



New Zealand definition of homelessness: 2015 update



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New Zealand definition of homelessness: update

This document updates the definition of homelessness document that was originally published in 2009. The definition itself has not been changed but has been edited to make it easier to read.

The definition was developed by a working group from Housing New Zealand Corporation, the Ministry of Social Development, and Statistics New Zealand. The group intends it to be used by the Official Statistics System's partners.

Rationale

An agreed definition provides a common understanding of the homeless population in New Zealand and allows government and community groups to make well-informed policy decisions. A definition of homelessness also helps identify the demographics of those most in need and the level of response they require. Policies and resources implemented to address homelessness can be better monitored and evaluated by using a common conceptual definition.

Consistent use of a common definition of homelessness will:

- enable data to be compared and integrated between organisations and across collections
- help develop broader public understanding of homelessness
- facilitate research that produces comparable and consistent information and data on homelessness
- be relevant for Māori, and include New Zealand's cultural diversity
- provide the potential for some international comparability
- enable the collection of quality data to inform policy and funding decisions about homelessness in New Zealand.

Scope

The homelessness definition can be used to structure the collection of data on people's living situations, through surveys or by using administrative data. The definition can also be applied to existing datasets to ascertain whether an assessed living situation aligns with one of the conceptual categories in the definition.

Evaluating this definition fits within a three- to five-year review cycle, where practical, and this will be done after it has been applied to administrative data sources and possibly used in survey research.

Concept

The working group adapted the concepts and definitions of homelessness from the European Observatory on Homelessness (ETHOS) typology of homelessness and housing exclusion, a framework used by European statistical offices (FEANTSA, 2007; 2008; see appendix 1). The framework was modified to meet the requirements of the societal, cultural, and environmental contexts of New Zealand. An important consideration for the New Zealand definition of homelessness is to recognise concealed homeless living situations (Edgar & Meert, 2006). The concealed homeless include people who have no other housing option but to share someone else's accommodation on a temporary basis, and who have no security of tenure in doing so. Another

consideration concerns people who live in housing that would not normally be considered suitable for habitation.

Three domains of housing form the basis of New Zealand's approach to homelessness, adapted from ETHOS.

- The social domain requires that dwellings provide private and safe accommodation and personal living space for enjoying social relations.
- The legal domain requires that the occupant(s) have exclusive possession and security of occupation of the dwelling.
- The physical domain requires that dwellings provide habitable housing and be adequate to meet the basic living needs of the occupant(s) (eg toilet facilities, food preparation area).

The intersections of these domains provide a means for classifying homelessness.

Based on this framework, four conceptual categories were identified as representing homelessness. The categories are: without shelter, temporary accommodation, sharing accommodation, and uninhabitable housing.

To be counted in one of these categories, the living situation must not be a personal choice but rather the result of a lack of access to, and inability to acquire, safe and secure housing options. For example, situations in which personal safety is compromised or the individual lacks the skills or resources to access housing indicate personal choice is absent.

Definition and requirements

Homelessness is defined as a living situation where people with no other options to acquire safe and secure housing are: without shelter, in temporary accommodation, sharing accommodation with a household, or living in uninhabitable housing.

Note: The constraint in providing for full coverage across all living situations of the homeless is the difficulty in locating them (Edgar & Meert, 2006). The likelihood is that people without shelter, people staying long-term in motor camps and boarding houses, people sharing accommodation, and people residing in dilapidated dwellings may only be measured when the individuals are in contact with a provider, agency, or researcher.

The homeless living situations for each of the conceptual categories of the definition are outlined below.

Without shelter

Living situations that provide no shelter, or makeshift shelter, are considered as 'without shelter'. These include situations such as living on the street, and inhabiting improvised dwellings (eg living in a shack or a car).

Temporary accommodation

Living situations are considered 'temporary accommodation' when they provide shelter overnight, or when 24-hour accommodation is provided in a non-private dwelling that is not intended to be lived in long-term. This includes hostels for the homeless, transitional supported accommodation for the homeless, and women's refuges. Also included are people staying long-term in motor camps and boarding houses, as these are not intended for long-term accommodation.

Sharing accommodation

Living situations that provide temporary accommodation for people through sharing someone else's private dwelling are considered 'sharing accommodation'. The usual residents of the dwelling are not considered homeless.

Uninhabitable housing

Living situations where people reside in a dilapidated dwelling are considered 'uninhabitable housing'.

Appendix 2 provides the classification categories to operationalise these definitions.

Ideally, a number of variables should be collected together with homelessness information, such as: age, sex, ethnicity, geographic location (except for women's refuges for safety reasons), family composition, related and unrelated groups, and iwi/hapū where required.

Explanatory notes

People who have options to acquire safe and secure private accommodation are not defined as homeless. This covers people who have other accommodation options, and those who are looking for accommodation and have the means to acquire it through the usual channels, such as buying or renting.

Work on crowding and housing quality is out of scope for the homelessness definition and comes under the wider housing statistics work area.

In focusing on living situations, the homelessness definition does not consider the reasons for, predictors of (pathways into), or prevention of, homelessness.

The nature of someone's housing is a key factor in describing their living situation, but is not the only relevant information. People living in similar dwellings may be homeless, or not, depending on several contextual factors. Therefore, the following concepts may be used to describe relevant differences in living situation: with or without options to acquire safe and secure accommodation, type of dwelling, permanent or temporary, usual residence, on holiday.

People in the sharing accommodation living situation may be classified as 'visitors' in other collections.

For the purposes of the homelessness definition, women's refuges are classified as non-private dwellings. In other collections they may be classified as private dwellings for safety reasons. In some collections, demographic variables can only be collected if the dwelling is described as private, but in this definition that restriction does not apply.

Although people who remain institutionalised because accommodation in the community is not available are not defined as homeless, it is important to monitor this through other data sources as an indicator of future housing need.

Guidelines for inclusion and exclusion

Inclusions

People who move between the different forms of living rough, temporary shelter, or sharing with a household are included. None of these is considered safe and secure accommodation. People moving between the different living situations would be classified according to their current or latest living situation.

A minor (someone aged under 18 years) may be moving between different households, temporary accommodation, and the streets. If they have no options to acquire safe and secure accommodation they would be homeless, despite the fact that they may stay with family members some of the time. Minors moving between the different living situations would be classified according to their current or latest living situation.

People defined as homeless will include those who are on a waiting list for a home and whose current living situations are described in the definition.

People who have housing in another geographic location, but whose living situation in their current geographic location is considered homeless, are included. Possible reasons for their current situation include economic reasons and disconnection from family.

Someone who has recently had a usual residence but cannot return to it for safety reasons (eg due to the experience or threat of violence or sexual abuse), and has no other options to acquire safe and secure accommodation, is counted as homeless.

Temporary accommodation

Some services for homeless people may be provided at a marae, possibly including temporary accommodation, but currently the practice is not widespread. Temporary accommodation provided by a marae would be included in the temporary accommodation category.

Motor camps and camping grounds provide accommodation for temporary rather than long-term habitation. Living situations at these complexes are included as homeless if there are no other options to acquire safe and secure private accommodation.

Sharing accommodation

Includes situations where a household invites one or more families to stay in their home.

Includes situations in which family members may be split up to be accommodated by several other households.

Uninhabitable housing

The uninhabitable housing category covers dilapidated dwellings that have inadequate or absent utility services.

Exclusions

Casual rough sleepers who have a home elsewhere, such as people sleeping in a park overnight or people on holiday sleeping out, are excluded.

Tourists and travellers are excluded even if they have no usual residence. Examples are retirees who have sold their house and are touring in a mobile home, or travellers living in a converted house truck.

Students living in halls of residence and hostels are excluded.

Temporarily homeless because of civil defence emergencies are excluded.

Anyone who is between places is excluded. Examples are students staying with friends while looking for a flat, or someone staying in a boarding house after recently moving into the area.

Temporary accommodation

Excludes supported housing that is intended for long-term accommodation, such as IHC group homes for residents with intellectual disabilities.

Sharing accommodation category

The usually resident household members are not counted as homeless.

Uninhabitable housing category

Dwellings that are cold, damp, or not insulated but are not dilapidated are excluded from the uninhabitable housing category.

Glossary and related concepts

Dilapidated buildings

Dilapidated buildings are buildings that are in an advanced state of deterioration, to the point of being uninhabitable by current social norms. Indicators may include: surroundings are unkempt or overgrown, extensive exterior deterioration, roof is not weather proof, doors/windows broken or not secure, essential services have been cut, interior is bare and deteriorating, evidence of vandalism.

A dwelling may show some signs of neglect without being classed as dilapidated provided these signs are relatively minor, such as a lack of maintenance (paint flaking off), or repairs (eg boarded-up windows), or other jobs that are overdue (untidy garden or section), and do not amount to severe overall deterioration.

Household

A household is one person who usually resides alone, or two or more people who usually reside together and share facilities (such as eating facilities, cooking facilities, bathroom and toilet facilities, a living area).

Improvised dwellings

Dwellings or shelters not necessarily erected for human habitation but which are occupied. The structure supports a roof of some kind, no matter how roughly fashioned or makeshift, and lacks some or all the usual household amenities (eg electric lighting, piped water, bathroom, toilet, and kitchen/cooking facilities). For example, shacks, garages, and private vehicles other than those designed as, or converted into, dwellings.

Non-private dwelling

A non-private dwelling provides short- or long-term communal or transitory type accommodation. Non-private dwellings are generally available to the public for reasons of employment, study, special need, legal requirement, or recreation.

Places of habitation with no dwelling

Public or outdoor areas not intended for human habitation but which are occupied, including public parks, bus shelters, under bridges, on beaches, in caves, train stations, doorways, and private property (eg car parks and farm land).

Private dwelling

A private dwelling accommodates a person or a group of people. It is not generally available for public use. The main purpose of a private dwelling is as a place of habitation, and it is usually built (or converted) to function as a self-contained housing unit.

Supported accommodation

Supported housing can be provided in the community or within a residential care facility. It includes homes providing care for people with disabilities, group homes (eg IHC group

homes), staffed residential accommodation, and halfway houses. Supported accommodation only includes establishments where the main intent is for the dwelling to be used as a residential care facility, and where it has the capacity to provide care for five or more people with disabilities, or other supported residents.

Usual residence

Usual residence is the address of the dwelling where a person considers they usually reside, except in the specific cases listed in the guidelines, which are:

- Dependent children who board at another residence to attend primary or secondary school and return to a parent or guardian's home for the holidays 'usually reside' at the address of their parent(s) or guardian(s). Tertiary students usually reside at the address where they live while studying. If they give up their usual residence in the holidays (eg terminate the lease on a flat or give up their hostel room) and return to their parent/guardian's home, their usual residence over that period would be their parent/guardian's home.
- Children in shared care usually reside at the place where they spend more nights, or if they spend equal amounts of time at each residence, they usually reside at the place where they are at the time of the survey.
- People who are in rest homes, hospitals, prisons, or other institutions, usually reside where they consider themselves to live, which may be the institution.
- A person whose home is on any ship, boat, or vessel permanently located in any harbour usually resides at the wharf or landing place (or main wharf or landing place) of the harbour.
- A person from another country who has lived in New Zealand the past 12 months, or has the intention of living in New Zealand for 12 months or more, usually resides at his or her address in New Zealand.
- People of no fixed abode have no usual residence. However, for enumeration purposes, Statistics New Zealand assigns a meshblock of usual residence to people of no fixed abode, based on their location on the date of data collection. They are still recorded as having 'no fixed abode'.

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Appendix 1

The ETHOS conceptual categories are on the far left of the table: roofless, houseless, insecure, and inadequate. The operational categories 1–7 define homelessness, while categories 8–13 represent other forms of housing exclusion.

Table 1
ETHOS – European typology on homelessness and housing exclusion categories

	Conceptual category		Living situation		Generic definition
R O O F L E S S	1	People living rough	1.1	Public space or external space	Living in the streets or public spaces, without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters
	2	People in emergency accommodation	2.1	Night shelter	People with no usual place of residence who make use of overnight shelter, low threshold shelter
H O U S E L E S S	3	People in accommodation for the homeless	3.1	Homeless hostel	Where the period of stay is intended to be short term
			3.2	Temporary accommodation	
3.3			Transitional supported accommodation		
E I N S E C U R E	4	People in a women's shelter	4.1	Women's shelter accommodation	Women accommodated due to experience of domestic violence and where the period of stay is intended to be short term
	5	People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1	Temporary accommodation / reception centres	Immigrants in reception or short term accommodation due to their immigrant status
5.2			Migrant workers accommodation		
S U B S T A N T I A L	6	People due to be released from institutions	6.1	Penal institutions	No housing available prior to release
			6.2	Medical institutions (includes drug rehabilitation, psychiatric hospital, etc.)	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing
			6.3	Children's institution / homes	No housing identified (eg by 18th birthday)

	7	People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)	7.1 7.2	Residential care for older homeless people Supported accommodation for formerly homeless people	Long stay accommodation with care for formerly homeless people (normally more than one year)
I N S E C U R E	8	People living in insecure accommodation	8.1	Temporarily with family/friends	Living in conventional housing but not the usual or place of residence due to lack of housing
			8.2	No legal (sub) tenancy	Occupation of dwelling with no legal tenancy illegal occupation of a dwelling
			8.3	Illegal occupation of land	Occupation of land with no legal rights
U R E	9	People living under threat of eviction	9.1	Legal orders enforced (rented)	Where orders for eviction are operative
			9.2	Re-possession orders (owned)	Where mortgagor has legal order to re-possess
	10	People living under threat of violence	10.1	Police recorded incidents	Where police action is taken to ensure place of safety for victims of domestic violence
I N A D E Q U A T E	11	People living in temporary / non-conventional structures	11.1	Mobile home	Not intended as place of usual residence
			11.2	Non-conventional building	Makeshift shelter, shack or shanty
			11.3	Temporary structure	Semi-permanent structure hut or cabin
	12	People living in unfit housing	12.1	Occupied dwellings unfit for habitation	Defined as unfit for habitation by national legislation or building regulations
	13	People living in extreme overcrowding	13.1	Highest national norm of overcrowding	Defined as exceeding national density standard for floor space or useable rooms
Source: European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)					

Table 2
New Zealand homelessness operational categories and equivalents to ETHOS operational categories

NZ conceptual category	NZ living situation definition	NZ operational category	Ethos operational category (2006 & 2007) equivalent
Without shelter	Living situations that provide no shelter or makeshift shelter are considered 'without shelter'	Without shelter 1a. People living rough 1b. People living in improvised dwellings	Roofless 1. People living rough 11. People living in temporary/non-standard structures but category 11.1 may only partially be equivalent (caravan) and 11.2 relates to both 1a (NZ caves) and 1b. (NZ shacks)
Temporary accommodation	Living situations are considered temporary accommodation when they provide shelter overnight, or when 24-hour accommodation is provided in a non-private dwelling., and are not intended to be lived in long-term	Temporary accommodation 2a. People staying in night shelters 2b. People staying in transitional supported accommodation 2c. People staying in women's refuges 2d. People staying in boarding houses 2e. People staying in camping grounds/motor camps 2f. People staying in homeless hostel 2g. People staying on a marae	Houseless 2. People staying in a night shelter 3. People in accommodation for the homeless 4. People in women's shelter 11. People living in temporary/non-standard structures – except for non-standard and temporary structures included in the NZ 1b operational category (see classification, appendix 2).
Sharing accommodation	Living situations that provide temporary accommodation for people through sharing someone else's private dwelling	Sharing accommodation 3a. People sharing accommodation with someone else's household	Insecure 8. People living in insecure accommodation, but only category 8.1 Temporarily with family/friends applies to NZ 3a
Uninhabitable housing	Living situations where people reside in a dilapidated building are considered uninhabitable housing	Uninhabitable housing 4a. People staying in uninhabitable housing	Inadequate 12. People living in unfit housing



Appendix 2

The classification and criteria are included here to assist in understanding the definition and will be finalised prior to the development of a statistical standard for homelessness.

Classification

Living situations for each conceptual category are separately classified.

Classification criteria

The principal criterion for classifying homelessness is the distinction between no dwelling, private dwellings, and non-private dwellings.

People with no dwelling are classified in category one, living rough. Non-private dwellings are classified in category two, temporary accommodation.

Private dwellings are classified into either category three or four. Sharing accommodation, when a person is sharing someone else's private accommodation, is category three. Private dwellings are classified to category four if the dwelling is dilapidated yet inhabited.

1 Without shelter

11 Without shelter

111 Living on the street

119 Living outside nec [not elsewhere classified]

12 Living in improvised dwellings

121 Makeshift shelter

122 Shack

123 Tent

124 Garage

125 Vehicle (excl vehicles in motor camp)

129 Living in improvised dwellings nec

2 Temporary accommodation

21 Night shelters

211 Night shelter

212 Police cells

22 Transitional supported accommodation

221 Transitional supported accommodation (mental health providers)

229 Transitional supported accommodation nec

- 23 Refuges for victims of violence
 - 231 Women's refuge
 - 239 Refuges nec
- 24 Boarding houses
 - 241 Boarding house
- 25 Camping grounds/motor camps
 - 251 Caravan
 - 252 Cabin
 - 253 Mobile home
 - 259 Other nec
- 26 Homeless hostel
 - 261 Homeless hostel
- 27 Marae
 - 271 Marae
 - 29 Other temporary and emergency accommodation
 - 291 Other temporary and emergency accommodation (eg emergency accommodation in motels, backpackers)
- 3 Sharing accommodation
 - 31 Sharing accommodation
 - 311 Sharing accommodation with a one-person household
 - 312 Sharing accommodation with a one-family household
 - 313 Sharing accommodation with a two-or-more family household
 - 314 Sharing accommodation with other multi-person household
 - 319 Sharing accommodation nec
- 4 Uninhabitable housing
 - 41 Uninhabitable housing
 - 411 Dilapidated dwelling
 - 419 Uninhabitable housing nec