



HOMELESSNESS IN BELGIUM

KEY STATISTICS

In Belgium, homelessness policy follows a highly regionalised structure. This means that the statistics available are regional rather than national.

Brussels

In the Brussels region, La Strada (the support centre for the homeless sector) has developed two data collection mechanisms:

- 1) Centralisation of service data to monitor on one-night stays of the homeless people in services on an annual basis.
- 2) A periodical survey of homeless people on a given night over the whole territory of Brussels. The survey was carried in 2008, 2010 and 2014.

2014 One-Night Survey:

- Number of people sleeping rough (ETHOS 1.1): 412
- Number of people living in night shelters (ETHOS 2.1): 367
- Number of people living in homeless accommodation for men (ETHOS 3 & 4): 322
- Number of people living in homeless accommodation for women (ETHOS 3 & 4): 34
- Number of people living in homeless accommodation for women and children (ETHOS 3 & 4): 274
- Number of people living in mixed-gendered homeless accommodation (ETHOS 3 & 4): 183
- Number of people living in private (non-certified) accommodation services (ETHOS 11): 316
- Number of people living in shelter in religious communities (ETHOS 11): 44
- Number of people living in squats with local authority permission (ETHOS 11): 193
- Number of people living in very poor condition squats (ETHOS 12): 422

Total: 2.567

2014 Centralised Service-Data Collection:

- Number of people (adults & children) using homeless accommodation services: 2050
- Number of children using homeless accommodation services: 859
- Number of people using homeless accommodation services on a regular basis: 179

Total: 3.088

There have been several important studies on homelessness recently in Belgium, including evaluations in 2010 and 2012 of the Brussels winter emergency plan by La Strada¹.

Flanders

In Flanders, the NGO centres for general welfare (CAWs) use a uniform register system. However, the local authority services for social welfare (OCMW) do not, meaning that there is not comparable data for the region as a whole. In 2010 the minister of Welfare laid out plans for a regional monitoring system. These plans resulted in two research projects: one in 2011 (Robeyns, Demaerschalk, & Hermans, 2011) and one in 2014 (Meys & Hermans, 2014). These successive research projects constitute a first attempt to collect comprehensive data on homelessness. In 2014 a survey was carried out between 15th of January until the 15th of February. In this survey the ETHOS categories were used.

	Number of people living in night shelters	Number of people living in homeless accommodation	Number of people under threat of eviction	
	Winteropvang	Thuislozenzorg CAW's + doorgangswoningen OCMW's	Vorderingen onder dreiging uithuiszettingen OCMW's	
	ETHOS 1 & 2	ETHOS 3, 4 and 7	ETHOS 9	
people of age > 16	711	3019	599	4329
children	53	1675	unknown	1728
	764	4694	599	

Wallonia

In Wallonia, the government collects each year statistical data, based on quantitative questionnaire, from certified hosting services. Data concern the number of people staying in homeless accommodations during the year.

In 2014:

- Number of men living in night shelters (ETHOS 2.1): 526 (incomplete data)
- Number of women living in night shelters (ETHOS 2.1): 82 (incomplete data)
- Number of children living in night shelter (ETHOS 2.1): 0 (incomplete data)
- Number of men living in homeless accommodation (ETHOS 3 & 4): 2.100

¹ La Strada (2010) 2010-2012 Évaluation du dispositif d'urgence hivernal en région de Bruxelles-Capitale, available at : <http://www.lstb.be/pdf/DUHB%202010-2012%20FR-1.pdf>

- Number of women living in homeless accommodation (ETHOS 3 &4): 2.129
- Number of children living in homeless accommodation (ETHOS 3 &4): 2.176

INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

No clear overall trend at national level.

In Brussels, in four years the number of homeless has risen by 33%. This rise is principally seen in the following situations:

- people living in very poor condition squats,
- people living in private (non-certified) accommodation services,
- people sleeping rough,
- and people living in night shelters.

Concerning the first two situations, this rise can be explained by a refinement of measuring methods and a rise of precariousness in Belgium in general and in Brussels in particular. Concerning people sleeping rough and people living in night shelters this rise is unambiguous.

Since it is the first time this survey was carried out in Flanders we can't compare these data with data from earlier periods.

CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

No clear trends at national level. There is some evidence of an increase in the proportion of women and immigrants amongst homeless services users. More than one in three homeless persons in Flanders is a woman and the proportion continues to increase. Most of them become homeless as a consequence of domestic violence.

POLICIES & STRATEGIES

National Strategy

There is no integrated national strategy. There has been some progress towards regional strategies:

- In the Flanders region, a Flemish homeless strategy is inscribed in the Flemish anti-poverty strategy 2015-2019. The priority of this strategy, based on the 5 strategic goals to end homelessness, will be laid on prevention.

- In Brussels, protocols have been signed between the Government of the Brussels Capital Region and the three Community Institutions concerning the fight against poverty.
- The federal anti-poverty programme 2015-2019 was not yet ready at this moment of writing the fiche.

Governance

As stated above, competence for homelessness is mostly at the level of the regions. In the Brussels region, it is divided between the regional government, the three Community Institutions, and the communes (districts) which are responsible for the public social services centres. La Strada became operational in 2007. As a support centre for the homeless sector, its role is to support stakeholder dialogue/participation and data collection on homelessness. Meetings between service providers, public authorities and other stakeholders take place every two months with a larger meeting once a year. The aim is coordination, information sharing, practice development, mutual learning and overall exchange to enhance service delivery in line with needs.

REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Positive

Progress towards a homelessness strategy in Flanders. Federal Housing First experiment.

Negative

Increase in coercive approaches reported in Brussels. This includes the use of administrative sanctions and a focus on squats and Roma people. An ordinance approved on December 13th 2007 criminalized begging and called for a fine of 84 Euros (N.b. "vagrancy" and begging were decriminalized in Belgium in 1993).