
What Happens to Households that are Evicted from their Homes in France? Long Term Implications

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Introduction

Evictions in France are regulated by a legal procedure that aims to grant additional time to the household to find other housing. In spite of the legal evolutions in the field of eviction prevention, and the multiplication of preventive measures, the number of households in eviction procedures and actually evicted is increasing year after year.

The precariousness of household resources, with a structural rise in unemployment, involuntary part-time work, and precarious contracts such as fixed-term or interim contracts, makes millions of people vulnerable to the rising cost of housing. Nearly nine million people now live below the poverty line in France. Unpaid rent (95% of them) is the main cause of eviction procedures.

The record of 16 700 evictions with the assistance of police officers was reached in 2019. However, there are probably two to three times more households that are affected when considering the tenants who leave the housing of their own accord under the threat of eviction proceedings. Despite the health and social crises and the extension of the winter truce, the number of evictions in the last two years has exceeded 20 000 households.

France has been condemned on several occasions by the European Committee of Social Rights because evictions are not accompanied by rehousing solutions, which violates article 31-2 of the European Social Charter. The lack of housing, especially social housing, of adapted shelters, the increasing share of rent, and expenses in household budgets contribute to this evolution.

Many studies have analysed the circumstances and causes of rental evictions¹, but no study in France has looked at what happens to people who have been evicted from their homes a few years later. The Fondation Abbé Pierre, in partnership with the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, conducted this retrospective study on the consequences of rental evictions to find out whether eviction leads to poor housing and if so, to what extent. In other words, does rental eviction have lasting consequences on people's lives?

Thanks to the network of partners² and its platform "Allo Prévention des expulsions"³, 66 households that were evicted in the last three years were contacted and participated in interviews (for 68% of them, the eviction was due to unpaid rent linked to a drop in income). The difficulty of tracking down these households is important to note, because for these households, their access to support ended with their evictions. This in turn could have caused a legitimate sense of bitterness toward the organisations and institutions that failed to prevent the eviction. While the French Ministry of the Interior expected 12 000 rental evictions in 2021, this sample represents a very small proportion of evicted households, but gives an insight into situations that were previously invisible.

The questionnaire for these interviews was drafted by students in sociology under the supervision of their professor and a lawyer from the Fondation Abbé Pierre and a professional involved in the social and legal support of these households. The content of the questionnaire addresses several themes. First of all, it is a question of reconstructing the residential history of these households since the eviction, and then asking about the consequences of the eviction on their social and professional relationships, on their health, on their children's schooling, on their relationships with the institutions, and on the social and legal support they received.

The interviews were conducted in pairs with households living in 46 cities in metropolitan France. Of the interviews, 36% were conducted face-to-face (in Marseille, Romilly-sur-Seine, Toulouse, Perpignan, Montpellier, Nice, Cagnes-sur-Mer, Grenoble, Lyon, Lille, Vias, and Tourcoing), the rest were conducted by telephone.

¹ Fondation Abbé Pierre, *Les conséquences psychologiques et sociales de la procédure d'expulsion*, June 2004; ANIL, *Comment en arrive-t-on à l'expulsion? 100 ménages expulsés de leur logement rencontrés par les ADIL*, February 2012; Tassin, F. (2014) «Mieux connaître le processus d'expulsion locative», *Lettre de l'ONPES n°2*; François, C. (2017) «Déloger le peuple. L'État et l'administration des expulsions locatives», sociology thesis at the University of Paris 8, under the supervision of Sylvie Tissot.

² Gathered within the framework of a network led by the Fondation Abbé Pierre, these associations support the most precarious households, particularly in terms of preventing evictions, fighting substandard housing, and access to the DALO.

³ This eviction prevention hotline informs households about their rights, about the procedure underway, advises them, and guides them through the procedures.

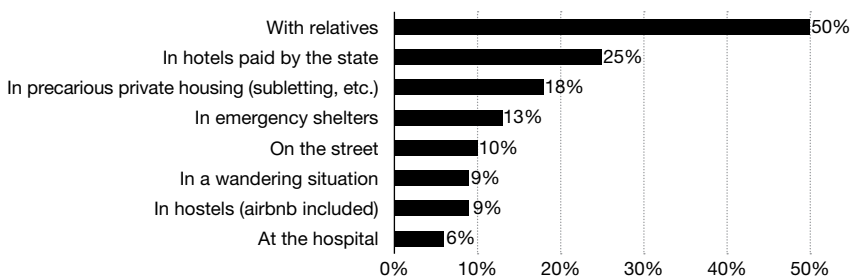
The high proportion of associations located in Ile-de-France region in the sample led to an over-representation of households from this region: 45% of the people surveyed currently live in this region and 50% were living there at the time of the eviction. Seven additional interviews were conducted with associations in the areas concerned in order to get a better understanding of the local context.

The selection method of this sample introduces certain biases. Indeed, setting up the sample through associations led to an over-representation of people who have received support or at least socio-legal advice. It is therefore not representative of the people who are the furthest from associations. Finally, our language skills and those of the associations have limited our interviews to French-speaking people. This selection bias invites us to analyse with caution the effect of the language barrier as an obstacle to rehousing.

Results of the study

First of all, this study shows that eviction is not a trivial event in people's lives. It has dramatic consequences for some households: we can see that 10% of people who have been evicted have spent time sleeping on the street. Also, 50% of households were taken in by relatives, which means that the mobilisation of the family, friend, or community network is decisive when evicted. One third of the households had used social hotels paid by the State, with all the very negative consequences that we know: hotels are very far from urban centres, they are unsuitable for family life, there is no social support, the conditions are often poor and unhealthy with cockroaches and bedbugs, they are often overcrowded, and there are no proper cooking facilities; in short these are not places to live but simply places to sleep.

Share of people having lived at least once....



We also note that eviction severely disrupts the lives of households in terms of health, employment, self-esteem, and trust in the institutions that failed to prevent the eviction and failed to rehouse them quickly. These are households that were

already vulnerable – both in terms of income and social issues – leading up to the eviction; the eviction makes them even more fragile for longer. Eviction produces a social rupture and a strong feeling of incomprehension and humiliation for the people affected.

In 29% of the cases, the eviction leads to an interruption of employment. The loss of employment is linked to a change of neighbourhood or town, or sometimes to the loss of housing, which leads to professional destabilisation. Continuing or finding a job when you do not have stable and secure housing is very complicated.

In addition, 71% of households report that eviction has had an impact on their health, particularly on mental health. The procedure itself causes a lot of stress: it often lasts a year to a year and a half, during which households live in anxious expectation because they do not know when it will happen. The post-eviction period is also a very anxious time because people have to organise and search for new housing and deal with uncertainties; this stress can lead to the break-up of some families.

Also, 43% of households with children report that the eviction impacts their children's schooling: problems with attendance, concentration, dropping out of school, etc. Not knowing where they will sleep or living with three to five people in a hotel room are not good conditions to continue education.

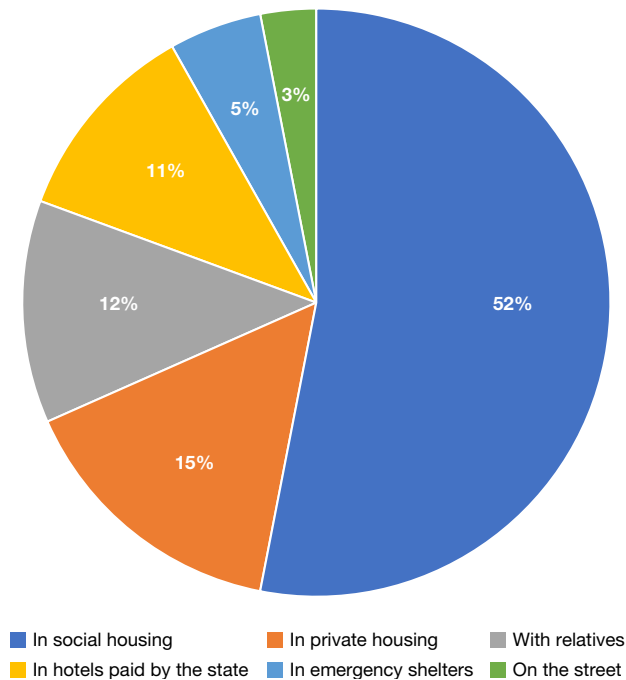
Of this sample, two-thirds of the households ended up being rehoused three years later by their own means or through social housing. On average, for those who were lucky enough to be rehoused, it took 11 months to secure a new home. During these 11 months of wandering, households alternated between several accommodation solutions depending on their resources (with friends, in hotels, in hostels, in sublets, in mobile homes, with sleepers, etc.). Although some people find housing more quickly, wandering can be a source of psychological, family, professional, and social setbacks and it becomes difficult to get back on track. Three years later, one third of households have still not found housing.

The study also shows that eviction is a tragedy that follows households for quite a long time because after an eviction, households are still in debt and must repay their rental arrears. This debt must be paid off if the household wants to have a chance to find a social or private landlord. Debt reduction is all the more difficult as eviction often leads to breakdowns in managing personal/family affairs: loss of address, housing benefit, administrative documents, etc. Households describe how the burden of eviction can be very heavy. Households describe how complicated the maze of procedures is when you no longer have a stable home. Social support is often split between several social workers and several administrations. The feeling of being 'blacklisted' because of a payment (or debt) incident is very strong for some households who declare that they "cannot get back on track".

Eviction therefore leads to a social rupture that generates a very strong feeling of incomprehension and humiliation for some people.

When rehousing does occur, it is mainly in social housing (52% are currently housed in social housing). It is in this type of housing that households manage to restore their stability and to find better housing conditions for the most part.

Current housing type of surveyed households



Conclusion

There is no standard pathway for evicted households, but it is clear that eviction makes residential pathways more fragile over time. It has serious consequences for social relations, financial resources, health, and education. Conversely, access to social housing stabilises the residential pathway and is the most common rehousing solution, however this solution is often far too late.

These results clearly demonstrate the importance of preventing eviction because eviction is a moment when people become disengaged and excluded from society, and results in humiliation for people who have simply encountered an obstacle in their lives (68% of the households surveyed were evicted following unpaid rent

linked to a drop in income caused by a loss of employment, a health problem, a separation, etc.). When eviction cannot be avoided, it is essential to support people at all levels so that they can be rehoused as quickly as possible, and the period of homelessness can be kept to a minimum.