



Methodology Annex: Life-trajectory interview

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Introduction

The project agreement for the CSEYHP project includes the elaboration of an annex on the life-trajectory interview (LTI).

The life-trajectory interviews took place approximately from June to October 2009 and were conducted by ex-homeless young people (*for more information consult the Annex on Working with Co-Researchers*). Therefore the design of the schedule had to take into account that the interviewer was not a researcher with specific knowledge on life-trajectory models. It had to be as simple as possible but yet aiming at a life-trajectory analysis.

Consequently, the team of researchers of the CSEYHP project developed, as far as possible, a life-trajectory analysis based on the information resulting from the conversation between the ex-homeless person conducting the interview (co-researcher) and the young homeless person.

The LTI was divided, allowing for a short break for refreshments, in two main parts: a first open question followed by a second group of closed questions intercalated by comments and other short open questions.

Through combining both levels of data – a quantitative analysis of the results to the closed questions using the software *Social Package for Social Sciences* (SPSS) and the content analysis of the descriptive/open questions – the national teams gathered different reports under specific themes.

This annex discusses the main methodological aspects of the LTI. The findings on homeless paths and profiles are more fully reported in the thematic reports deliverables that explore different angles of the research data. These are the following:

- Thematic report 1: Trajectories into homelessness and risk factors
- Thematic report 2: Social exclusion and homelessness in Northern, Southern and Central Europe
- Thematic report 3: Capabilities and resiliencies among homeless youth populations
- Thematic report 4: Gender, ethnic group and migrant dimensions of homelessness

This Annex gathers brief theoretical notes on the LTI, reporting the experiences of the four teams conducting and analysing the interviews.

1. Cross-national Research and harmonisation

When aiming at a cross-national comparison several challenges occur, such as how to establish the necessary theoretical and methodological conditions to find comparisons; or how to analyse the cultural impacts of the same phenomenon between countries.

In this research the harmonisation of the criteria to select co-researchers and interviewees was essential. The research strategy also paid particular attention to establishing a common schedule for the interviews to the young homeless.

With regard to the interviewees, a quota sample was established (9 men and 9 women for each of the three ethnic backgrounds: dominant, minority and immigrant) covering several homelessness paths:

Fig. 1 – Criteria for selecting the interviewees

Total per country	54 (total of 216 for the four countries)
Ethnic background and nationality	1/3 dominant ethnic, 1/3 minority, 1/3 immigrant (18 each)
Gender	50% female, 50% male (9 men and 9 women for each ethnic background)
Age	16-26 years old
Regional distribution	Not living in the same area as the co-researcher
Homelessness situation	Without proper and/or legal housing, sleeping rough or sleeping with friends, in hostels or other accommodation intended for less than one year. Added(*): <i>Depending on support services: living in care or move on support; social tenant; experienced homelessness with the parents</i>
Practical	Must be able to undergo an interview
Education	No criteria
Skills	Must be willing and able to share personal life history
Work experience	No criteria
Health (physical and mental)	Not in (acute) crisis
Criminal record	No criteria
Payment	Preferably vouchers
Language	Must speak national language or able to deliver translator
Ethics	Must fully underline ethical notes
Selected via	Main Researcher /Social worker/Co-researcher

Note: (*) The final criteria resulted from a widening of the initial previewed parameters for defining the homelessness situation. This fact was due to the difficulty of reaching the universe of young homeless, particularly in Portugal and the Czech Republic, for reasons such as the non-existence of specialised provision services.

In **PT** the fact that there are no specific services for young homeless persons made it difficult to reach the initial quota when taking homelessness in a narrow sense. Thereafter, the quota was filled by broadening the definition including cases, among others, of family homelessness followed by a process of re-housing, children living in care, long term accommodation for young mothers and move on accommodation.

The Czech Republic deserves a particular note due to the process of dissolution of Czechoslovakia, which impacted on citizenship and migration dynamics. In the beginning of the process dual citizenship was not allowed and when authorized only a minority exercised this right. After 2004, Czech Republic and Slovakia are under the EU policy frame for the free movement of workers. People of both countries were then allowed to cross the border without a passport and to work anywhere without needing to obtain an official permit. Three years later, in December 2007, both countries joined the Schengen Agreement and border checks were abolished.

During the process of dissolution, the Roma who were born and officially registered in today's Slovakia but did not re-register their official place of stay, have seen their citizenship left open. The Roma were particularly affected by the norms required to obtain citizenship, including proof of a five-year period of residence, significant fees and a complex bureaucratic process. The Roma children and youth in child care facilities that did not have their legal status clarified were also moved out of care but without access to employment or housing.

In **CZ**, it was verified during this research, and also from research on homeless adults migrants, that in case of Roma their pattern of homelessness is hidden in the community.

Sometimes whole family groups can be in danger of homelessness because of general social deprivation. However, our research, being the first of its kind in the CZ, focused on the main pattern of youth homelessness, where the vast majority of the respondents were of Czech ethnicity. In case of immigrants, we found some aspects of homelessness among prostitutes whose pattern of homelessness is mostly influenced by frequent changes of partners and homes. However, they typically do not end up in the streets. In conclusion, reaching the established quota for CZ would mean a distortion of the existing young homeless population.

In the **NL** it was difficult to find girls especially in the categories 'minority' and 'immigrant'. About one in ten of the Dutch homeless youth are girls. It is also quite difficult to find 'immigrants', especially those who are illegal. According to social workers who asked illegal immigrants to participate as an interviewee, most of them didn't want to because they don't want to talk about traumatic experiences. Furthermore the illegal immigrants don't feel like participating because they are convinced that after the interview their situation will not be improved, because of the impossibility as perceived by them to become a legal citizen of NL.

The **UK** shared the difficulty with NL of achieving interviews with young women not born in the UK. Two young women in this category attended the interview but refused to be recorded, being concerned about being identified within a small community; one young man similarly refused to be interviewed. It was possible to fulfil the quota for men not born in the UK, but not for women. Similarly young women and young men not born in the UK who had not yet received the status of 'leave to remain' did not want to be interviewed. However the UK did not share the difficulty of NL in interviewing ethnic minority women UK born. Ethnic minority UK born men and women were over-represented in the interview group and were dropped from the sample of 54. In London it was only possible to interview one ethnic dominant (white British) UK born woman – they were rare within the hostel population (a complete change from the late 80s to mid 1990s). The ethnic dominant women and men in the UK sample were largely interviewed in Birmingham, a rural area (Herefordshire) and an area outside London (Thames Gateway).

2. Life-Trajectory Interview Technique

The vulnerability of the interviewees in a situation of homelessness, the fact that the interviews were conducted by ex-homeless people, along with other factors, emphasises the importance of the ethical guidelines that were constructed.

Life-trajectory interviews are the first of two critical field methods for this study. The fact that the interviews were conducted in all the partner states means that the project will be able to evaluate the experiences of young people between states and within states in relation to gender, ethnic minorities and migrant status. It will be possible to explore the complex relationships between homelessness status, location, social placement and experiences of social exclusion.

Social inequalities and modernity risk dynamisms call for flexible analytic categories able to deal with faster social changes, impacts of cumulative events, reconfiguration of roles, values, norms, etc. In our research project, this analytical goal is put into practice through the life course¹ analysis that further along the study will allow redefining the concepts of social exclusion and risk, in relation to young homeless of different gender, ethnic group and migrant status.

¹ "The 'life course' is not simply a description but has become a project in which individuals are actively and consciously engaged. Social institutions expect and ensure that people plan their lives and, in part, establish the states, events and transitions that define the life course. A crucial agency in this process is welfare state: public policies to a large degree shape "life course policies" aiming to sustain 'normal' life courses in a society in which risks have become a way of life.", Walker and Shaw, 1998: 266

As chief analytic point, homelessness paths are a process of several ruptures. The focus is on the risk factors that increase the vulnerability to homelessness and social exclusion episodes, including social capital (social provision services, family networks and so forth). This explains our interest in the development of early intervention services for young people at risk.

The LTI is based on the youth homeless testimonies but does not neglect the impact of structural factors such as unemployment, available low-cost and social housing, among others. The qualitative bibliographical youth research on life transitions allows a better understanding of the interface between individual agency and constraining structures.

The "life-event data is an essential source to get to the identification of social exclusion routes and duration" (Hill, Leisering and Walker, Gershuny, Walker and Shaw, 1998). The analysis of the succession of life-event data, around both achievements and obstacles, allows tracking homelessness paths and identifying points of reinsertion. In this way the methodology applied contributes to delimit models and profiles of exclusion along with the proposal of tailored support measures.

Furthermore, Gershuny (1998) proposes three different types of events by which past ones can assume salience for the future that also need to be taken into account: "singular significant events" (conceiving a child, winning a lottery, falling in love); "cumulatively significant events" (repeated activities that lead to the acquisition of certain types of functional skills or other characteristics, including norms, expectations and values) and "processes of interaction among different accumulating characteristics" (like using negotiating skills apprehended in the workplace, in family arguments, and so forth).

The argument of three different types of events is especially important for this study which compares the life trajectories of young people born in a country and those who were not born in a country. Often a singular significant event led to young people not born in the country having a changed life path.

Building on Raffo and Reeves (2000), this Project *"lays to rest the notion of a normative model of youth transition. It highlights the increasing complexity and uncertainty which characterizes young people's lives, both in terms of their apparent options for post-school destinations, and their lifestyle and consumption choices. This complexity is reflective of the impact of economic restructuring and changing labour market requirements, favouring increasingly informal, casualized and flexible work (Ashton et al., 1990; Payne, 1995; Merson, 1996; MacDonald, 1998), and processes of individualization (Beck, 1992), which have created more open-ended biographies for young people. At the same time, social policies (especially those implemented in education, training and social security during the late 1980s and 1990s), which have diversified educational options, deregulated the youth labour market, and increased young people's dependence on parents, or careers, have fractured and extended young people's transitions"*. Moreover, the authors offer an analysis of the designated *"individualized systems of social capital that both support and constrain individual actions"*. The authors verified that *"young people's access to particular subject choices and careers advice at school, and their labour market opportunities and outcomes, are still structured by gender, family background, income and ethnicity."* This is also a line of research that shapes our Project.

Following Davis (2006), the *"LTI provide a rich source of contextually situated (spatially and temporally) qualitative data providing the opportunity to bridge the qual/quant divide through the use of medium-n case based research and categorical data analysis techniques (see Ragin, 2000). The use of trajectory categories can contribute to poverty dynamics research and enhance its impact on social policy – particularly social protection policies. Such categorisations can also be used as heuristic tools to inform policy."* In these terms, the aim was to categorise trajectory directions in relation with the concept of intergenerational social mobility. In other words, the socio-economic situation of the young homeless in relation to their parents, as well as the ascending or descending movements in terms of access to employment, education, housing, along their life

trajectory. However, due to the difficulties for the co-researchers to detect and correct life trajectory discrepancies, this research goal has been reformulated, as we will explain further on.

As part of one of the policy guidelines of the European Commission, including under the Youth Strategy, it is fundamental for fighting youth social exclusion to break the intergenerational transfer of poverty and other social disadvantages. This is also why the LTI highlights dimensions, among others, as the description of childhood and the identification at crucial age stages (12, 16, 18 and now) of the housing situation and living conditions of young people at those ages.

In the first year of the Project, we established levels of relative poverty following a comparative approach². Relative poverty is made of flows of coming out and into that situation (including the analysis of processes to overcome poverty³). For instance, the francophone tradition centres on relational matters, such as the rupture of social bonds between individuals and society – solidarity, insertion and integration. On the other hand, Anglo-Saxon research focuses on the individuals' and households' lack of economic resources – individual rights and economic development. For articulating both traditions, it is fundamental to differentiate the causes of precarious situations in terms of process and its repercussions (poverty), as well as its impacts (perpetuation of poverty).

It should be kept in mind that a lot of research on homelessness is quantitative. This research is very useful because it lays bare the problems homeless youth have to cope with in general. Not all young homeless persons have to cope with all the general problems that pop up from the quantitative material since all individuals have their own specific problems and pathways into homelessness.

To get a grip on the differences that exist within the group of homeless youth one might analyse the quantitative material. The more sophisticated the analysis, the more detailed group comparisons might possibly be made. One can relate problems to problems and get a clearer picture of how factors relate to each other. Homeless youth experiencing this or that circumstance might be in more risk of that situation. One can even go back into history and relate things that happened in the past to things happening now.

Still quantitative research doesn't give a picture of a range of intermingling events in a particular homeless youth's life. Even very rich quantitative material often doesn't get a grip on different pathways (for a fundamental criticism of the life of generalised group characteristics, Mills, 1981).

Still it is interesting to see if patterns can be detected in the pathways of groups of young homeless people. Who become homeless? Is it possible to detect refined patterns, mechanisms which lead to youth homelessness? For that we need a method that not only focuses on generalised characteristics, but takes into account the individual development of young homeless persons. This takes as a unit of research the respondent as an individual, as well as the individual through time. At the end the research-results might be distanced from the individual level but analysis starts on the individual over time: the case-study.

This research might be done by studying homeless youth administrative files (dossiers). It might also be done by questioning homeless youth themselves. This second possibility

² A comparative Report on Youth Homelessness and Social Exclusion in the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Portugal and the UK - A preliminary study for the European research project 'Combating Social Exclusion among Young Homeless People (CSEYHP)', Date 27th July 2009, http://www.movisie.nl/125397/eng/home/projecten/homeless_youth/publications/

³ On the subject of welfare dependency and to overcome a state of poverty, Walker and Shaw point out, "three models of dependency have been distinguished in the public debate in the USA which have more general applicability (Bane and Elwood, 1994): the rational model – generosity of benefits as compared to wages makes it irrational for claimants to leave assistance; the psycho-social (or "expectancy") model - people want to get off benefit but they cannot because they have lost faith in their own abilities; the cultural model – people do not want to leave assistance because they have developed values different from the rest of society that endorse a life on benefits.", 1999: 270

is central in the LTI method. The advantage of this method is that it takes the life of individual homeless youth as a whole through space and time.

The life trajectory method is a qualitative one. It generates detailed information. Biographical testimonies obtained from the LTI allow understanding the intersecting of several orders of factors.

Qualitative research in general – whether LTI, or other ways to collect qualitative research material – can be useful in different respects. It can help to understand what meaning respondents attach to their experiences and circumstances. It lays bare symbolic perceptions which are important to understand the pathways homeless youth live through. From the perspective of homeless youth themselves one can detect not only important factors on the individual level but also on the meso and macro levels. For example if an illegal homeless youth indicates as the main problem, not having a passport and therefore being excluded from civic rights, a pathway of a group of homeless youth is very clearly linked to the macro-societal level.

The quantitative and qualitative material can reinforce each other. Quantitative material leads to hypothesis about which risk factors lead to homelessness. Qualitative material might give more insight on how risk factors lead to youth homelessness for certain groups.

The LTI can be used as the basis for understanding mechanisms that lie behind homelessness. These mechanisms can be the nucleus of forming profiles groups of homeless youth. Both quantitative and qualitative research results deliver material to build the existence of such a profile.

The technique of using two or more different methods on the same subject is called multi-method approach or triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Cohen and Manion, 2000). The use of the LTI together with the collection of quantitative material by closed questions (lists of answers options to be ticked) is an example of triangulation.

For studying risk and poverty, Leisering and Walker (1998) highlight the relevance of concepts like “states, trajectories, and domains”, which in the case of the present research apply to the identification of homelessness risk factors. By other words, a life course is represented by various staged trajectories in different domains of life that intersect. Risks can emerge from those interactions, or events occurring in one sphere can be reproduced in other. For example, unemployment is known to be associated with an increased risk of relationship breakdown. In our interview several domains in different life stages are approached, namely housing, education, employment and autonomy and family situation.

For analysing the nature and extent of social exclusion, it is essential to take into account the probability of the transition to that situation. The risk factors discriminate between the occurrence of events and their effects. In this research, the interviewees were asked to identify their relation with social provision services at different levels: prevention, needs and services used at the moment.

Moreover, the conducted LTI also pinpoints the “fractals” individuals go through during their trajectories. These are temporary changes such as a short-term job that does not permit to get out of a homeless phase. The last themes of the LTI focus on the impact of living without adequate housing, service needs, uses of social provision services. It envisages social provision services as a crucial element of social capital in youth transitions. Therefore, LTI makes it possible not only to understand how young people at the margins of society understand, experience and transform their transitions in life several domains, but also to pinpoint their resources and needs at the social capital level.

Building on Worthman and al. (2005) the LTI is designed to elicit models of economic and social success and the life course achievement and derailment and to understand how individuals position themselves with respect to these models. In this sense, the LTI design of the present research addresses both “bad and good moments”, “the person so special that made you cope”, understanding the pathways of both risk and resilience. In

spite of the fact that this is not a quantitative study that aims on finding statistic significant correlations, the adopted case study approach on the interviews allows identifying young homeless peoples' expectations and desired life project.

As mentioned, it is also our conceptual approach that the LTI helps in triggering points of reinsertion for tailored reinsertion measures. The LTI is also an instrument for better understanding the testing and exportation of the two models under research – Early Intervention and 8-Step – since it helps to analyse the several milestones (main short term and long term goals), barriers, social resources and material goods that young homeless people perceive and idealise for their life trajectories.

The present study doesn't seek to develop explicit questions on choices but captures the projects and social expectations of the young people, such as their symbolic representations on matters like future plans. There was a special concern to design a model of interview that asks about traumas and problems, but as well as positive aspects and achievements, and the moments or persons that keep the person motivated.

This Project explores the concept of social exclusion and risk by contemplating several dimensions and social spheres that impact on individual trajectories. These dimensions, since we are dealing with a period of transition from childhood to adulthood, also correspond to crucial events for life transitions. The LTI has a general description of the life-trajectory (ups and downs - Part I) and questions grouped along key life themes (Part II) under a closed format, analysed after in more detail.

To sum up, this research with young homeless people works through a life-trajectory narrative interview and is not strictly biographical. The life-trajectory method allows young people to steer the initial interview but also uses, in the final part, a semi-directive interview schedule to collect comparative data. The LTI combines several levels of information for analysing homelessness paths: identification of life-events, achievements and obstacles along the life-trajectory and for the several life domains that were mentioned, along with the resources and capabilities of the young interviewees in a situation of homelessness. As also said, the key-working dimension and the assessment of needs are crucial for analysing points of reinsertion and testing the 8-Step and Early Intervention Models.

3. Co-researchers Conducting the Life-Trajectory Interview

The co-researchers both completed paper interview schedules and digitally recorded each interview. Through this dual recording process, the different national research teams could understand the way different young people responded in interviews even in relation to the structured part. In some of the structured questions there are very detailed responses, which through the recording, it is possible to keep track of.

The LTI interviews were analysed using SPSS but combining the use of nominal and numeric variables. In this way it is possible to keep track of significant quotes from interviewees' answers (transcribed) that complement the quantitative data and were used in illustrative ways throughout the thematic reports. The co-researchers, in a great part of the cases, made a special effort to also keep notes of the descriptive answers although the interview was also being recorded.

3.1. Part I of the LTI

"Can you please tell me something about your life experiences up until now ... including the ups and downs, the good bits and bad bits? Begin wherever you like and take all the time you need"

The interview starts with the presentation of the co-researcher and of the Project. The interviewees begin engaging in the interview by presenting themselves and briefly reporting on significant ups and down in their lives.

The answers the interviewees chose to give varied significantly, meaning that there was not a specific way to start Part 1. Some gave little information such as their names, age and place of birth, while others preferred to describe where they lived, with whom and the good and bad moments of some periods of their lives - childhood, present day, and so forth.

In relation to the time lines chosen by the young homeless interviewees to structure their answers, some preferred to start from childhood and move on to the present day, while others preferred to start from the present and move backwards. Furthermore, some gave just one significant event and then asked to move on to the next question.

For the **NL**, some respondents (mostly girls) the questions worked really well: they felt free to tell their life history. Most respondents however struggled with this question; where to start, what do you want to know, etc. This experience was shared by the **UK**.

Also there seemed to be considerable hesitation in the answers. Respondents sometimes avoided specifics about difficulties and hardships they had encountered, which they did reveal later in the interview. This suggests that respondents are reluctant to immediately open up to the interviewer and reveal more sensitive aspects of their lives. This makes sense since, it is the first question and respondents have not yet had time to create a level of trust with the interviewer.

The **UK** team found that rather than problems with question format the main problem was that further training was required for co-researchers to get used to the questionnaire and what each question was meant to achieve. The UK co-researchers did a really good job but it was difficult for them to perform the multiple tasks of listening, holding something at the back of their mind and filling in the questionnaire at the same time. So that if a stepparent suddenly appeared in the narrative they seemed to just accept the new information but didn't go back to make the family picture fit the new information. Another example is not exploring discrepancies as when a young person says they were excluded from school and then suddenly report a higher expected level of school qualifications.

This applies also to the **NL** but since interviewing requires practice this would have been difficult to avoid. One other issue is concerned with follow-up questions. Some co-researchers were capable of asking follow-up questions to help the respondents clarify or elaborate on their answers. Others however were not, thus creating big differences in the amount of information acquired in this first question.

In **CZ**, all the respondents talked about their lives, themselves and their life experiences. Most of them mentioned both good and bad experiences from their lives. They frequently talked about their families - about their parents who were often divorced, about their upbringing and experience with institutional care. One third of them talked about their lives in a lengthy way. The respondents had no problem with talking about themselves, the co-researchers usually didn't have to influence their talk significantly, and they usually asked questions to clarify or complete the questions. Some co-researchers had a feeling that the respondents were glad to share and be listened to.

In **PT**, there were also some interviewees that had mixed notions of past and present borderlines. There were two main profiles of respondents: a more introverted youth having difficulties to communicate spontaneously, and the more extroverted, which could even use the Part 1 as a moment of catharsis to "let it all out". The short life descriptions (around 5 minutes) were frequent. This is the case since the respondents were often at ease with summarizing their lives in a few words. However, the answers with 10/15 minutes (medium) were also frequent among the more communicative interviewees that were comfortable with sharing their most difficult moments. Not so used by the respondents were the very short format answers, limited to name and place of birth and little else (around 2 minutes). Overall, the average of Part I of the interviews was between 5 and 15 minutes. This reflects the work done by co-researchers helping with examples and motivating the young homeless persons. The co-researchers had a special concern with winning youth trust and building a good environment during the interview.

In the **UK** the majority of Part 1 answers that were short were from the non-UK born who had language difficulties and also had only one significant huge event in their lives to report – fleeing war, fleeing persecution, a death of a parent. Apart from that there were a few young people born in the UK who did not want to describe the extent of the trauma they had experienced. In general the narratives were longer.

In **PT**, the age average also varied considerably according to the length of the life-trajectory descriptions. For the longer, the ages varied between 20 and 26 years old. For the shorter answers, the interviewees were generally younger (16 to 20 years old). This can be related with difficulties of exposure or the perception of having a “normal childhood with nothing much to say...” This is not the case for **NL**, where both young and older people had longer and shorter answers.

- Interviews of people with one paragraph - were they always short or did they expand later in the interview as they became more comfortable?

The young people that had difficulties of communication in general had constraints during both parts of the interview and vice-versa. This can be related to how well they understood some questions that had to be reformulated by the interviewer, or with the fact that they were more uncomfortable speaking about themselves.

In **PT**, one aspect that should be highlighted is that, in some cases, the interviewers felt that respondents were there mainly because of the payment, answering without enough concern and being too vague. On the other hand, there were also interviewees that mentioned that they really enjoyed the experience. They used the interview to reflect about their own lives.

The **NL** team verified the proportion of around fifty-fifty between those that lost themselves during the second part of the interview and the ones that remained short in their answers.

- Were young people who said a great deal young women or young men, older or younger?

In **PT**, according to co-researchers, it was easier to talk to young women than young men. This is the case since men were more quiet, reserved and suspicious. Women (younger or older) were much more open to speak about their lives in both parts of the interview. For example, there are women that have children and relate much of their testimonies to their difficulties as mothers to, for instance, find a job, child care, and so forth. In sum, the difference between younger and older applies to men respondents, as well.

In the **UK** all the co-researchers were female and some young men were more reticent particularly in talking to younger female co-researchers. The UK team found that the non-UK born who were interviewed in their own language (5) produced transcripts of a similar length to the UK born. It would have been interesting to compare young men’s responses if interviewed by young male co-researchers.

For the **NL**, young women were indeed usually somewhat easier to talk to than younger men, the former ones usually being a bit more elaborate in their answers. But there were also many young men who answered elaborately. There was no difference in ages though, since both young and older interviewees answered elaborately.

3.2. The different degrees of biography from childhood on, or starting at a particular point such as becoming a homeless

The degrees of biography varied according to the youth migrant status. Generally speaking, the immigrants have incidents or events to tell around the experience of leaving the home country: reasons to immigrate, reception at the host country, and so forth. The majority of the immigrants described first the childhood followed by the present.

The life-trajectory descriptions of the national born (ethnic minority/ dominant) varied significantly and they were better able to explain the present and less the past.

There are homelessness paths that report to childhood, like living as homeless with family, in self-made shacks, children's home, evicted by the parents, among others. In these cases, the homelessness path including the childhood period is very well explained mentioning also the means of survival.

3.3. Part II of the LTI

Under Part II, the interview contemplates the following crucial transitions and social domains:

- **Background:** socio- and demographic description; geographic mobility; religion and ethnicity.
- **Childhood:** taking as references the ages of 12, 16, 18 - persons living with the young homeless and housing situations; living in care; refugees and parents homeless paths; parents' sources of income; family relations and experiences of arguments; running away; early intervention services and childhood assessment.
- **Education:** school paths; qualifications; professional goals and constraints and vocational training.
- **Leaving home and finding independence:** first autonomous housing experiences and current status.
- **Income, work and activity:** several main activities; sources of income and survival strategies.
- **Socialising:** leisure activities; belonging to communities and social groups; social and family contacts and favourite things to do.
- **Impact of inadequate housing:** previous living situations; homelessness factors; feelings of insecurity; perceptions on risk and homelessness; health and use of social provision services at the current moment.
- **Support and key workers:** main support needs; experiences and satisfaction with key working; suggestions for improving services and future plans and wishes.
- **Information:** ways to contact agencies, the use of IT and suggestions for the Project.

As described, the life-trajectory themes allow also highlighting key working and support needs as well as the uses of information technologies as ways of social inclusion. The selected topics of life transitions are also fundamental to understand the several homelessness paths according to the specific national contexts and under a cross-national perspective.

In general, the interviewees coped surprisingly well with Part II.

3.4. The type of disclosure in the initial Part I compared to Part II

In **PT**, the type of disclosure in Part 1 in comparison with Part 2 varies considerably. In Part 1 many had problems beginning the conversation because of the broader and subjective nature of the question, saying "I do not know where to start". This was more frequent with the younger or introverted respondents. In these cases, the co-researchers tried to clarify the objective of the question through simple and concrete examples. The ones that started from the present and didn't go backwards to the childhood period were left after a while without much to say, preferring to move to the second part of the interview where they knew that questions were more direct, and probably they would feel less exposed. Furthermore, there were also a couple of cases where interviewees felt constrained speaking about the past in a descriptive way, but nevertheless admitted to having family problems and experiencing traumas in the second part of the interview. For instance, there was an interviewee who started speaking about the present and when the

interviewer asked about the past the person got quiet, started crying and then asked if it was possible to move on to the second part.

The mentioned situation was previewed under the ethic recommendations by complementing the interview with the indication of counselling or extra time if necessary. Furthermore, it reveals that LTI when dealing with homeless youth needs special safeguards.

The reasons why there is such variation in terms of length and type of information on the LTI can be related to the fact that the young people did not feel prepared to describe their lives in such an in-depth way at the start. Therefore Part II was very helpful to complement Part I and had also questions for respondents, who became progressively more confident, to elaborate on their life experiences, including their childhood.

Overall, and keeping in mind that the respondents are young and also have accumulated several traumas and painful experiences, it is valuable to combine descriptive and closed questions.

The role of the co-researchers is fundamental for building empathy as well as for motivating the young respondents, even if the analysis of life-trajectory is, due to their inexperience, constrained. In this sense, the goals of the LTI are in balance with another priority of this Project – the participation of ex-homeless as co-researchers.

4. The Life-Trajectory Interview Analysis

As mentioned above, the design of the schedule had to take into account that the interviewer was not a researcher with specific knowledge on life-trajectory models. As also stated, the co-researchers' difficulties to control and correct discrepancies or gaps of information during the interviews, made it necessary to redefine some of the analytical goals. For instance, the categorisation of trajectories patterns (smooth, single-step, multi-step etc.) was impossible to do accurately. Nevertheless, the participation of the co-researchers is obviously one of this Project's strengths and has offered other valuable contributions.

As also referred to, the analysis of the LTI combined a qualitative level (selecting illustrative quotes for the central analytic dimensions and key life transition domains following an exploratory content analysis) with a quantitative treatment of the directive questions of Part II (numeric and ordinal variables on SPSS). It is considered an added value that along with the main statistical findings, qualitative elements can also be used that illustrate the interviewee's perceptions and subjective events.

Regardless of the constraints on analysing the data collected by the co-researchers, the interviewees share challenges and constraints in their transition from childhood to adulthood in several life domains. Their homeless pathways contradict a linear conception of transitions since employment and living autonomy, that are considered chief points to determine the entrance to adulthood, are clearly compromised. Yet the complexity of family problems and other issues during childhood, has made, in many cases, this period a very short one.

In order to assess the intersection of several risk factors, teams identified different models of homelessness paths by reconstructing chronologically the LTI, following specific domains (age and events life grid): year and age, family events, housing events, activities/education events, the services in contact and possible points of reinsertion.

As an example, of an identified homeless pathway in the UK:

Fig. 2 – Life-trajectory Grid Analysis

Year	Age	Place	Family Event	Housing Event	Activities Event	Services In Contact	Reinsertion Points
1993	0	Salford	Born	Living with both parents			
2004	11	Scotland	Mother flees to Scotland to escape domestic violence	Mother given social housing in small Scottish Town	Changes school as mother flees domestic violence	Local authority housing	Local authority housing Local refuges Police
2005	12	Scotland	Starts drinking with twin brother and both begin to be violent towards mother			Social services become involved	Family Mediation Substance misuse services Anger management Counselling
2006	13	Scotland	Increase in drinking and violence towards mother		Social services arrange for a change of secondary school due to disruptive behaviour	Social Services	Family mediation Educational Support Anger management Counselling
2007	15	Scotland	Twin brother goes into foster care	Twin brother moves to social services accommodation		Social Services	Family Mediation Substance misuse services Counselling
2009	16	London		Takes coach to London only but returns home next day	Gets a weekend job to fund running away to London		Emergency accommodation/night shelter Family Mediation
2009	16	London		Returns to London put up on hotel by Social Service		Social Services ref to hostel	Social Services Supported accommodation
2009	16	London	Mum develops terminal cancer	Moves into supported hostel	Starts performing arts course, volunteer work	College, supported accommodation	Counselling Supported accommodation College peer group

One of the main advantages of this approach is that it allows for a better understanding of how the different events intersect, contributing to overcome an abstract and not contextualised approach of homelessness risk factors. Also, it contributes to trigger tailored measures of reinsertion.

As mentioned, the findings on the LTI analysis can be found in the four Thematic Reports.

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