

HOMELESSNESS IN GERMANY

KEY STATISTICS

There is no legally-required, nationwide data collection on homelessness in Germany. Relatively extensive data exists but does not cover all regions of the country. BAG W (the umbrella organisation of non-profit homeless service providers) presents annual nationwide estimations based on its own monitoring systems, taking account of developments in the housing market, labour market, migration, social security and drawing on regional statistics and BAG W flash surveys. BAG W also lobbies in an ongoing fashion for the improvement of data collection with a legal basis at national level.

According to BAG W's estimations for 2016, the (annual prevalence) number of cases of homeless people in Germany is 860,000. This breaks down into the two following categories:

- Homeless people: 420,000 over the course of a year
- Recognized refugees experiencing homelessness in shelters for asylum seekers: 440,000 over the course of a year

There are comprehensive, regular statistics on homelessness available in North-Rhine Westphalia, the most populous of the 16 *Länder* in Germany. A data collection strategy was developed in the framework of a regional homelessness action plan. In 2016, a one-day count on the 30th June recorded:

- People provided with night shelters and temporary accommodation by the local authorities (part of ETHOS 1.2 and 3.2): 11,637
- People who had received some support from the voluntary sector for the homeless in the month leading up to the count (parts of ETHOS 1,2,3,7, 8.1 and 11): 13,408

Key pull-out statistics

2016: 420,000 homeless people
444,000 refugees

INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

According to BAG W estimates, the overall number of homeless people (including recognized homeless refugees) rose by 150% from 2014 (335,000) to 2016 (860,000). This included a rise in the number of rough sleepers from approximately 39,000 to 52,000 – an increase of about 33%. The number of homeless people rose by 25% between 2014 (335,000) and 2016 (422,000).

CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

According to BAG W estimates, homelessness amongst family households rose fast between 2014 and 2016. Homelessness amongst single-person households is estimated to have increased by 22% from 239,000 to 294,000. Family homelessness is estimated to have risen by 31% from 2014 to 2016. The larger overall number of single homeless reflects in part a shortage of small flats available to house single homeless people (in 2016 there are 5.2 million 1-2 room flats for 16.8 million single households).

According to BAG W, of about 420,000 homeless people (without recognized homeless refugees) in Germany in 2016, 27% were women (100,000). The share of children and adolescents is estimated at 8% (32,000). Men represent 73% of the homeless population (290,000).

POLICIES & STRATEGIES

National Strategy

There is no national strategy in the sense of a federal programme defined in a strategic document. Nonetheless, service provision for homeless people is relatively extensive and provided for by a legislative framework. National legislation sets out the obligations of municipalities in terms of social service provision. Since the mid-1990s, the Social Code has stipulated that all persons who are at risk of losing their homes are entitled to assistance - either in the form of loans or allowances for rent arrears. Police laws in the *Bundesländer* (regional states) strictly oblige municipalities to provide shelter for roofless people.

In 2013, BAG W laid down principles for a National Strategy in a *Call for a National Strategy against Homelessness and Poverty*, published in September 2013. It will follow up this call in the coming years. The Call focuses on specific local, regional and national level programmes. So far the National government has rejected to take up the proposal (12/2016).

North-Rhine Westphalia, the most populous region, has a regional action plan on homelessness. The budget for the Programme is about 1 million Euros a year. Its aim is to develop innovative approaches and support municipalities to tackle homelessness. The main focus is the prevention of homelessness and access to housing. Specific target groups include migrants and older homeless people.

Governance

Competence for homelessness lies largely at local and regional level. At central-state level, a department in the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is responsible for policies supporting homeless people. Consultation with stakeholders in the homeless field is mainly carried out by BAG W. There is very little inter-ministerial coordination. Starting in 2016 this ministry is operating a 89 Million Euro fund in the framework of the new Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). The majority of about 80 funded projects are directed to the homeless population, especially homeless EU-migrants and their children.

BAG W provides guidance on policy orientation that aims to frame policy development at local, regional and national level. Germany's extensive homeless service network has been rapidly growing in the past 20 years. There has been

a strong focus on the development of *housing-led approaches* (since 1980), mainly influenced by the policy-orientation work of BAG W. BAG W has also strongly supported the development of *prevention approaches* since 2000.

Targeted Prevention

Homelessness policy in Germany is strongly prevention-orientated. In 1994, Social Code provisions on assistance in the case of rent arrears were converted from powers into duties in cases where households were at imminent risk of becoming homeless. A revised handbook on making administrative prevention efforts more effective was published in 1999, while programmes to reorganise and improve preventative services were developed in many municipalities all over Germany.¹ Many municipalities run coordinated prevention services focusing on rent arrears. Social 'support in housing' for formerly homeless people and for those who have faced a housing crisis at some stage has also been extended in recent years.

Housing-Led Approaches

Long-term housing solutions as the main response to homelessness have been the dominant approach in Germany since 1990, according to official statements. Since 1984, the social laws of the Federal Republic strongly reflect the legal principle that outpatient care has priority over inpatient care.

However, the emphasis on access to housing as early as possible as a response to *all* types of homelessness has limits, especially for single homeless people. The staircase approach is still prevalent in some areas. Overall, BAG W concludes that around 80% of NGO based homeless services use a "outpatient-counselling approach" in the context of housing-led strategies and 20% a more "inpatient-institutional" approach in the context of hostels and special institutions. A survey on supported housing, organised by service providers for homeless people, reported almost 5,800 formerly homeless people were receiving "support in housing" from 261 different service providers on a single day in 2003. However, about 47% of the housing provided was time-limited including 20% in

¹ Busch-Geertsema, V and Fitzpatrick, S. (2008) 'Effective Homelessness Prevention? Explaining Reductions in Homelessness in Germany and England' in *European Journal of*

Homelessness "Effectiveness of Policies and Services for Homelessness", - Volume 2, December 2008, Brussels

shared accommodation. Approximately half of the service users were in regular dwellings with full tenancy rights.²

Budget Evolution

Funding for social services for homeless people is legally guaranteed in Germany. There have been major decreases in national funding in the field of employment services (30% and more in the context of the crisis).

REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Positive

- The level of the subsistence benefit has been revised slightly upwards (although it is still not enough) after the intervention of the national court in 2010.
- A rent control regime for new rents was introduced in 2013. So far it does not show major effects.
- In the last years some regions (“Bundesländer”) have made stock surveys of homelessness, namely Bayern and Baden-Württemberg. They follow mostly the design of homelessness statistics established in North-Rhine-Westphalia for years. In the future there might be chances to get to a national homelessness statistic for all of Germany.

Negative

- Ceilings of the housing benefit regime are too low in a context of rising rents.
- There is still no major investment in social housing, but in the face of the housing crisis larger cities are trying to enlarge their investments into social housing.

- The growing regulation of public space has led to stricter control of public places, also affecting homeless people, especially EU- migrants. In December 2016 a new regime for EU migrants was introduced into the social code limiting social aid for unemployed EU migrants without claims to unemployment benefits to a maximum of four weeks. Furthermore the EU migrant could be granted a credit for the travel back to their country of origin. Some legal experts assume that this regulation would violate constitutional article 1 of the German constitution and some high court rulings referring to this article. The consequences of the law are still to be seen, but BAG W believes it may result in more undocumented EU-migrants among the homeless population.

² Busch-Geertsema, V. and Evers, J. (2004) *Auf dem Weg zur Normalität. Bestandsaufnahme der persönlichen Hilfen in Wohnungen im Bereich der Hilfen in Wohnungsnotfällen* [On the

Way to Normality. Stock Taking of Support in Housing for People in Urgent Need of Housing]. (Bremen: GISS)

