

HOMELESSNESS IN THE NETHERLANDS

KEY STATISTICS

In 2016 the homeless shelters who are members of Federatie Opvang (The Dutch Federation of Shelters) reported having assisted 60,000 people¹. This was a slight increase from 2015 (58.000). There are no national figures in 2016 on the number of women and children assisted by the women's shelters. The numbers of the homeless shelters cover all categories of the ETHOS definition of homelessness.

In 2016, the national statistics office (CBS) estimated that there were approximately 31,000 homeless people aged between 18 and 65 in the Netherlands². This estimate was based on three registers of homeless people and covered:

- People sleeping rough (ETHOS 1.1)
- People staying in homeless shelters (ETHOS 1.2)
- People staying in short-term accommodation (ETHOS 3)
- People staying with friends, acquaintances or relatives on an irregular basis (ETHOS 8.1)

Just over 40% of this population was concentrated in the major cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht (known as the G4). Almost half of the homeless people between 18-30 years old are found in the G4.

The definitions which are used by the Federatie Opvang and the national statistics office CBS differ. The CBS counts homeless people who are registered as such with a local authority. The Federatie Opvang counts all people who have requested and received assistance from a shelter organization.

2016, national statistics office (CBS) estimates approx 31,000 homeless people aged 18-65

INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

The number of homeless people maintains at a high level. The start of a national strategy in 2005-2006 resulted in less than 50.000 homeless people in shelters for the homeless in 2009. The CBS statistics office counted 17.000 registered homeless people in 2009. Since then there has been an increase. The number seems to fluctuate around 60.000 homeless people annually. In 2016 there is an increase in the number of homeless families. Almost 19.000 women and 4.000 children were registered in 2016. In 2013 these numbers were 16.000 women and 2.500 children.

CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

According to the numbers of the CBS statistics office, youth homelessness is increasing. In 2016 the share of young homeless people (18-30 years) was 41%, much higher than in 2015 (27%). In 2016 the Netherlands counted 12,400 young homeless people, in 2015 this was 8,300. In 2009-2015 the share of young homeless people fluctuated between 22 and 29 percent, slightly increasing every year. Young homeless people are more often of immigrant descent (59%) compared to the whole group of homeless people (49%). Young homeless people are more frequently than other age groups, found in one of the 4 big cities. As stated above, the number of homeless families is growing.

¹ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2017/12/22/cijfers-maatschappelijke-opvang-2016>

² <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2016/51/dakloos-vaker-jong-en-niet-westers>

POLICIES & STRATEGIES

- **National Strategy**

Strategic Plan for Social Relief: 2006-2010 and 2011- 2014;
Regional plans 2016 and after.

- **Scope**

Initial focus on 4 major cities (G4) then expanded to 43 municipalities and their regions. The first phase lasted from 2006-2010 and the second phase covers 2011-2014. In 2014, a new phase has been prepared due to the decentralization of the long-term mental health care facilities to the 43 municipalities responsible for prevention of homelessness. The new law on Social Support (Wmo2015) made the 43 municipalities responsible for around 40,000 psychiatric patients living in supported housing facilities. The municipalities are required to develop new regional plans where they combine homelessness prevention policies with policies for supported housing for people with mental health care problems, addiction problems or learning difficulties. These regional strategies to promote stable living and support conditions for this group and to prevent homelessness have to be in place by the end of 2017. Evaluation³ has taken place and it appears that only a few regions have worked out concrete plans.

Resources

The budget for regional and local strategies consists of a special allowance for the 43 cities. In 2017, this annual budget was €385,000,000. For supported housing for people with chronic mental health care problems another 1.4 billion euros was decentralized to the municipalities. The budget is divided among the 43 municipalities according to an allocation formula. In 2017, 35 municipalities received an additional €107,959,001 for the implementation of policies and services relating to domestic violence. Another €135,000,000 is available from the justice system, from donations and from contributions from service users (service users pay a certain contribution from their social security allowance towards room and board).

Governance

The strategy was coordinated by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports (VWS) and the National Association of

Local Authorities (VNG). VWS has overall responsibility for the implementation of the legal system and monitoring of the decentralization and policy development. The municipalities are responsible for developing and implementing regional and local policies.

Because of the decentralization, the ministry of VWS is no longer responsible for monitoring the progress. All municipalities are required to report to their local council. The minister of VWS reports on progress on the subject of homelessness at least once a year. Regular consultation takes place between Federatie Opvang, local authorities, health insurance companies and others. The ministry of VWS gives a subsidy to the VNG so that they can support the municipalities in developing policies on homelessness. The VNG facilitates a platform of civil servants and of aldermen which meets and discusses five times a year about the progress and the obstacles which they experience in developing and implementing homeless policies. In 2018 the ministry of VWS plans to develop and present a comprehensive multi-annual agenda for housing and integration of homeless people and mental health care patients.

REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Positive

- The National Association of Local Authorities has developed quality standards for homeless shelters and supported housing for people with mental health problems. The standards have been developed in cooperation with service users and service providers.
- A national covenant has been signed by all 43 local authorities to abolish the use of local connections. In 2016 and 2017 there were still strong signals that municipalities were still using the local connection criterion to exclude homeless people for support and services. Following the results of the 3rd mystery guest research project in 2017, the ministry of VWS and the national association of local authorities sent a letter to all 388 local authorities to explain the law that says the use of local connections is not allowed. In 2018 an independent advisory

³<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2017/11/14/beschermd-wonen-en-maatschappelijke-opvang-de-regios-aan-zet>

committee will mediate between cities who have a dispute on the local connection of a homeless person.

- The number of evictions has not increased further. The number of forced sales of owner occupied housing has decreased.
- More and more, people with experience of homelessness, mental health problems or addiction problems are working as a paid worker in shelter organizations.
- Housing First initiatives have spread to 17 cities nowadays and continue to grow.

Negative

- Young people under 27 are obliged to wait for 4 weeks before they can apply for subsistence benefit in order to show they have looked for work. This contributes to increased vulnerability to homelessness.
- There is no adequate income (social security or minimum wage) for people from 18-21. Parents are obliged to pay for costs of living for children up to 21 years old. If there are no parents, the municipality is not obliged to pay the costs of living.
- The Inspection of the Ministry of Social Affairs has done research in which they find that homeless people and multiproblem families are not receiving tailored assistance for income and work problems.
- If there are several people in a household who receive social security benefits, they will all get a cut on the benefits they are receiving. This policy has resulted in people not any longer being willing to share a house with a homeless relative or friend, because they would get less benefits.
- There is still not an adequate transfer for young people leaving care (18-18+), resulting in many young people becoming homeless.
- Local connection is used as a form of gate-keeping and limits access to services. Several aspects of Dutch legislation, policy and practice deny vulnerable groups their right to emergency shelter if they have not lived in the community for

two to three years. By excluding homeless people and recovering addicts and migrants who for a multitude of reasons cannot either prove or sustain residence over the required period, the Netherlands fails to comply with provisions of the Revised Social Charter of the Council of Europe, including the right to housing. In 2017 another mystery guest research project has been organized. The results were that still half of the homeless people without a local connection are refused shelter and assistance by local authorities.

- The housing market is extremely difficult to access, both qualifying for a mortgage or a commercially rented house requires a high income. Waiting lists for socially rented housing are up to twelve years.
- Over-indebtedness is an increasingly important barrier to housing. Due to the economic crisis one out of every 5 households is severely indebted

