

Homeless and houseless women in The Hague

An explorative research

FEANTSA conference 2025

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- 1. Our position as researchers**
- 2. Background**
- 3. Method**
- 4. Results**
- 5. Discussion**
- 6. Acknowledgements**
- 7. Questions**





The Hague

- Municipal Health Services (the Hague Region)
- Research department: Epidemiology and Policy Advice
- Research projects commissioned by the national or local government
- Work in close collaboration with local policy makers

- Unique position: findings can be incorporated into policy decisions on short term.
 - Advantages
 - Disadvantages



The Hague

The Netherlands: 18.083.010 inhabitants in 2025 (Source: CBS)

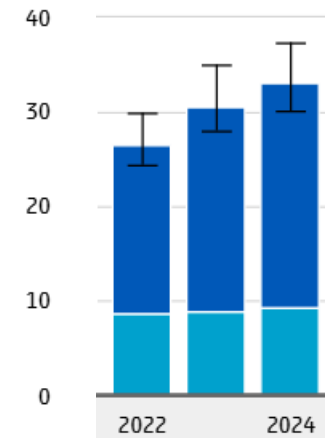
The Hague: 569.387 inhabitants in 2025 (Source: DHIC, GDH, DPZ)

**3th
biggest
city**



Homelessness in the Netherlands

- On January 1st 2024, there were **33.000 people experiencing homelessness** in the Netherlands
- At the beginning of 2022, this number was still almost 27.000



Source: Central Bureau for Statistics, 2025

Homelessness in The Hague

- In 2023, **2.02 per 1,000 inhabitants** in The Hague stayed in a shelter → placing the city among the **top five regions with the highest homelessness**.
- **'Unhoused' and 'homeless'**

- Research shows that **women make up a substantial share** of the homeless population, often hidden and vulnerable.
- The first **ETHOS-count (2023): 30% of homeless people are women**, most staying in (un)safe informal network. Women frequently choose these networks to **avoid shelters and the streets.**



- In The Hague/ policy makers → 20% of people in homeless shelters female. But not 20% of all homeless population is female. Where are they? What do we know about them?



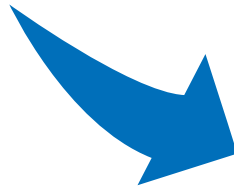
The Hague



Need for more insight into homeless women in the Hague region

Explorative, qualitative research conducted to gain insight into:

- 1) Where homeless women in The Hague reside
- 2) The choices they make and the considerations behind them
- 3) Specific needs



Not a definitive picture, but a first impression

Methods

Initial idea: mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches

Qualitative -> Interviews (n= 21)

- (Former) homeless women (n=4)
- Professionals working with the homeless women (n=17)
- Conducted in 2023/2024

Quantitative -> Registration data

- Number of homeless women
- Duration of stay in shelters



Recruitment

Professionals:

- Network
- Referrals

Women:

- Snowballing approach



Gaining insight into the scope of women residing outside the shelters → challenging.

Topics/ structure interviews

Professionals

- Easy to reach
- Topics: Availability and quality of homeless shelters, Motives for women for seeking help from shelters, Description target group, Survival strategies

Women

- Limited number of women: Hard-to-reach target group
- Open approach - women's voices were central
- Topics: Places they stayed before going to the shelter, Motives for seeking help, Homeless women compared to homeless men

Susan*

36 years old

Temporary
housing in shelter

Higher level of
'self-sufficiency'

Has been in close
proximity to
houselessness
since teenage
years

Maria

27 years old

Temporary housing in
(winter)shelter

History of drug abuse
Mental illness

End-of-stay at
shelter for sex
workers and human
trafficking victims

Care avoidant

Louisa

56 years old

Temporary
housing in
(winter)shelter

Homeless due to
leaving abusive
relationship

Care avoidant

Anna

25 years old

Ex-homeless
Own apartment

Homeless as a
student

Care avoidant

* Names are fictitious

1. Women hesitate to go to shelters

- More often 'homeless' than 'unhoused'
 - Risks on street (perceived as) much higher
 - Longer stays in marginal housing
- Experience more barriers to stay at shelters
 - Presence of men
 - Fear of being separated from children
 - Not suited for communal or 2-pers rooms

"I am afraid. You won't see me walking around at night. When it gets dark, I am inside. I do not like it. I am very afraid [...] You run into a lot of people. People who are not right in the head"

– Woman, 56 y/o

"It's difficult for women with traumas to share a room with others"

– Teamlead emergency shelter

Reasons for going to shelters

- Unsafe situation for their children
- Abuse getting out of hand

"We see that a woman asks for help when abuse is getting out of hand and they fear for their lives"

– Professional, Barka

Characteristics within this group

- Complex problems due to long stay in networks
- Mental health issues, often multiple and severe
- Medical problems
- Unwanted pregnancies
- History of abuse

2. Where do women stay outside the social shelters?

- Within safe network
 - Easier to find a place to stay compared to men
 - Special situation for students – stay with girlfriends, easy to miss, risk at dropout
- Within unsafe network
 - Many women 'invisible' for long periods of time
 - Return to abusive (ex) partner
 - Housing in exchange for sexual acts
- Sleeping rough



Complex dependency relationship (for safety)

"And they (women) are not alone outside, right. When they are outside there are always multiple men around to 'protect' them "

– Casemanager street team

3. Specific needs of women

- Homeliness
- Contraceptives
- Training/ help with practical issues
- Cultural sensitivity
- Low-threshold shelters

"The women have decorated the shelter with features like wood, [...], and cushions. It feels more homely, compared to the men's shelter."

– Straat Consulaat

4. Quantitative -> Not included in report

- No data available on the size of group
- Incomplete data on the number of postal addresses requested by women

"For women in shelters there should be more training available that are easily accessible. Like digital skills, or practical issues such as digital ID's"

– Teamlead SHOP

Limitations

- Limited interviews with (former) homeless women
- Limited view on women in informal housing (campsites, sheds, garage boxes etc.)
- Time constraints

Results

- No groundbreaking results, but confirmed general idea
- Second and third ETHOS-count
- Need for further research

Question for the audience:

How did you convey women to participate in your research? Tips?

Thank you to:

All the women and professionals that took the time to speak with us, without them this research could not have taken place.

The municipality of the Hague, with in particular Ariedick Schoorl



The Hague



HWW zorg

Haagse Wijk- en Woonzorg



**Haags straatteam,
Daklozenloket**

KesslerPerspektief



**Rode
Kruis**



**STRAAT
CONSULAAT**



Praktijkonderzoeker

limor
Opvangen Aanpakken Loslaten



Thank you for your attention

Questions?



Organisations consulted:

1. Zij aan Zij, Leger des Heils
2. Stichting Limor (n= 2)
3. De Kessler Stichting: Noodopvang
Delagoa en Schenkweg
4. HWW-zorg
5. Haags straatteam, Daklozenloket (n= 2)
6. STEK/Wereldhuis
7. Stichting Barka (n= 2)
8. SHOP Den Haag
9. Straat Consulaat (n= 2)
10. Praktijkonderzoeker
11. Het Rode Kruis
12. VluchtelingenWerk (n= 2)

