted during National Homeless Count recorded 1628 children that accompanied their parents classified as homeless. The collected data include their sex, age, housing situation, and the communes (basic administrative units) where they stayed.

INTRODUCTION

The Polish Ministry of Family Labour and Social Policy (*Ministerstwo Rodziny, Pracy i Polityki Społecznej* MRPiPS) conducted National Homeless Counts in Poland twice: in February 2013 and January 2015. If the adult homeless people were accompanied by children, then the latter were also included in the count. The counts involved mass mobilization of all the relevant public services, e.g. social workers, the municipal police, and NGOs, which on one day were required to get in touch with all homeless shelters and other homeless service sites, and go to unconventional and public space places where homeless people can be found, count them, and collect all basic data on the people present there. Next, for each commune (*gmina*), a

summary questionnaire was filled, where the total number for each commune is given, types of places of residence, sex, and adult/child status. In 2013, an additional, more detailed sociodemographic survey was performed, with the use of a questionnaire that allowed to collect data at the individual level, i.e. about each of the counted persons.

Considering the methods of both counts, termed a time-point headcount, the collected data should be treated as minimal, as they concern only the persons who were found by the services **on the day** of the count **in the places** investigated during the count. In the areas where there are no or very few streetworkers, the recorded numbers will be grossly underestimated, as the services were probably unable to visit on the count day all the places where homeless people stay during the daytime, as the services were unaware of them. In the localities where the streetwork was initiated or its quality was improved between 2013 and 2015, the numbers recorded in 2015 may have been much higher simply because on the count day the services knew about a larger number of locations where homeless people could be found.

The locations that are not classified in the official registers of each province (voivodship) as homeless service sites, are also not covered by the count, and the people staying there are not counted, although their housing status may be similar (e.g. in centres for drug-addicted people). Moreover, the head of a given homeless service site could refuse to provide data for the summarizing questionnaire. The 2013 data prove that such situations happened sometimes, as in some localities homeless shelters for adults and children exist, but no homeless person was recorded there.

With regard to child homelessness, it is particularly important to note that the methods used by the MRPIPS do not allow to record the people who temporarily live in their distant relatives' homes, with friends or acquaintances, and in overcrowded conditions. Victims of domestic violence who are parents with children, usually find a temporary shelter in this way in case of emergency. Both the above-mentioned housing situations are temporary, characterized by a lack of a legal right to live in the given place, and an inability to satisfy their social needs – one of the three domains whose exclusion indicates homelessness, according to the recommendations regarding European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion of European researchers and institutions, e.g. the Parliament and the Commission.

For these reasons, the numbers recorded by the MRPIPS in 2013 and 2015 must be interpreted only as the numbers of homeless people who were found by the services in those years. The numbers cannot be treated as the total numbers of homeless people or homeless children in Poland. **The recorded numbers are grossly underestimated. Moreover, the differences between the numbers recorded in 2013 and 2015 cannot be interpreted as evidence of an increase or decrease in the level of homelessness, as none of the censuses estimated it correctly¹.**

¹ Summary of detailed analysis of methodology of Polish national homeless counts and Sociodemographic Survey: <http://www.czynajpierw mieszkanie.pl/en/summary-chronic-homelessness-in-sociodemographic-survey-mrpips-2013/>

The data presented below result from an analysis of raw data collected with the use of the questionnaire (sociodemographic) in 2013, received from the MRPIPS on the basis of the application for access to public information, and from the MRPIPS reports published after the counts. The raw data from the year 2013 were slightly corrected and transcoded: evident errors were removed, e.g. classification of people older than 18 years as children, and the type of housing status was changed if it was wrong on the basis of information recorded under “others” and “what kind?”.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CHILD HOMELESSNESS ON THE BASIS OF THE MRPIPS SURVEY AND COUNTS?

2013 SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

In 2013, the Sociodemographic Survey took into account 1628 children. Among them, 45% were boys and 46% were girls (for 9%, no sex was given). 33% of the children were up to 3 years old, 22% were 4-6 years old, 34% were 7-15 years old, i.e. were obliged to attend primary or middle schools, and 8% were 16-18 years old (Table 2).

More than half of the children, 58% (942), on the count day stayed at homeless service sites, i.e. in homeless shelters, houses and hostels for homeless people. Probably shelters for single mothers with children were included in this category. In contrast to the European Typology of Housing and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS), the Polish Ministry did not distinguish in the questionnaire this type of housing situation (shelters for mothers with children, victims of domestic violence), unfortunately, because it is now impossible to determine the real housing situation of the children. Conditions in a homeless shelter versus a shelter for single mothers, specialized in child care, usually differ markedly.

6% of the children (96) were counted in specialized centres for victims of domestic abuse (classified as a different type of housing status – yet another

example of a deviation from the category used in the questionnaires from the reality).

14% (228) of the children were counted in training, supported or protected flats. This is a lot, considering that flats are the least frequent form of aid offered to homeless people in Poland. Only 4% of homeless adults were counted there (Table 4). It is good that children are placed there, because a protected/training/supported flat is a much more suitable form of aid offered to homeless children than a homeless shelter, night shelter or even a specialized shelter for single mothers.

As many as 16% of homeless children (260) were counted in abandoned buildings and in allotment huts. This type of housing status, in contrast to a homeless shelter, shelter for single mothers, temporary living in their acquaintances' homes or in an overcrowded location, seems to be characterized by more privacy. If the family with children occupies the hut and abandoned building independently, as is usually the case, the social domain seems to be satisfied: they live in their own way, without any official regulations of an institution, subordination to the staff, and the need to follow an obligatory scheme of moving out of homelessness. However, the living conditions/physical standards in such places are clearly unsuitable for children.

During the count, only 6 of the counted children (less than 1%) were classified as living temporarily in their relatives' homes in overcrowded conditions or in unstable tenancy situations (with no written contract). Such a low number of children identified in the above-mentioned housing situations is not surprising, as it is consistent with the applied methods. The objective of the count was to count the people staying in homeless shelters and other homeless service sites or living on the streets, rather than to assess the real scale of homelessness. However, exclusion of the situation of temporary living in other people' homes very negatively affects the assessment of the scale of the homelessness of children, as we all want to protect them most strongly, preventing the extreme situation of a lack of permanent housing. The children living in homeless shelters and other homeless service sites or in buildings that should not be inhabited probably account for a small

percentage of all those whose housing status is difficult or extremely difficult, and the only line separating them from street homelessness is the kindness and empathy of relatives, friends, or sometimes casual acquaintances.

The sociodemographic survey did not involve the collection of information on who took care of the counted children. They probably had custodians, but it is unclear if they were mostly mothers, fathers, or if the children were taken care of by some other guardians.

The questionnaires also did not include information on the duration of homelessness, its causes, health status of the children (e.g. certificate of disability) or their health insurance.

Most of the children were counted in the provinces: Kujawsko-pomorskie (16%), Śląskie (15%), and Zachodniopomorskie (13%). Detailed data on the provinces and cities/towns/villages where the children were found are presented in Table 5 in the Annex. It is noteworthy that in Warsaw alone as many as 80 homeless children were recorded, including 28 in crisis intervention centres, 1 in a night shelter or a warming up facility, and 51 in homeless shelters, houses or hostels, probably in shelters for single mothers with children. In light of the data, the crisis intervention system in the city of Warsaw can be regarded as good: no homeless child on the census day lived on the streets. However, the quality of the census in the public space of the city was assessed negatively. According to the NGOs, the number of people living on the streets is much higher. The organizations also signalled that their clients included parents living on the streets with their children.

2015 HOMELESS COUNT

In 2015, no detailed survey was performed with the use of the personal questionnaire, so we only have access to results of the summary questionnaires at the community level (as the lowest one). Information on the children counted as homeless are much poorer: their sex, age and other characteristics were not determined. We only know their numbers in individual provinces counties and

communes, and in what housing situation they were found.

The 1892 recorded children accounted for 5% of the total number of counted homeless people (36 161, Table 6), who were found by the services (80% of them were men, nearly 15% were women).

69% of the counted children (1298) stayed in shelters for single mothers with children, including 41 in a 'social emergency centre' or a drunk tank (sic) in the warmińsko-mazurskie and zachodniopomorskie provinces. 31% (594) children were recorded in abandoned buildings, allotment huts, including – surprisingly – as many as 446 in Kujawsko-pomorskie (142 in Toruń, 213 in Bydgoszcz, and 51 in Solec Kujawski). In the city of Warsaw, 49 homeless children were recorded, including 32 in a homeless shelter and 17 in buildings that should not be inhabited. Detailed data, with a subdivision into provinces and types of housing status (institutions and other places) are presented in Table 7 in the Annex.

ANNEX

2013 SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Table 1. Sex of homeless children recorded in Poland in 2013

| Sex | Number | % of total |
|----------------|-------------|------------|
| Male | 740 | 45 |
| Female | 742 | 46 |
| No data | 146 | 9 |
| Total | 1628 | 100 |

Table 2. Age of homeless children recorded in Poland in 2013

| Age (years) | Number | % of total |
|----------------|-------------|------------|
| 1 | 222 | 14 |
| 2 | 148 | 9 |
| 3 | 166 | 10 |
| 4 | 128 | 8 |
| 5 | 131 | 8 |
| 6 | 96 | 6 |
| 7 | 88 | 5 |
| 8 | 67 | 4 |
| 9 | 68 | 4 |
| 10 | 60 | 4 |
| 11 | 71 | 4 |
| 12 | 61 | 4 |
| 13 | 52 | 3 |
| 14 | 55 | 3 |
| 15 | 52 | 3 |
| 16 | 51 | 3 |
| 17 | 66 | 4 |
| 18 | 5 | 0 |
| No data | 41 | 3 |
| Total | 1628 | 100 |

Table 3. Place of residence of homeless children recorded in Poland on the census day in 2013

| Current place of residence | (N) | (%) |
|---|-------------|------------|
| Warming-up facility, night shelter | 48 | 3 |
| Homeless shelter, house or hostel for homeless people, shelter for single mothers | 942 | 58 |
| Supported, protected, training or rented housing | 228 | 14 |
| Hospitals, hospices, care-and-treatment centres (ZOLs), other health-related facilities | 1 | 0 |
| Prisons, places of temporary detention | 2 | 0 |
| Buildings that should not be inhabited: ten house, outbuilding, ruined building | 11 | 1 |
| Abandoned buildings, allotment huts | 260 | 16 |
| Others: overcrowded conditions, in mother's home, in a rented flat without any written contract | 6 | 0 |
| No data | 34 | 2 |
| Centre for victims of domestic abuse, emergency shelter | 96 | 6 |
| Total | 1628 | 100 |

Table 4. Residence in protected/training/supported housing

| Current place of residence: supported, protected, training, or rented housing | (N) | (%) | Total population |
|---|------|-----|------------------|
| Adult | 1191 | 4 | 27516 |
| Child (below 18 years) | 229 | 14 | 1628 |

Table 5. Province and place of residence of homeless children recorded in Poland on the census day in 2013

| Province/ commune/ town of residence | Commune / town (N) | Province (N) | (%) |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Dolnośląskie | | 158 | 10 |
| Wrocław | 54 | | |
| Wałbrzych | 48 | | |
| Legnica | 15 | | |
| Głogów | 14 | | |
| Zgorzelec | 13 | | |
| Kujawsko Pomorskie | | 263 | 16 |
| Bydgoszcz | 152 | | |
| Toruń | 41 | | |
| Solec Kujawski | 35 | | |
| Inowrocław | 15 | | |
| Grudziądz | 14 | | |
| Lubelskie | | 54 | 3 |
| Lublin | 25 | | |
| Lubuskie | | 19 | 1 |
| Żary | 9 | | |
| Zielona Góra | 8 | | |
| łódzkie | | 37 | 2 |
| Bełchatów | 18 | | |
| Turów | 9 | | |
| Małopolskie | | 57 | 4 |
| Kraków | 38 | | |
| Tuchów | 12 | | |
| Mazowieckie | | 126 | 8 |
| Warszawa | 80 | | |
| Otwock | 23 | | |
| Płock | 11 | | |
| Opolskie | | 67 | 4 |
| Opole | 39 | | |
| Zopow | 13 | | |
| Podkarpackie | | 15 | 1 |
| Gorzyce | 7 | | |
| Rudnik nad Sanem | 7 | | |
| Podlaskie | | 13 | 1 |
| Garbas Drugi | 13 | | |

| Province/ commune/ town of residence | Commune / town (N) | Province (N) | (%) |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Pomorskie | | 125 | 8 |
| Gdańsk | 69 | | |
| Gdynia | 38 | | |
| Śląskie | | 251 | 15 |
| Częstochowa | 40 | | |
| Katowice | 40 | | |
| Bielsko Biała | 30 | | |
| Tarnowskie Góry | 29 | | |
| Tychy | 16 | | |
| Zabrze | 12 | | |
| Sosnowiec | 11 | | |
| Świętokrzyskie | | 31 | 2 |
| Kielce | 17 | | |
| Warmińsko-Mazurskie | | 44 | 3 |
| Gołdap | 12 | | |
| Olsztyn | 8 | | |
| Wielkopolskie | | 158 | 10 |
| Poznań | 45 | | |
| Piła | 25 | | |
| Rostarzewo | 25 | | |
| Błońsko | 21 | | |
| Szamotuły | 12 | | |
| Zachodniopomorskie | | 208 | 13 |
| Szczecin | 82 | | |
| Police | 33 | | |
| Stargard Szczeciński | 26 | | |
| Białogard | 13 | | |
| Karwowo | 12 | | |
| No data | | 2 | |
| Total | | 1628 | 100 |

2015 HOMELESS COUNT

Table 6. Numbers of people counted as homeless in Poland in 2015

| Group | (N) | (%) |
|--------------------------|--------------|------------|
| Men | 28918 | 80 |
| Women | 5351 | 15 |
| Children (below 18 yrs.) | 1892 | 5 |
| Total | 36161 | 100 |

Table 7. Children counted in provinces, with subdivision into types of place of residence in 2015

| Province | in institutions | in other places | Total |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Dolnośląskie | 177 | 1 | 178 |
| Kujawsko-pomorskie | 82 | 446 | 528 |
| Lubelskie | 37 | 0 | 37 |
| Lubuskie | 42 | 2 | 44 |
| Łódzkie | 81 | 3 | 84 |
| Małopolskie | 53 | 0 | 53 |
| Mazowieckie | 106 | 60 | 166 |
| Opolskie | 64 | 4 | 68 |
| Podkarpackie | 13 | 0 | 13 |
| Podlaskie | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Pomorskie | 83 | 3 | 86 |
| Śląskie | 215 | 0 | 215 |
| Świętokrzyskie | 21 | 0 | 21 |
| Warmińsko-mazurskie | 73 | 0 | 73 |
| Wielkopolskie | 145 | 5 | 150 |
| Zachodniopomorskie | 103 | 70 | 173 |
| Subtotal | 1298 | 594 | 1892 |
| % of total | 69% | 31% | 100% |

