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National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion

Netherlands

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**ESPN Thematic Report on
National strategies to fight
homelessness and housing
exclusion**

The Netherlands

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Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| SUMMARY | 4 |
| 1 THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION..... | 5 |
| 1.1 Definition of homelessness..... | 5 |
| 1.2 Measurement and estimation | 5 |
| 1.3 Trends in HHE and characteristics of the homeless | 5 |
| 1.4 Causes of homelessness..... | 7 |
| 1.5 Inflow and outflow of people in protected housing and shelters | 8 |
| 2 RELEVANT STRATEGIES AND POLICIES TACKLING HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION | 8 |
| 2.1 National strategies on homelessness and housing exclusion..... | 8 |
| 2.1.1 National housing agenda 2018-2021 (announced May 2018)..... | 9 |
| 2.1.2 Multi-annual strategy for protected housing and shelter (announced May 2018)..... | 9 |
| 2.1.3 Homeless youth action plan 2019-2021 (announced March 2019) | 10 |
| 2.1.4 'Home again' action programme (started April 2017, continued in 2019)..... | 11 |
| 2.1.5 Housing First Netherlands stimulation programme (started in 2016)..... | 12 |
| 2.2 Monitoring..... | 12 |
| 2.3 Funding | 13 |
| 2.3.1 Social housing | 13 |
| 2.3.2 Municipal provision of shelter and protected housing | 13 |
| 2.3.3 European funding | 15 |
| 3 ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT PATTERNS OF SERVICE PROVISION AND CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING THE NETHERLANDS' RESPONSES TO HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION | 15 |
| 3.1 Types of support based on Social Support Act..... | 15 |
| 3.2 Effectiveness of access to permanent accommodation..... | 17 |
| 3.3 Effectiveness of HHE prevention | 17 |
| 3.4 Housing First initiatives | 18 |
| 3.5 Main weaknesses/gaps..... | 20 |
| 3.6 Priorities for improvement in the Netherlands | 20 |
| REFERENCES | 22 |
| ANNEX | 24 |
| Table A1: ETHOS Light categories defined as homeless in the Netherlands | 24 |
| Table A2: Latest available data on the number of homeless people in the Netherlands | 25 |
| Table A3: Characteristics of registered homeless people in the Netherlands between 2009 and 2016 | 26 |

Summary

In 2016, Statistics Netherlands (CBS) estimated that there were 30,500 homeless people in the country. This included primarily ETHOS¹ Light types 1 and 2 (and a small part of type 6) (see Table A1 in the Annex). This represented a substantial increase compared with the 2009 estimate (17,800). The homeless were predominantly male, and often had a non-western foreign background, were generally poorly educated and were twice as likely to have been divorced as the general population.

Most homeless people came from a situation of benefit dependency or a situation where they had no personal income. Hence, job loss was not a major cause of homelessness. Nearly half of the people becoming homeless had been treated for mental health issues prior to becoming homeless, which makes it an important risk factor. Another recent problem that has been said to cause homelessness is the introduction of the 'cost-sharer's norm' in 2015, which means that social assistance recipients living together receive lower benefits. This may have caused parents to ask their adult children to leave the family home.

There are five main strategies aimed at tackling homelessness and housing exclusion (HHE).

1. The *national housing agenda* focuses on alleviating the current shortage of housing.
2. The *multi-annual strategy for protected housing and shelter* aims to promote inclusive housing and adequate support for people who need it.
3. The *homeless youth action plan* is a specific programme that is part of the multi-annual strategy, aimed specifically at young people.
4. The '*Home again*' *action programme* is designed to improve cooperation and coordination between stakeholders at the regional and local levels, by initiating pilots.
5. The *Housing First Netherlands stimulation programme* promotes the use of Housing First (HF) models by spreading good practice and studying their effectiveness.

Social housing is provided by housing associations. Currently, there is a serious shortage of (social) housing in the Netherlands, which can lead to waiting lists for people in need of housing. The number of evictions fell significantly between 2013 and 2017, partly as a result of conscious efforts by housing associations.

Municipalities can offer shelter, assisted housing and protected housing as services to help fight homelessness. They contract with non-government organisations (NGOs) and care organisations to provide these services. Users of shelters are generally mildly positive about the quality of these facilities. The funding of the Social Support Act (Wmo), which includes support to the homeless, will change in 2021; it will give municipalities more control over the budgets. This may lead to more use of assisted housing and HF models rather than protected housing models. No EU funding is used.

HF initiatives are being implemented in several regions in the Netherlands. This requires intensive cooperation between HF organisations, municipalities, housing associations, care professionals and the police and justice departments. A study has found that these initiatives are successful in the Netherlands. Overall, both participants and professionals are satisfied.

The main weaknesses in the Dutch system are: (1) the shortage of housing; (2) the lack of insight into the policy choices that municipalities make; and (3) the mismatch between the expertise of generalist social workers and the specific needs of the homeless. The main priorities for improvement are: (1) to increase the adoption of HF models; (2) to

¹ European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion.

increase cooperation between stakeholders at the regional/local level; and (3) to complete the transformation of the system from protected housing to assisted housing models.

1 The nature and extent of homelessness and housing exclusion

1.1 Definition of homelessness

The most recent and detailed report on homelessness in the Netherlands is a 2018 report on homelessness by CBS, the leading statistical agency in the Netherlands (CBS, 2018a). Several Dutch strategies aimed at addressing HHE refer to this report (see Section 2). We will therefore use the definition and data from this report as the main source in this Thematic Report. The CBS definition covers: (1) people living rough (on the streets or in other public spaces); (2) people who use short-term shelters; and (3) people who are non-permanently residing with family or friends and do not know where they will stay the next night. This definition does not include the so-called residential homeless, who are registered in institutions for shelter and care. Hence, the CBS definition primarily includes categories 1 and 2 of the ETHOS Light typology, and part of type 6 (see Table A1 in the Annex).

1.2 Measurement and estimation

The CBS study (2018a) is based on three data sources, comprising:

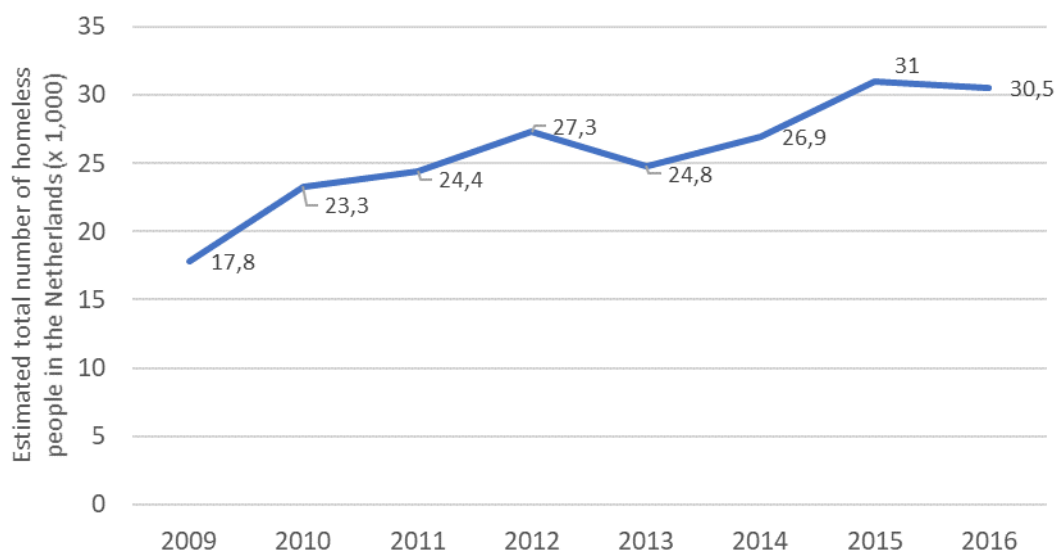
1. people who reside in day and night shelters
2. people who receive social assistance benefits but have no permanent residence
3. homeless people in the national Alcohol and Drugs Information System (LADIS).

These sources partly overlap; some individuals are registered under more than one of them. However, the CBS states that they do not cover all homeless people in the Netherlands. Based on the amount of overlap between them, the CBS estimates the national number of homeless people. This national estimate is around four times as high as the number of registered homeless people.

1.3 Trends in HHE and characteristics of the homeless

As described in the recent CBS study (2018a), the estimated number of homeless people was 30,500 in 2016 (see Figure 1). In 2009, it was substantially lower (17,800). The most notable increase was between 2013 (24,800) and 2015 (31,000). The explanation for this is not given in the CBS report, but it could be the consequence of increasing poverty rates during the final years of the crisis (2011-2014) (CBS, 2018b).

Figure 1: Estimated number of homeless people in the Netherlands, 2009-2016 (thousands)



Source: CBS (2018a).

Other sources were consulted to gain additional insights into the prevalence of other types of housing exclusion not included in the CBS definition (see Table A2 in the Annex). A news report indicates that there are 35,000 vacation homes that are being rented out as permanent housing due to housing shortages. In total, there are 70,000 people living in shelters in the Netherlands, although not all of them are necessarily homeless (for instance, women fleeing domestic violence can also reside in shelters).

The following can be said about the characteristics of the homeless (based on the CBS definition and data for the year 2016) (see Table A3 in the Annex).

- The majority of the homeless were **men** (84%). This had been relatively stable over the years.
- **People with a non-western foreign background** were heavily overrepresented among the homeless (48%) in 2016 compared with the general population (9%). This had also been the case in earlier years, but had become more pronounced.
- People with **low levels of education** were strongly overrepresented among the homeless (65%) relative to the national percentage (28%). People with middle levels of education were slightly underrepresented (31%) relative to the national percentage (41%); and people with high education levels were strongly underrepresented (4%) relative to the national percentage (31%). Since 2009, the share of homeless people with middle levels of education had increased.
- The **age** distribution was roughly similar to the general age distribution in the Netherlands, although people below 50 were slightly more often homeless and people over 50 were slightly less often homeless. Between 2009 and 2016, the proportion of young people (below 30) among the homeless increased from 17% to 24%.
- Around 20% of the homeless were **divorced**, which was double the national average. The other 80% were almost exclusively **unmarried**.
- An absolute majority (65%) of the homeless lived in the **western part** of the Netherlands, which is relatively densely populated and strongly urbanised. Nearly half (45%) of the homeless lived in the **largest four cities** (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The

Hague and Utrecht), which are all located in the west. Since 2009, the problem of homelessness had become more concentrated in these largest cities.

- A majority (83%) of the homeless received some **social assistance** benefits in 2016, which was up from 72% in 2009. The share of the homeless who had income from work fell from 10% in 2009 to 5% in 2016. Further analysis shows that the increased dependency on social assistance benefits was most pronounced among people with middle and higher levels of education.
- CBS data show that around half of the homeless had some form of **debt**, most often below €1,000. These data do not include information on missed payments, rent arrears or credit card debt.
- Of all registered homeless people in 2016, 58% were **newly registered** in that year, versus 22% who were registered for the second consecutive year, and 20% who had already been homeless for two or more years.
- The annual **mortality** rate among the homeless was 0.7-1% between 2009 and 2016, which was high compared with the national average of 0.2%.

1.4 Causes of homelessness

The CBS study (2018a) looked at the situation of the group of people who had recently become homeless, prior to their becoming homeless. This sheds some light on possible causes for becoming homeless. The data show that most homeless people came from a situation of benefit dependency or a situation where they had no personal income. Among the people who became homeless in 2016, many had been receiving social assistance (22%) or another type of benefit (7%) or had had no income at all (18%) in the five years prior to becoming homeless. Only around 25% of them had been working five years before entering into homelessness. Roughly the same can be said when looking at their situation 10 years prior to becoming homeless. Unsurprisingly, the homeless had also generally had low incomes previously, on average belonging to the ninth income percentile on becoming homeless and to the 24th income percentile five years prior to becoming homeless.

Interestingly, the people who became homeless between 2012 and 2014 had slightly more often come from having a job five years prior to become homeless, and slightly less often from benefit dependency. This indicates that, as a result of the economic crisis, more people who used to have jobs ended up being homeless than before and after the crisis. However, it cannot be argued that job loss was the main cause for this; most people who become homeless come from a situation of benefit dependency.

In the literature, several types of life events are linked with an increased risk of becoming homeless. The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) has studied whether these links can also be identified in the Dutch data on homelessness.

- Firstly, we see that nearly half of the homeless were treated for **mental health issues** in the three years prior to becoming homeless. This percentage fell between 2012 (53%) and 2016 (39%), but was still very high.
- As described before, only 24% of the people becoming homeless in 2016 had had a job five years before becoming homeless. Hence, job loss is not a major cause for homelessness in the Netherlands.
- Another life event possibly related to homelessness is **divorce**. The CBS data show that among people becoming homeless in 2016, 20% were divorced, of whom only 4 percentage points had got their divorce within five years prior to becoming homeless. This does not indicate that divorce is a massive cause of homelessness.

It has been argued that the sizeable increase in homelessness in 2015 can be attributed to a national measure implemented in July 2015 called the 'cost-sharers norm'

(*kostendelersnorm*) (Bommeljé, 2015). This measure is based on the principle that people who cohabit with others in a single household have lower costs of living. Hence, the cost-sharers norm stipulates that people who live in the same household and who receive social assistance benefits, receive lower benefits. This especially affects people receiving social assistance benefits with adult children living at home. Reportedly, this led parents of these households to ask their children to leave the family home, because they could not otherwise make ends meet, which in turn has led to a higher inflow of young people at homeless shelters (Bommeljé, 2015). In some cases, they tried to register at a homeless shelter or institution to avoid a cut in their benefits while continuing to live with their parents or friends. This, however, posed a risk, because they could be caught upon inspection and be charged with fraud. As a result, it was increasingly difficult for these young people to find a place to stay (Bommeljé, 2015).

1.5 Inflow and outflow of people in protected housing and shelters

A study of the inflow and outflow of people to and from protected housing and shelters has shown that the inflow into shelters came mostly from people living rough. They often struggled with multiple problems, such as psychiatric, drug-related and behavioural problems (Batterink et al., 2018; p. 20). Because data on this are not centrally collected, data were collected at the regional level via case studies. A different study based on surveys at 18 shelters found that users were on average 41.6 years old, predominantly male (76%) and had different levels of education (30% low, 40% middle and 30% high) (Planije & Tuynman, 2016). Also, about 1 in 3 had not been born in the Netherlands. Around a third of users stayed in the shelter for 4 months or less, another third stayed 4-12 months and the last third stayed for over a year.

Based on one of the case studies in the aforementioned report, we can give a rough estimate of where people leaving the shelters continued to live. Generally speaking, most people went on to live independently, usually with some type of ambulatory support (around 60%) and sometimes without any additional support (20%). A relatively small portion of the people leaving shelters went on to live in some type of protected housing (around 10%). In some regions, municipalities report long waiting lists for protected housing, effectively turning shelters into places where people wait for protected housing (Batterink et al., 2018; p. 20).

2 Relevant strategies and policies tackling homelessness and housing exclusion

2.1 National strategies on homelessness and housing exclusion

In the Netherlands, there are five main strategies that can be described as addressing HHE:

1. national housing agenda 2018-2021 (announced May 2018)
2. multi-annual strategy for protected housing² and shelter (announced May 2018)
3. homeless youth action plan 2019-2021 (announced March 2019)
4. 'Home again' action programme (started April 2017, continued in 2019)
5. Housing First Netherlands stimulation programme (started in 2016).

² Assisted housing is provided by institutions for people with psychiatric or psycho-social problems who need help in their daily activities and cannot live independently (temporarily). People residing in assisted housing have their own room, share a common living room and kitchen with other residents and receive counselling from a social-medical worker for a number of hours per week.

2.1.1 National housing agenda 2018-2021 (announced May 2018)

This is a broad national agenda aimed at reducing the shortage of housing in the Netherlands and improving the quality of housing and neighbourhoods (Ministerie van BZK, 2019). A key objective is to have 75,000 houses constructed every year until 2025. However, the responsibility for, and decision-making on, construction of housing lies primarily in the hands of municipalities and housing associations³ at the regional/local level. As a result, the national housing agenda does not contain very concrete measures to be taken at the national level, but instead describes many possibilities that are being explored and discussed with municipalities and housing associations.

The agenda consists of three parts.

1. **Building more housing.** This includes many measures to promote the construction of new housing, such as simplifying regulations, training more workers for the construction sector, as well as planning and setting up more construction projects at the regional/local level.
2. **Affordability of housing.** Measures are being explored to promote the accessibility of social housing. Also, housing is made more affordable by making rent allowances more broadly available to people. Finally, several measures are being explored to improve the possibilities for young people to purchase housing, for instance by being more flexible with regard to mortgages.
3. **Improve utilisation of current housing supply.** In order to achieve this, measures are firstly taken to make the housing market more dynamic. If people move more often, it becomes easier for young people to find housing. Also, efforts are focused on encouraging people in social housing to move into middle-segment rented properties, in order to make more social housing available. Finally, an important section is devoted to providing adequate housing for vulnerable groups. The agenda states that measures need to be worked out at the local level to enable people currently living in shelters and protected housing to move into independent housing to live on their own. The aims for these measures are described in the 'multi-annual strategy for protected housing and shelter' (see below).

The Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations has stated that she will monitor and discuss the action taken as part of the national housing agenda at least twice per year with the stakeholders involved.⁴

2.1.2 Multi-annual strategy for protected housing and shelter (announced May 2018)

Municipalities in the Netherlands are responsible for providing shelter and assistance to the homeless within the framework of the Wmo. There are various forms of shelter and assistance available for homeless people, such as long-term shelters, night shelters and various forms of protected housing. Municipalities are free to determine what services they provide exactly, and how they integrate this with their provision in other policy domains (such as debt assistance, social assistance and long-term care). At the national level, an integrated multi-annual strategy was written collectively by all the stakeholders involved.⁵ This strategy is based on a recommendation by the 'Future of protected living' commission, which was created in 2015 (Advies Commissie Toekomst beschermd wonen,

³ Most social housing in the Netherlands is owned by housing associations. For more details on this, please refer to Section 3.

⁴ Letter to parliament from Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations 'National housing agenda 2018-2021', dated 23 May 2018.

⁵ This includes client representatives, municipalities, healthcare organisations, housing corporations, and the Ministries of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Justice and Security, Social Affairs and Employment, and Public Health, Welfare and Sport.

2015). The strategy urges municipalities and other stakeholders to strive towards social inclusion for everyone. This means that people should be housed in 'regular' housing and neighbourhoods as much as possible, and that support should be aimed at recovery and self-reliance. It explicitly states that support should move from the 'staircase' model to an HF model with flexible support. Because the users of shelters and protected housing are often vulnerable people with multiple problems such as addiction, psychiatric problems, debts or mental disabilities, the strategy also states that municipalities need to work together with NGOs and care organisations to provide adequate support.

The multi-annual strategy contains goals and strategies for six different topics, of which two are relevant here.

- **Housing:** stakeholders should strive towards having enough housing available and towards providing adequate care and support. Municipalities, NGOs, care organisations and housing associations should work together to achieve this. The possibilities for early signalling of problems should be explored further, in the light of the legal issue of privacy. Innovative forms of housing provision with ambulant support need to be explored. Homelessness and eviction should be prevented as far as possible.
- **Accessibility:** stakeholders should strive towards providing adequate support and care when people need it. Their broad situation should be considered. There should be sufficient and adequate shelter and protected housing to meet the demand, and they should be accessible for people in need. Waiting lists are undesirable.

2.1.3 Homeless youth action plan 2019-2021 (announced March 2019)

A specific action programme originated from the aforementioned multi-annual strategy, aimed at combating homelessness among young people (aged 18-27) (Ministerie van VWS, 2019). This action programme consists of five priorities.

- **Prevention, long-term support and coordination:** stakeholders should focus on identifying at an early stage those young people who are at risk of becoming homeless. This can be done by actively looking for young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and also do not receive any type of benefit. Also, youth care provisions (including residential youth care) stop when a person turns 18, which can increase the risk of homelessness (Niessen & Van der Vegt, 2018). This transition to adulthood needs to be smoother.
- **Financial security:** financial problems need to be identified at an early stage by municipalities, for instance when people do not pay their rent or utility bills. New legislation is being drafted to enable municipalities and other organisations to exchange information on this.
- **Personal development and education:** homeless young people should be encouraged to participate in education and training.
- **Shelter and housing:** homeless young people should have their own type of shelter, separately from other homeless adults. Also, efforts should be made to increase the supply of available social housing (reference is made to the national housing agenda). Young people usually do not need an entire house; often a room in a shared house is sufficient. This requires that municipalities are creative in developing new housing concepts, for instance using vacated office buildings.
- **Rules that help:** rules and legislation may hinder the work of professionals trying to help homeless young people. Examples are the cost-sharer's norm, which offers a disincentive for benefit recipients to offer young people a (temporary) place to stay. Also, the system of allowances and benefits contains several problems. This action programme will share good practice in how to cope with problematic rules and where necessary will review these rules to see if they can be changed.

The action programme will begin to be implemented in the course of 2019, for which an implementation plan was due to be written before the summer. Subsequent progress in achieving the goals will be monitored by the Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS), partly based on the reporting by CBS. The Minister will discuss progress with the local municipal chairperson of the social policy executive if necessary.

2.1.4 'Home again' action programme (started April 2017, continued in 2019)

In April 2017, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities together with several organisations⁶ that are responsible for social housing, protected housing, mental health programmes and social work, initiated the 'Home again' action programme (VNG, FO, Leger des Heils & Aedes, 2017a). The aim of the programme is to facilitate and speed up the process of helping people to move from temporary homeless shelters and protected housing institutions into their own housing and into living independently. This improves the situation of these people, and also frees up space in shelters and protected housing institutions, which is much needed to help people currently on waiting lists. To achieve this aim, the programme has set up a series of six regional pilots, in which municipalities, housing associations and care institutions make local arrangements and set targets. The programme tries to overcome the common hurdles that can make it difficult to achieve the aforementioned aims, such as a shortage of available social housing, by promoting more cooperation, knowledge-sharing and dissemination of good practice between municipalities and the various organisations that are involved, both at the local and the national level. Where problems at the local level are caused by national policies or legislation, the programme tries to lobby at the national level to resolve these problems. There were no quantitative goals set for the programme.

The action programme states that the various actors involved should undertake the following.

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Care and shelter organisations | <p>Cooperate at the regional level.</p> <p>Prepare clients well for moving into their own housing, and provide a good transition from the previous case manager to the municipal case manager.</p> <p>Develop further a differentiated offer of types of protected housing.</p> <p>Describe clearly what is needed to make it possible for these vulnerable groups to live independently.</p> |
| Housing associations | <p>Acknowledge the urgency of the task at hand.</p> <p>Look for creative ways of providing more social housing for this group.</p> <p>Cooperate with municipalities to develop a preventive approach towards debts and eviction.</p> <p>Eliminate administrative requirements for access to social housing (e.g. debts, income levels, being linked to the region).</p> |
| Municipalities | <p>Take the lead in urging the other organisations to cooperate at the regional level.</p> <p>Urge other municipalities in the region to take action.</p> <p>Make sufficient financial means available to provide (ambulant) counselling for people who move into independent housing, for a sufficient amount of time (more than six months).</p> <p>Involve partners in increasing or reducing counselling when necessary.</p> |

⁶ The 'Home again' action programme was initiated by the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (Vereniging Nederlandse Gemeenten, VNG), the Association for Housing Associations (Aedes), the Federation for Shelters (Federatie Opvang, FO), the Alliance of Assisted Housing (RIBW Alliantie), the Dutch Association of Mental Health and Addiction Care (GGZ Nederland) and the Salvation Army (Leger des Heils, LdH).

There has been neither a formal evaluation study done on the action programme, nor any publicly available quantitative monitoring of the results. Instead, a document was published in which the six pilots were briefly described (Aedes, FO, GGZ Nederland, Leger des Heils, RIBW Alliantie & VNG, 2018). Three examples are described below.

- Province of Groningen: annually, 600 houses are made available to homeless clients. Care organisations prepare the homeless to live independently, and municipalities work on helping them with other problems such as unemployment and problematic debt.
- Region of North Limburg: a prognosis is made each year of the number of people ready to leave protected housing and temporary homeless shelters. Housing associations reserve part of the available housing for this group, and care organisations provide them with the necessary support with their finances and help them settle in the neighbourhood.
- Region of Eindhoven: housing associations provide independent housing for homeless people. Initially, the house is let to care organisations, and if the person successfully stays in the house the lease is transferred to the individual after one year. This has a 97% success rate.

In the other three pilots, the results were less concrete; they primarily reported increased cooperation between the involved stakeholders.

In December 2018, the VNG announced that the programme would be continued in 2019, and that 10 additional pilots would be initiated.⁷

2.1.5 Housing First Netherlands stimulation programme (started in 2016)

In 2016, the VWS commissioned Radboud University of Nijmegen to support and study the development of HF initiatives in the Netherlands. This is not so much a national strategy, but rather a stimulation programme meant to promote the use of HF initiatives in the Netherlands and to advance knowledge on the effectiveness of these initiatives in the country. The programme is aimed primarily at homeless people with psychiatric and/or addiction issues. The university created the website www.housingfirstnederland.nl, where municipalities, care organisations and housing associations can find information on the concept of HF and examples of HF initiatives in the Netherlands. It also carried out a study of the effectiveness of these HF initiatives and published several papers about this on its website. However, it seems that the website is no longer being updated with new material.

2.2 Monitoring

Overall, the aforementioned strategies do not have a strong monitoring mechanism in place. The national housing agenda, the multi-annual strategy for shelter and protected housing, and finally the homeless youth action plan, are all monitored by the ministry in charge, but no transparent way of monitoring based on pre-defined indicators is evident. This is of course a hard thing to do, because municipalities are in charge of providing shelters along with protected and assisted housing, and they organise this in very different ways with different stakeholders. Hence, there is no central data collection system in place for this. The most carefully monitored programme is the Housing First Netherlands programme. This is in line with the goal of the programme, which is to share knowledge on HF initiatives and thus promote their use.

⁷ This was announced in the following news update: <https://vng.nl/onderwerpenindex/maatschappelijke-ondersteuning/beschermde-wonen-maatschappelijke-opvang-ggz/nieuws/actieprogramma-weer-thuis-presenteert-de-resultaten>.

The primary statistical basis for recent government action on HHE is the 2018 report on homelessness from CBS (CBS, 2018a). As mentioned above, this is the most recent and most detailed report on homelessness in the Netherlands. To our knowledge, this study is not carried out periodically. Therefore, it does not serve as a true monitoring instrument.

EU indicators are not used to monitor HHE in the Netherlands.

2.3 Funding

2.3.1 Social housing

Most social housing in the Netherlands is owned by housing associations. These have to act on a commercial basis but are required to use their profits to meet general housing needs, in other words to house anyone who is unable to find suitable housing themselves. The vast majority of these homes have a regulated rent and fall under the rental policy of the minister. The liberalisation limit (regulation threshold) for rented housing is stable at a rent of €720.43 (2019) per month. This increases the space for the free rented sector, and simultaneously improves the affordability of the social rental market. But associations also have homes owned under a liberalised rental contract and a rental price above the liberalisation limit.

In recent years, several measures have been taken that have had a negative impact on the financial ability of housing associations to invest in new housing.

1. Since July 2016, average rent increases by housing associations have been limited to calendar year inflation plus 1 percentage point. This led to the lowest average rent increase for existing tenants in years in 2017, at 1.3%. This was partly due to the low level of inflation.
2. Since 2016, housing associations have to offer at least 95% of their cheap dwellings to people who are looking for a house and who are entitled to rent allowance (which is means-tested). With this measure, the government aims to reduce spending on rent allowances by preventing people being offered housing that is too expensive for their income situation. However, it also reduces revenues for the housing associations.
3. In 2013, a landlord levy was introduced (*verhuurdersheffing*). Landlords who own more than 50 rental properties pay an annual levy on the value of the rented housing (in 2018 this was 0.591% of the total value). The purpose of this levy is to contribute to reducing the national debt.

In a recent survey by the national Association for Housing Associations (Aedes), housing associations claim that the third measure above reduces their capacity to invest in new houses (Aedes, 2019). However, media reports have argued that the housing associations have enough financial means to build more new social housing.⁸

2.3.2 Municipal provision of shelter and protected housing

Municipalities are in charge of providing shelter and protected housing from their Wmo budget, which they receive from the government. These budgets are currently distributed among 43 'centre municipalities' based on historic data on where organisations providing shelter and protected housing (supply) are located. However, these organisations are not present in all municipalities but geographically clustered in certain parts of the Netherlands. This is in contradiction with the Wmo, which gives all municipalities the responsibility to provide the required services close to citizens; and also not in line with

⁸ See article published by Follow the Money (a group of journalists) in 2016: '*Corporaties zijn klap verhuurdersheffing allang teboven*' [*Housing associations have long recovered from landlord levy*]: <https://www.ftm.nl/artikelen/corporaties-zijn-klap-verhuurderheffing-allang-te-boven?share=1>.

the recommendation by the 'Future of protected living' commission, to house people with vulnerabilities in an 'inclusive way', in regular neighbourhoods. Hence, the distribution of budgets should not be dictated by where provision is available (supply), but rather on where the people who need it live (demand). Municipalities are supposed to be in charge of how and where these services are provided, and hence should receive the budgets for this directly.

The government has therefore devised a new 'objective model' which distributes Wmo budgets across municipalities in a different way. This model takes into consideration a number of objective factors (primarily the characteristics of the population) that can influence the costs of municipalities in providing the necessary provision. For instance, high densities of ethnic minorities and high poverty rates are associated with higher cost levels for municipalities. The new objective model will be implemented as of 2021. This will lead to considerable budgetary shifts between municipalities (Cebeon, 2018).

Another issue is that people who need shelter or protected housing are free to move between municipalities, and the receiving municipality is responsible for providing and financing this. Homeless people in particular tend to migrate to larger cities such as Amsterdam, which consequently leads to higher costs for these municipalities. This system gives municipalities a financial incentive to refer people in need of shelter or housing to other municipalities and provides a disincentive for them to increase the availability of shelter and protected housing in their municipality. The 'Future of protected living' commission therefore recommended that the financing system be changed, by having the municipality of origin pay for 50% of all costs for shelter and protected housing for up to three years, even when the person has moved to another municipality (Advies Commissie Toekomst beschermd wonen, 2015). However, in the end this proposal was not implemented, partly because it was difficult to arrange. As a result, smaller municipalities in particular (with less provision for homeless people) still have an incentive to refer homeless people to other (larger) municipalities.

Funding from specific programmes

As mentioned before, there have been several strategies and programmes that are aimed at supporting access to housing.

- The **national housing agenda** does not provide any additional funding to the stakeholders involved, but rather sets a common goal and strategy that all stakeholders should work towards.
- For the implementation of the **multi-annual strategy for protected housing and shelter**, the VWS has made roughly €2 million available.⁹
- The **homeless youth action plan 2019-2021** is based on existing tasks and responsibilities of the government, municipalities and other organisations. The plan states that an additional programme budget has been reserved for 2019-2021, to support the measures in the plan. The size of this programme budget is not specified (Ministerie van VWS, 2019; p. 25).
- The **'Home again' action programme** does not seem to provide additional funding to the pilot regions. The programme does provide a national project leader and supporter, who helps the pilot regions to develop and execute their plans.

⁹ Letter to parliament from the Minister of Public Health, Welfare and Sport: 'Letter offering the multi-annual strategy for protected housing and shelter', dated 24 May 2018.

2.3.3 European funding

To our knowledge, no European funding is being used to prevent or combat HHE in the Netherlands.

- **European Social Fund (ESF): active inclusion priority.** This fund only subsidises activities that are aimed at promoting labour market participation. Hence, support given to the homeless aimed at promoting their self-reliance and independence in general, cannot be subsidised under the ESF priority on active inclusion.
- **Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD).** In the Netherlands, this is used to support a project aimed at reducing the social exclusion of elderly people with low disposable incomes (Witkamp et al., 2018). Activities were aimed at increasing participation by the elderly in social and educational activities, to improve their skills and social networks. Hence, this fund has not been used to combat HHE.
- **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).** This fund is used in the Netherlands to promote knowledge-development and innovation in small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

3 Analysis of the current patterns of service provision and challenges in implementing the Netherlands' responses to homelessness and housing exclusion

3.1 Types of support based on Social Support Act

In the Netherlands, municipalities are responsible for providing shelter and assistance to the homeless within the framework of the Wmo. Each municipality designs its own specific services. Municipalities also provide several other services to vulnerable groups, such as long-term care (under the Wmo), debt assistance and social assistance benefits. Hence, each municipality is able to design and provide an integrated approach to meeting the support and care needs of its citizens. As such, no single system can be described. However, there are three main types of services that municipalities offer that are relevant here: shelters, assisted housing and protected housing. A general description is given below, although it is important to note that they can vary considerably between different municipalities.

Shelter (*maatschappelijke opvang*): this is temporary accommodation for people who are homeless and in need of care or support. These shelters are mostly concentrated in the larger municipalities (FEANTSA, 2018). There are different types of shelter available for different types of needs.

- Night shelters provide a place to sleep, eat and shower. People cannot usually stay there during the day, and they sleep in dormitories. Night shelters are designed to provide short-term stays.
- Crisis shelters are for people who are in immediate and urgent need of a safe place to stay as a result of a crisis situation (such as domestic violence or other complex issues). There are general crisis shelters (for men, women and children), and women's shelters (only for women and their children up to 15 years of age). People usually stay here for several months and receive support to resolve their crisis situation.

Municipalities (and their shelters) are legally required to accept all people asking for shelter, regardless of where they are from. After considering their specific situation, it is

possible for them to refer the person to another municipality if they are more likely to recover there.

The second service that municipalities offer based on the Wmo is assisted housing (*begeleid wonen*). This is meant for people who are able to live independently in their own home, but still need some support in certain areas. They receive ambulatory support (*woonbegeleiding*) from a social worker who visits their house and helps them with things such as managing their administration and finances, having social interaction with neighbours, finding employment or daytime activities, and dealing with their mail. Assisted housing can range from short-term to long-term.¹⁰

The third service is protected housing (*beschermd wonen*). Here people have 24/7 supervision and access to support, close to their home. The support is meant for people with psychiatric or psycho-social problems who are not able to maintain themselves independently. The support they receive is aimed at promoting their self-reliance, psychiatric and psycho-social functioning, and preventing neglect. They can live either in a place owned by their care organisation or in their own home. Protected housing is offered when assisted housing is not sufficient to meet the person's support needs (VNG, 2017).

Municipalities contract with different care organisations and NGOs to provide these services. These three services are not aimed exclusively at homeless people; protected housing, in particular, is mainly focused on people with psychiatric problems.

In 2018, a study was done of the accessibility of shelters, using 'mystery guests' (Planije et al., 2018). The findings were that in 57% of cases, the mystery guest was given a place to stay for the night, versus 19% for whom this was uncertain and 24% who did not receive a place to stay. The main reasons for not accepting people were that the person did not have a specific tie with the region (58%), followed by a lack of available beds at the shelter (42%). Compared with earlier years this was an improvement, but it also shows that the principle of the nationwide accessibility of shelters is not followed everywhere.

In 2016, a study was done based on surveys among users of 18 shelters in the Netherlands (Planije & Tuyenman, 2016).

- On average, 69% of people were satisfied with the **living conditions** (privacy, cleanliness, safety etc.). Most notably, users reported that the ambiance in shelters was not always pleasant and that they would like to have more privacy.
- Overall, users were very positive about the **staff** in the shelters (politeness, attention, being taken seriously etc.); 83% of the users were satisfied about this.
- 72% of the users were positive about the **adequacy of the support and counselling** in the shelter. People were very positive about how things were explained to them, the amount of support and their freedom to make their own decisions. People were more critical about the timing of information provision, the time it took for them to receive support and the extent to which different types of support were coordinated.
- Users were less positive about the **result of the support they received**; 63% of the users were satisfied with this. Almost half of the users reported that the support had not helped them in dealing with people and situations that they had

¹⁰ Further information at <https://www.opvangatlas.nl/dakloos>; and at <https://begeleidwonennederland.nl/beschermd-wonen/begeleid-wonen/verschil-begeleid-en-beschermd-wonen>.

previously found difficult. Also, around one third of users reported that their personal situation had not improved as a result of the support, that their hopes for the future had not improved and that the support did not increase their ability to make choices for their future lives. In interpreting this finding, it is important to note that shelters are not equipped to treat people for severe mental issues or addiction. Hence, it is not realistic to expect that shelters could solve these problems.

3.2 Effectiveness of access to permanent accommodation

Households have access to affordable rented housing (social housing). As mentioned before, most social housing in the Netherlands is owned by housing associations. To qualify for a house, the annual household income has to be below €38,035. Additionally, people with higher incomes, up to €48,655/year (so-called middle incomes), qualify for a small portion of social housing. People who are entitled to social housing are generally entitled to rent allowance, which is means-tested. In 2016, the government obliged housing associations to allocate at least 80% of newly built homes to households with an annual income up to €34,911. This was aimed at ensuring that new social housing was allocated to the most vulnerable groups in terms of income.

In order to apply for social housing, people have to be registered as home-seekers, which is possible from the age of 18. After registration, people can apply for houses that become available. Most houses are assigned to the applicant with the longest waiting time (since registering), and some houses are assigned randomly. Under certain circumstances that call for urgent housing (either medical or social), people may be assigned a house without having to accumulate waiting time. There is also a separate policy for so-called priority groups, which covers for instance refugees and people who are living in shelters (Kromhout et al., 2016). They are assigned housing directly, without the need to register, accumulate waiting time or apply for housing.

In 2016, the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Affairs commissioned a study on average waiting times for home-seekers in the Netherlands (Kromhout et al., 2016). The average waiting time varied markedly between municipalities, from 2.5 years in some municipalities to 8.7 years in Amsterdam. The study found that waiting times had been increasing and concluded that they would probably increase even more in the future. Long waiting times pose a problem for the accessibility of housing, especially for people who need housing quickly and have not, or have only recently, registered (Kromhout et al., 2016). Most of these people do not meet the strict criteria for being considered an urgent home-seeker, because they do not face a life-threatening or urgent problem. Home-seekers with large families have more trouble finding social housing, because there are fewer houses available that are suitable for large families.

3.3 Effectiveness of HHE prevention

An important way of avoiding HHE is to prevent evictions. There has been a strong decline in the incidence of evictions in the Netherlands in recent years. In 2017 there were 3,700 evictions, which was almost half the 2013 figure (6,980) (Aedes, 2018b). Unfortunately, this has not stopped the overall number of homeless people from increasing in that period: from 24,800 in 2013 to 30,500 in 2016.

The main cause for evictions in 2017 was rent arrears (85%). Other reasons for evictions were tenants causing complaints among their neighbours (8%) and drug abuse (9%). The vast majority of evictions were of single-person households (84%).

The fall in the number of evictions may be partly attributed to an increasing awareness that evictions are undesirable and carry considerable negative economic and social consequences. This is reflected in a motion that was passed in parliament in November 2018 that urged the government, municipalities and housing associations to increase

their efforts to prevent evictions.¹¹ Municipalities and housing associations reach annual agreements on targets for social housing and, as a result of the motion, these increasingly focus on reducing the number of evictions (Aedes, 2018a). Housing associations take several measures before evicting people, mainly by trying to establish personal contact through calling, and house visits. Also, there is increased cooperation with municipalities and other organisations, aimed at early signalling of financial difficulties among households and at facilitating preventive action (Aedes, 2018a).

People who are evicted have a high risk of becoming homeless. There are no recent studies or data available on their situation after eviction. A local study from 2013 found that 40% of the people who were evicted went on to live with family or friends, and another 40% found a new place to live (in the same region or another). 17% of evicted people ended up in some type of shelter (Kruize & Bieleman, 2013). Another study found that around 24-30% of the inflow of people in shelters was the result of recent evictions (De Ruig et al., 2014).

3.4 Housing First initiatives

A recent innovation is that in some regions HF initiatives are being carried out. There are no research or administrative data available that show how widespread the initiatives are or to what extent they are growing in number. However, as part of the aforementioned Housing First Netherlands programme, a series of studies was carried out by Radboud University on the application and effectiveness of HF initiatives in the Netherlands. These projects are usually carried out by care organisations or NGOs that provide ambulatory support for people in assisted housing situations (*begeleid wonen*). They are usually financed by municipalities via their Wmo budgets. These HF organisations work together with other stakeholders (Van Loenen, Van den Dries, Jansen & Wolf, 2018), as follows.

- HF organisations work with **municipalities** to arrange the necessary access to Wmo services, evaluate the progress of HF participants and arrange social assistance benefits for them if needed.
- HF organisations work with **housing associations** to arrange housing for new participants, discuss how participants are doing and possible complaints from neighbours.
- HF organisations have contact with **medical/care professionals** (such as general practitioners) when necessary. The HF case manager can accompany the participant to medical appointments.
- HF organisations have contact with the **local neighbourhood police officer** in the case of complaints by neighbours. They liaise with the **justice department** in case the person has outstanding fines or prison sentences.

The findings of Radboud University were very positive overall. Participants in HF initiatives reported being very satisfied with them. Compared with the previous support they had received, they reported many advantages to the initiatives. These included more positive and appreciative contact with the case managers, more tailored support, the stability of having their own home and less focus on rules and conditions. This has enabled the participants to make a positive change for themselves. Professionals are also very positive about HF (Van Loenen, Van den Dries & Wolf, 2018). Another study has also shown that professionals at municipalities and care organisations are generally positive about the progress that was being made in HF initiatives (Batterink et al., 2018; p. 39)

¹¹ Motion on 'Preventing and combating silent poverty and social exclusion', filed on 27 June 2018 (kst-24515-443).

Data were collected regarding the participants in the eight HF projects that were involved in the Radboud University study (Al Shamma, Van den Dries & Wolf, 2018). On 17 October 2016, the total number of participants in these projects was 361. They had been participating in the programme for 3.5 years, on average. In the following 18 months, 172 new participants entered, and 85 left, the programmes. The people who left did so after spending an average of 2 years in a programme. For 40 of the 85 participants leaving, data were gathered on their situation upon leaving.

- In 17 cases (43%), the participant left because they were doing well and no longer needed support. They all successfully remained in the house that they obtained through the HF programme.
- 5 participants (13%) passed away during data collection.
- 18 participants (45%) left for negative reasons. In 15 cases, the participant left involuntarily, due to prison sentences (4) or because the HF organisation decided that they could no longer remain in the programme (for instance because they caused problems with the neighbours or did not pay their rent) (11). After leaving the programme, these people went on to live in various circumstances, such as prison, protected housing, a shelter, with relatives or living rough.

There are considerable differences between HF programmes regarding the available budget for supporting the participants. This is because some municipalities have more financial room in their Wmo budgets (depending on costs for other types of care). The available budget per participant is the result of negotiations between the HF organisation and the municipality. As a result, some programmes offer more weekly hours of support than others, which raises the question of how much time is needed for adequate support.

This was the subject of a study involving interviews with case managers and participants (Van Loenen, Van den Dries & Wolf, 2018). HF programmes ranged between low intensity (3.5-4 contact hours on average per participant), medium intensity (6 hours) and high intensity (7-8 hours). These are averages; the weekly number of contact hours varied markedly between participants in line with their individual support needs. The intensity of the support was usually higher at the beginning, after which it was gradually reduced. Case managers working in high-intensity HF programmes stated that 7-8 hours on average was usually enough to meet the support needs of the participants. Case workers in the lower- and middle-intensity programmes more often reported not having enough time to meet support needs. This could lead to problems, especially for new participants (who tended to have higher support needs) and for participants who experienced some type of relapse. These case workers tended to compensate by working more (unpaid) hours. Participants in middle- and high-intensity HF programmes usually reported receiving enough support and understood the limitations that the case workers had to deal with. Also, they very much valued the fact that case workers could be contacted in case of problems, even outside of office hours.

The Radboud University study points toward several factors that can have a positive or negative effect on the success of HF initiatives (Van Loenen, Van den Dries, Jansen & Wolf, 2018).

| Positive impact | Negative impact |
|--|--|
| <p>Participants having their own home as a solid base.</p> <p>HF caseworkers being open, constructive and trusting.</p> <p>Providing tailored support to meet individual needs.</p> <p>Only a minimum of rules and conditions. No pushing participants to do things they do not want to.</p> <p>Cooperating well with other stakeholders.</p> <p>Sufficient financing.</p> | <p>Housing shortage.</p> <p>Housing not being suitable (e.g. noisy).</p> <p>Behavioural issues of participants (e.g. anger, distrust, intimidation, often related to addiction or psychiatric issues).</p> <p>Detention: if participants receive a prison sentence, they can no longer afford their rent and lose their house.</p> <p>Financial situation: participants often have less money to spend than they used to on the streets, and are not used to paying regular bills.</p> |

3.5 Main weaknesses/gaps

1. There is a shortage of social housing in the Netherlands, most notably in the four largest cities. Because these cities also have a relatively high number of homeless people in shelters, it is more difficult to house them. It also causes long waiting times for people who are not currently homeless but do need housing in the short term (for instance because they have no other option but to live with their parents).
2. The Wmo prescribes a decentralised system, in which all municipalities have the freedom to design their own shelter and assisted/protected housing services for people who need them. This was a conscious choice, because it enables municipalities to integrate Wmo care with other types of support such as debt assistance and social assistance. However, as a result little is known about the choices that municipalities make when designing their services. For instance, do they apply HF or staircase models? More research on this is needed, along with greater ability to monitor the various strategies on HHE.
3. The Wmo enables municipalities to give their citizens tailored and integrated support for a broad set of possible issues. They employ generalist social workers who are able to identify various types of care and support needs. This means that target groups such as the homeless, who need a specific type of approach and support, will not always receive the support they need. This is especially true for smaller municipalities, where homelessness is less prevalent.

3.6 Priorities for improvement in the Netherlands

1. HF initiatives have been implemented in some regions in the Netherlands, and have proven to be effective here. These HF initiatives should be more widely adopted. This is currently being promoted by the Housing First Netherlands programme, but it seems that the website is no longer actively being updated. A more active campaign would be desirable.
2. In order to develop a successful strategy to prevent and address homelessness, intensive cooperation is needed between local stakeholders (municipalities, housing associations, care organisations and NGOs). This is being promoted by both the multi-annual strategy for protected housing and shelter and the 'Home again' action programme. However, more work still needs to be done to further improve this cooperation.
3. As stated in the 'Future of protected living' recommendation, a transformation is needed from protected housing towards people living independently and receiving ambulatory flexible support. Although there are no national studies on this, the

impression is that most municipalities still focus primarily on types of protected housing. More focus is needed on new ways of supporting people while they live in their own house. The shift in the Wmo from supply-oriented to demand-oriented financing of protected living will probably contribute to this.

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Annex

Table A1: ETHOS Light categories defined as homeless in the Netherlands

| Operational category | | Living situation | | Definition | Defined as homeless in the Netherlands |
|----------------------|---|------------------|---|---|--|
| 1 | People living rough | 1 | Public space/ external space | Living on the streets or in public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters | Yes, included in CBS definition (CBS, 2018a) |
| 2 | People in emergency accommodation | 2 | Overnight shelters | People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation | Yes, included in CBS definition (CBS, 2018a) |
| 3 | People living in accommodation for the homeless | 3 | Homelessness hostels | Where the period of stay is time-limited and no long-term housing is provided | No, not included in CBS definition (2018a) |
| | | 4 | Temporary accommodation | | |
| | | 5 | Transitional supported accommodation | | |
| | | 6 | Women's shelter or refuge accommodation | | |
| 4 | People living in institutions | 7 | Healthcare institutions | Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing No housing available prior to release | No, not included in CBS definition (2018a) |
| | | 8 | Penal institutions | | |
| 5 | People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing | 9 | Mobile homes | Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence | No, not included in CBS definition (2018a) |
| | | 10 | Non-conventional buildings | | |
| | | 11 | Temporary structures | | |
| 6 | Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing) | 12 | Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence | Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence | Yes, partly included: the CBS definition (2018a) only includes people in this category if they frequently move between family and friends, and do not know where they will sleep the following night |

Table A2: Latest available data on the number of homeless people in the Netherlands

| Operational category | | Living situation | | Most recent number | Period covered | Source |
|----------------------|---|------------------|---|--|----------------|--|
| 1 | People living rough | 1 | Public space/ external space | 30,500 | 2016 | CBS (2018a) estimates the number of homeless people in the Netherlands, for categories 1 and 2 combined |
| 2 | People in emergency accommodation | 2 | Overnight shelters | | | |
| 3 | People living in accommodation for the homeless | 3 | Homelessness hostels | 70,000 people in shelters and protected housing (not all homeless) | 2017 | Federatie Opvang (2018) |
| | | 4 | Temporary accommodation | | | |
| | | 5 | Transitional supported accommodation | | | |
| | | 6 | Women's shelter or refuge accommodation | | | |
| 4 | People living in institutions | 7 | Healthcare institutions | No data available | 2018 | Infographic Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen: LINK |
| | | 8 | Penal institutions | Penal institutions: 8,777 | | |
| 5 | People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing | 9 | Mobile homes | 32,000 vacation homes rented out as permanent housing Number of occupants unknown | 2018 | Financieel Dagblad (2018) 'Ondernemers en overheid ruziën over inschrijving van bewoners op vakantieparken' (LINK) |
| | | 10 | Non-conventional buildings | | | |
| | | 11 | Temporary structures | | | |
| 6 | Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing) | 12 | Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence | No data available | | |

Table A3: Characteristics of registered homeless people in the Netherlands between 2009 and 2016

| | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Gender (%) | | | | | | | | |
| Men | 85 | 86 | 86 | 85 | 85 | 85 | 84 | 84 |
| Women | 15 | 14 | 14 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 16 | 16 |
| Age (%) | | | | | | | | |
| 18-21 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| 21-29 | 15 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 20 | 19 | 21 |
| 30-49 | 63 | 60 | 60 | 58 | 57 | 56 | 55 | 53 |
| 50-64 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 22 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 23 |
| Origin (%) | | | | | | | | |
| Netherlands | 50 | 48 | 48 | 49 | 47 | 46 | 45 | 42 |
| Western country | 11 | 11 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Non-western country | 39 | 42 | 42 | 41 | 43 | 44 | 45 | 48 |
| Region (%) | | | | | | | | |
| Four largest cities | 37 | 37 | 36 | 36 | 39 | 41 | 43 | 45 |
| Other municipalities | 59 | 60 | 61 | 62 | 58 | 56 | 53 | 52 |
| Level of education (%) | | | | | | | | |
| Low | 72 | 70 | 69 | 68 | 67 | 66 | 66 | 65 |
| Middle | 24 | 26 | 27 | 29 | 29 | 30 | 30 | 31 |
| High | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |

Source: CBS (2018a)

