

Homelessness in the Netherlands

An assessment

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Uitgave

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1 Homelessness in the Netherlands

1.1 Numbers and characteristics

Numbers

The numbers of homeless people in the Netherlands vary depending on the used definition and counting method, as shown in table 1 below. According to KPMG and the Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS), there are between 22.533 and 36.400 (known) homeless people in the Netherlands.^{1 2}

Table 1 Homeless people in the Netherlands (source: Trimbos)

| Source | Year | Amount | People counted |
|--------|---------------------|--------|--|
| KPMG | Second half of 2020 | 22.533 | All homeless persons (18+) for whom the aim is to offer housing with or without guidance |
| CBS | 2020 | 36.400 | (Estimate of) actual homeless people (18-65) |

It is important to emphasize that the numbers as shown above are an underestimate of the real amount of homeless people in the Netherlands. The mentioned numbers are based on homeless people that are known by the (homeless) shelters. It is however unclear how many people are homeless, while they are reliant on their social network for a place to sleep (so called “couch surfers”)³ or have an illegal status in the Netherlands. Also, not all homeless people are allowed in shelters and therefore don’t go there. This makes it even more difficult to estimate the correct amount of homeless people in the Netherlands. Children (<18 years) and people above 65 years are also not counted. Moreover, there are no statistics for people that are at risk of homelessness or who are experiencing (serious) difficulties in exercising their right to housing.

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The importance of a definition

In counting homeless people, the definition of *homeless* is really important: which people do you count? There are people living on the street, the so-called visible homeless. But there are also people that have found a temporarily solution, but are in fact homeless as well. These are for example people that live in holiday parcs⁴, women that are staying in a women’s shelter and people that are sleeping on the couch of a friend.

Development in numbers

According to the CBS there was an increase of homeless people in the Netherlands from 2009 to 2018, as figure 1 shows below. From 2020 onwards, it seems that this upward trend has come to a halt, based on the numbers of registered homeless people. However, many organizations have doubts about this increase, due to incomplete numbers and homeless people that are not visible to organizations.⁵

¹ CBS Statline (2021), homeless people 18-65 years old, characteristics, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/cijfers/detail/84990NED?dl=4FC10>.

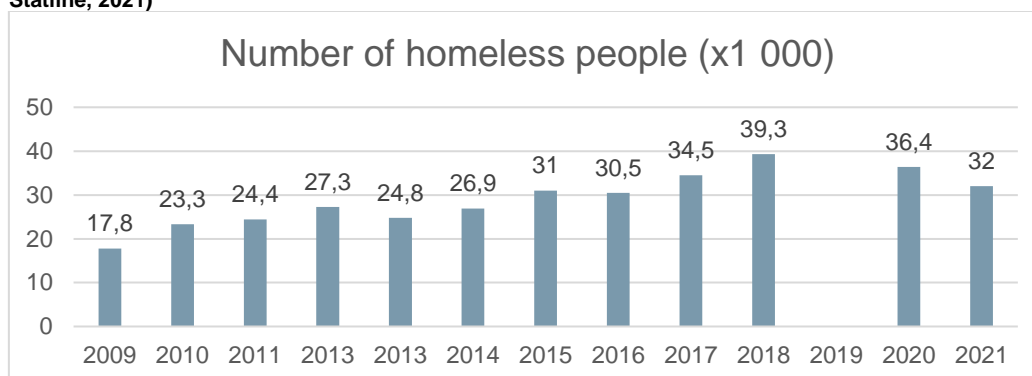
² <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2021/06/21/monitor-dak-en-thuisloosheid>.

³ In Dutch this is also known as “bankslapers”.

⁴ According to Valente, roughly 55.000 people stay in a holiday parc presently in the Netherlands (Interview Rina Beers, 18-01-2022).

⁵ <https://www.valente.nl/nieuws/reactie-valente-cbs-cijfers-dakloosheid/>.

Figure 1 Number of homeless people in the Netherlands (18-65 years old) until 01-01-2021 (source: CBS Statline, 2021)⁶



Main characteristics

Focussing on the number of homeless people in 2020 (36.400), 84% of this group is male and 16% of this group is female (see also table 2 below).⁷ Most of the homeless people are 27-50 years old (57%), followed by 18-27 years old (23%) and 50-65 years old (20%). There is variation in the cultural background: 60% of the homeless people have a migration background⁸, compared to 40% that does not have a migration background. Focusing on the homeless people with a migration background, 50% have a non-Western migration background and 10% has a Western migration background. It also seems that a relatively large group of the homeless people (36%) are registered in one of the four bigger cities in the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague or Utrecht), compared to 64% of which who are living in a relative smaller city or village.

Table 2 Characteristics of homeless people in the Netherlands as of 01-01-2021 (source: CBS Statline, 2021)

| Characteristics | Number (x 1 000) | Percentage |
|--|------------------|------------|
| Total number of homeless people | 34,4 | 100 |
| Gender: male | 30,6 | 84 |
| Gender: female | 5,8 | 16 |
| Age: 18-27 | 8,5 | 23 |
| Age: 27-50 | 20,7 | 57 |
| Age: 50-65 | 7,2 | 20 |
| Migration background: the Netherlands | 14,6 | 40 |
| Migration background: outside of the Netherlands | 21,8 | 60 |
| Migration background: western | 3,5 | 10 |
| Migration background: non-western | 18,3 | 50 |
| Registered in G4 (the four biggest municipalities in the Netherlands: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Den Haag, Utrecht) | 13,1 | 36 |
| Registered in any other municipality | 23,3 | 64 |

⁶ The numbers of homeless people in the Netherlands on 01-01-2021 and 01-01-2020 are provisional and are finalized at a later stage using data from an additional source of CBS.

⁷ CBS Statline (2021), homeless people 18-65 years old, characteristics, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/cijfers/detail/84990NED?dl=4FC10>.

⁸ A person of whom at least one parent was born abroad.

Subgroups

As the Raad voor Volksgezondheid en Samenleving (RVS) emphasises: there is not one standard type of a homeless person. The diversity of problems homeless people face, is much more nuanced than for example only problems with addiction or psychiatric problems. Also, homeless people are much less recognizable. The total group of homeless people, as described above, actually consists of various subgroups. Each of these subgroups have their own context as well of their own (health)care and support chain. The causes and solutions for homelessness for each of these subgroups (partially) vary and therefore it is important to distinguish between these groups. Table 3 below shows the most important subgroups.

Table 3 Different subgroups of homeless people (18-65 years)

| Subgroup | Description | Number (estimate) |
|--|--|--|
| Economic (self-reliant) homeless (“economisch daklozen”) | People that become homeless due to a life-event (for example a divorce) and are considered as self-reliant (most of them still have a job). Besides being homeless, this group doesn’t have any other problems (addiction, psychological problems) in general. | Only (few) local numbers (Amsterdam: 1,100-4,500) ⁹ |
| Homeless migrant workers from Middle- and Eastern Europe | Migrant workers from Middle- and Eastern Europe who have lost their jobs in the Netherlands and therefore have become homeless. Besides homelessness, this group often has problems with addiction and/or psychological problems. | 2,500-3,000 ¹⁰ |
| Undocumented homeless | Homeless people that are not documented, for example people who have gone through the asylum procedure without success and are now excluded from social service. | - |
| Homeless families | Parent(s) and their children that have become homeless. | 1,650 ¹¹ |
| Homeless young adults (18-27 years) | Young adults that have become homeless. | 8,500 |

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Besides the above-mentioned subgroups, there is also a large group of people that are *at risk* of becoming homeless. These people deal in general with multiple problems, are socially vulnerable and are not or insufficiently self-reliant. Also, they may suffer with psychiatric problems, (serious) psychosocial problems, problems with addiction(s), problems with criminality or avoidance of health care. In other words, it concerns people who find themselves in a precarious situation in many areas of life (health, income, social network). This group is very difficult to quantify, but is extremely relevant when it comes to preventing homelessness.

⁹ <https://www.platform31.nl/publicaties/huisvesting-en-ondersteuning-economische-dak-en-thuislozen#>

¹⁰ <https://ivo.nl/onderzoek-naar-dakloze-arbeidsmigranten-uit-midden-en-oost-europa-eerste-resultaten/#:~:text=Geschat%20wordt%20dat%20er%202.500,het%20thuisland%20werk%20wordt%20beloofd.>

¹¹ <https://www.valente.nl/nieuws/reactie-valente-cbs-cijfers-dakloosheid/>

1.2 Routes to homelessness

A lot has already been written about the various routes that lead to homelessness. In much research and publications, a distinction has been made between three factors that increase the risk of becoming homeless¹²:

1. Individual factors (for example: addiction, psychological problems, criminal activities);
2. Relational factors (for example: lack of a social network);
3. Structural factors (for example: insufficient affordable housing.)

It is important to emphasize, however, that hardly anyone *suddenly* becomes homeless. In most cases there has been an accumulation of problems, often years long.

De Raad voor Volksgezondheid en Samenleving distinguishes four routes for how people can become homeless, as table 4 shows below.¹³

Table 4 Four routes for how people can become homeless (source: RVS)

| Route | Description | Examples |
|---------|---|---|
| Route 1 | Loss of housing after a (major) life event, such as a breakup or job loss | “Spoedzoekers” |
| Route 2 | No housing after leaving an institution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaving after detention • Leaving after care stay • Lack of aftercare |
| Route 3 | Eviction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to debts |
| Route 4 | Remigration | After remigration it is difficult to find a house, due to the tight housing market or accumulated debts. |

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¹² https://ivo.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Rapport-Routes-naar-dakloosheid_Tilburg.pdf

¹³ <https://www.raadrvs.nl/documenten/publicaties/2020/04/21/herstel-begint-met-een-huis---dakloosheid-voorkomen-en-verminderen>.

2 Homelessness among young adults

2.1 Numbers and characteristics

Numbers

According to the CBS, in 2020 there were 8,500 homeless young adults (18 to 27 years) – this is approximately 23% of the total number of homeless people (see also table 2).¹⁴ Based on the measures of KPMG, there are 5,566 homeless young adults in the second half of 2020. Relatively, this is also around 23% of the total homeless population measured by KPMG.

CBS reports a decrease in homelessness among young adults, since in 2016, according to their estimates, there were 10,700 homeless young adults. However, according to the director of Stichting Zwerfjongeren Nederland, this reduction is not likely. Many homeless young adults are not visible to organizations and are reliant for example on their own social network (friends, family) for a place to sleep. In addition, the fact that the number of places in night shelters has been significantly reduced, makes it more difficult to monitor them(?).¹⁵ Besides that, young adults that are staying illegally in the Netherlands are not counted.

People younger than 18 years

In many studies and policies, the category used for homeless young adults is 18 to 27 years. However, there are also people younger than 18 years who don't have a place to stay. The number of this group was estimated to be 3,960 in 2016.¹⁶

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Main characteristics

The group of homeless young adults contains relatively large amount of women: 26% is female (compared to 16% of the total group of homeless people). Important to mention is that of the female homeless young adults, 25% to 50% has a child or are pregnant. In total about one in six homeless young people has a child.¹⁷ A relatively big proportion of homeless young adults has a non-western migration background: 58% (compared to 50% of the total group of homeless people).¹⁸ Looking at the age of homeless young adults, the largest group is between 16 and 21 years old. Other characteristics are having a relatively low education (approximately 50% has only finished primary school) and being in debt (more than half of the homeless young adults are in debt).¹⁹

Homeless young adults often have to deal with many (multiple) problems. Based on the severity and nature of the problems of homeless young adults, there are three categories to distinguish, see table 5 below.²⁰ According to Stichting Zwerfjongeren Nederland, 60% to 70% of the homeless young adults have a history in youth care.²¹

¹⁴ <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2021/13/stijging-van-het-aantal-daklozen-tot-stilstand-gekomen>.

¹⁵ Interview Hella Masuger, 13-01-2022.

¹⁶ Factsheet Movisie and Stichting Zwerfjongeren Nederland (2020), <https://www.movisie.nl/sites/movisie.nl/files/2020-03/Feiten-cijfers-dak-thuisloze-jongeren-Nederland.pdf>.

¹⁷ <https://www.movisie.nl/sites/movisie.nl/files/2020-03/Feiten-cijfers-dak-thuisloze-jongeren-Nederland.pdf>.

¹⁸ <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2021/13/stijging-van-het-aantal-daklozen-tot-stilstand-gekomen>

¹⁹ https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/sites/default/files/download/kennismakelaar_2.pdf

²⁰ Factsheet Movisie and Stichting Zwerfjongeren Nederland (2020), <https://www.movisie.nl/sites/movisie.nl/files/2020-03/Feiten-cijfers-dak-thuisloze-jongeren-Nederland.pdf>.

²¹ Interview Hella Masuger, 13-01-2022.

Table 5 Underlying problems of (homeless) young adults (source: factsheet Movisie/SZN, 2020)

| Category | Description |
|-----------------------|---|
| Mild problems | Mainly problems within one domain (for example finances, mental health, education), few traumatic experiences, no or low use of drugs and/or alcohol, promising within care and support |
| Serious problems | Problematic family situation, police and judiciary contacts, problematic use of soft drugs, mild mental handicap (licht verstandelijke beperking), long history in care and support |
| Very serious problems | Problematic family situation, psychiatric problems, drug addiction, very serious behavioral problems, many traumatic experiences, difficult to supervise |

Subgroups

Also among homeless young adults, there are various subgroups. Each of these subgroups have their own context as well of their own (health)care and support chain. The causes and solutions for homelessness for each of these subgroups (partially) vary and therefore it is important to distinguish between these groups – see table 6 below.

Table 6 Different subgroups of homeless young adults (18-27 years)

| Subgroup | Description |
|---|--|
| Undocumented homeless young adults | Homeless people that are not documented, people for example who have gone through the asylum procedure without success and are now excluded from social service. |
| Migrant workers from Middle- and Eastern Europe | More migrant workers from Middle- and Eastern Europe come to the Netherlands to work. Since their housing contract is connected to their working contract, it is easy for them to lose their home (when they lose their jobs). Among this group, there are also people younger than 27 years old. For them finding a house is difficult, also because a relatively small social network and not speaking the Dutch language. |
| LGBT / LGBTQ+ | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex homeless youth. This group is, due to their sexual orientation, more vulnerable (self acceptance, bullying, violence and abuse). |
| (Ex) young adults in detention | Young adults who have just come out of detention. Difficulties include not only finding a house, but also an education or job and building up their social network. This group also has to deal with stigma relatively often as they are not only homeless, but also “criminal”. |

2.2 Routes to homelessness among young adults

It is important to mention that a long process precedes the moment a young adult becomes homeless. In this process, different factors can be distinguished:

- Personal factors (of the young adult);
- Risk factors that increase the risk of becoming homelessness;
- Factors of the system.

Table 7 shows these different factors.²²

Table 7 Different factors that can lead to homelessness (source: factsteet Movisie/SZN, 2020)

| Factors | Description | Explanation and examples |
|------------------|---|---|
| Personal factors | Complex multiple problems | Addiction, mental problems |
| | Relational problems | Domestic violence, divorce of parents, loss of parents |
| | Lack of a social network | Lack of a supportive social network to fall back on, no support or a network (and thus forced to handle their problems alone) |
| Risk factors | Nurture/education | Insecure attachment relationships, family conflict, domestic violence, abuse, loss of trust in one or both of the parents, growing up in a foster family, out-of-home-placement |
| | Family composition | Absence of the father, young mother, parents with addiction problems, parents who are lower educated, regular change of home address |
| | Education | Being bullied, leaving school early, negative influence of friends |
| | Life events | Trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, behavioural problems, depression, psychoses, use of drugs/alcohol, teenage pregnancy |
| | Financial position of parent(s) | Few financial means, social assistance benefit |
| System | Complex society | When young adults turn 18, they are responsible for their own situation (finances, living). It is however unlikely that these adults really understand the (complex) way it is organized. |
| | Compulsory (youth) care becomes voluntary | When young adults turn 18, they can refuse youth care (without understanding the risks of refusing it). Especially for vulnerable young adults, this can lead to problems. |
| | Cost-sharing standard (kostendelersnorm) | When a young adult older than 21 years lives at his or her parent(s), this can have financial consequences for the parent(s). ²³ |
| | Permanent address ²⁴ | A permanent address is needed to receive health insurance, student grants or social assistance benefit. |
| | Search period | If young adults apply for (social) benefits, there is a mandatory four week-period in which they must look for a job or education. In this period, they do not receive a benefit. |

²² Factsheet Movisie and Stichting Zwerfjongeren Nederland (2020), <https://www.movisie.nl/sites/movisie.nl/files/2020-03/Feiten-cijfers-dakthisloze-jongeren-Nederland.pdf>.

²³ The age of the cost-sharing standard will increase from 21 years to 27 years from 01-01-2023. <https://www.binnenlandsbestuur.nl/sociaal/nieuws/rutte-iv-leeftijdsgrens-kostendelersnorm-omhoog.19268133.lynk#:~:text=Rutte%20IV%3A%20leeftijdsgrens%20kostendelersnorm%20omhoog&text=Mensen%20met%20een%20bijstandsuitkering%20mogen,en%20ze%20naar%20werk%20begeleiden>.

²⁴ According to the Wet basisregistratie personen (BRP). However, since 01-01-2022 municipalities are obliged to register all people who do not have a residential address at a postal address.

Besides the factors mentioned above, there are also some other (structural) factors that play a role in homelessness among young adults²⁵:

- Very tight housing market (high rents, limited rooms/houses);
- The group of young adults is a group that is very dependent, both from a living perspective as from a working perspective.
 - **Living perspective:** a relatively high proportion of this group has a so-called flexible living (temporarily renting contracts, anti-squat living, student housing contracts). The risk that they have to leave their house in a short period of time among this group, is relatively large.
 - **Working perspective:** many temporary jobs and/or unstable working hours (0 hours contract for example).
- Relatively low income: many young adults are dependent on student finance and therefore cannot afford the (high) rents.

²⁵ Interview Rina Beers, 18 January 2022.

3 Possible solutions

3.1 Solutions

The right approach

To prevent homelessness among young adults, Movisie²⁶ distinguishes a number of effective elements.

Timely integral sustainable assistance

- Offer the right help in time: the longer someone lives in a homelessness situation, the greater the problems often become.
- Integral approach: focus on multiple problems as one integrated whole (for example an approach that focuses on housing, education and addiction)
- Sustainable support: homeless young adults have a great need for more stability and continuity in the help and support they receive.

The basics (finances, day activities and living)

Young adults feel better when their foundation is in order. In this context, the term “the big 5” is often used:

- Housing
- Education/job²⁷
- Finances
- An adult to fall back on
- Social network



Customization

Not every young adult is the same and therefore there is not one (equal) approach for all young adults. The approach has to match with the needs of the young adult. Lately, support of peers (“ervaringsdeskundigen”) is more often utilized in the approach and seems to be highly effective. Peers have the same (shared) experience, are a role model in a kind of a way and can provide social support.

A professional attitude

Many research shows that the attitude of the professional plays an important role in whether an approach works or not. Regardless of the content of the approach, it is important as a professional to focus on the following five elements:

- Investing in (mutual) trust;
- Patience and tenacity;
- Non-judgemental attitude.

²⁶ <https://www.movisie.nl/sites/movisie.nl/files/2019-11/Wat-werkt-bij-de-aanpak-van-dak-en-thuisloosheid-onder-jongeren.pdf>.

²⁷ According to Rina Beers from Valente, having a starting qualification for adults is most important. With a start qualification, they can find a job (and thus a meaningful day plan), they can gain experience and it has a positive influence on their social network.

Concrete possible (structural) solutions

In line of the Actieprogramma Dak- en Thuisloze jongeren (2019), various action lines have already been mentioned to reduce homelessness among young adults, focusing on among other things prevention, aftercare, financial security, personal development and housing.²⁸ Valente already mentions some concrete (structural) solutions, as is mentioned in table 8 below.²⁹

Table 8 Possible (structural) solutions to prevent homelessness among young adults (source: Valente)

| |
|--|
| Do not deregister young adults from the BRP (Basisregistratie Personen) without having arranged a new home address or postal address |
| Do not apply the cost-sharing standard to families with a minimum income or financial difficulties |
| Do not apply the four-week search period for assistance for homeless young adults |
| Make housing sharing by several young people of social housing widely possible for working young people, students and homeless young people, and use the Housing First approach. |
| Let people, entitled to social assistance in housing corporations or their own homes, rent out a room to homeless young people and students without cutting back on social assistance. |
| Do not allow any young adults to leave intramural youth care, detention or care institutions without a place to live and an income being arranged. |
| Put together a pool of employers, consisting of companies that work as suppliers for municipalities, governments, corporations and other organizations in social domain, and that are prepared to offer work-study places. |
| Designate a “father” or “mother” for each young adult in a municipality who will remain with them. As long as necessary, a civil servant or employee in the social domain stays with the young person, to encourage, listen, correct, consult, text, cry and celebrate success together. |
| Tackling the stigma around homelessness among young adults. |

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3.2 Inspiring examples and creative concepts

Many organizations focus on (reducing) homelessness among young adults, by creating innovative housing concepts and projects. A selection is shown below in table 9.

Table 9 Selection of concepts and projects focused on (prevention of) homelessness among young adults

| Name of project | Description |
|------------------------|---|
| Housing First Jongeren | Living concept for homeless youth. Housing First Jongeren provides homeless young adults directly housing without preconditions. Read more: https://www.limor.nl/housing-first-jongeren . |
| Bouwdepot | Bouwdepot gives young people with a care history a fixed monthly income for a year. With this budget they can work on personal goals (such as paying off debts, working on recovery, gaining work experience) and building their future. Read more: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> https://zwerfjongeren.nl/nieuwsbericht/bouwdepot-genomineerd-voor-de-nationale-jeugdhulprijzen-2021/ https://zwerfjongeren.nl/bestaanszekerheid/het-bouwdepot-werkt-en-daar-is-steeds-meer-aandacht-voor/ |

²⁸ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2019/03/14/actieprogramma-dak-en-thuisloze-jongeren-2019-2021>.

²⁹ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/actieplan-paul-blokhuis-nul-dakloze-jongeren-2021-federatie-opvang/>.

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Beelddepot | Homeless young people appear to suffer a lot from stigmatizing images. Contemporary images are desperately needed for better understanding, trust and better progressive policies. Read more: https://zwerfjongeren.nl/nieuwsbericht/het-juiste-perspectief-voor-dakloze-jongeren/ |
| Friends wonen | A housing concept for young adults: living together as “friends” in one shared apartment/house. Read more: https://www.platform31.nl/nieuws/friendswonen-een-goed-alternatief-voor-jongeren-uit-de-opvang |
| Goeie buur | A housing project that helps young people between the age of 18-27 years old to find a room. Before, they used to be homeless or may have lived in a foster family. The young adults come to live at SSH and also get a roommate/housemate, which is the first point of contact for the young adult. Read more: https://www.sshxl.nl/nl/goeie-buur |
| Huishonger | Hyper-temporary living for young homeless adults on vacant lots. Five future scenario’s have been made for these hyper-temporary living. Read more: http://huishonger.joesmanon.nl/ |
| Stimuleringsfonds creatieve industrie | 9 innovative concepts to combat homelessness among young people. Read more: https://dezwijger.nl/programma/een-thuis-voor-alle-jongeren . |

4 Must-read-list

Relevant Dutch laws, regulations and national programs

- Jeugdwet, <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0034925/2022-01-01>
- Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/zorg-en-ondersteuning-thuis/wmo-2015>
- Meerjarenagenda Beschermd Wonen en Maatschappelijke Opvang, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2018/05/24/meerjarenagenda-beschermd-wonen-en-maatschappelijke-opvang>
- Actieprogramma dak- en thuisloze jongeren (2019-2021), <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2019/03/14/actieprogramma-dak-en-thuisloze-jongeren-2019-2021>
- Partnership various (public) organization and government (Nederlands Jeugdinstituut, Movisie, Ingrado, Divosa, ExpEx, Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten (VNG), MBO Raad, Samenwerkingsorganisatie Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven (SBB), Jeugdzorg Nederland, central and local government), <https://www.16-27.nl>.

Statistics

- CBS (2021), characteristics of homeless people, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/cijfers/detail/84990NED?q=daklozen>.
- CBS, research among homeless people (2009-2018), <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/maatwerk/2020/04/vervolgonderzoek-daklozenstatistiek-2009-2018>.

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Relevant research, publications and (background) documents

- Monitor dak- en thuisloosheid (2021), <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2021/06/21/monitor-dak-en-thuisloosheid>.
- Divosa (2020), Maatwerk Participatiewet voor dak- en thuisloze jongeren, <https://www.divosa.nl/publicaties/maatwerk-participatiewet-voor-dak-en-thuisloze-jongeren>
- Research IVO, zicht op preventieve maatregelen om dakloosheid te voorkomen in Tilburg (2020), https://ivo.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Rapport-Routes-naar-dakloosheid_Tilburg.pdf.
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