

*The number of people experiencing homelessness has been on the rise in many OECD and EU countries in recent years (OECD, 2022<sup>[1]</sup>). At the same time, with the record number of new arrivals coming to OECD countries (OECD, 2023<sup>[2]</sup>) and the widespread lack of affordable housing across OECD and EU countries, the issue of migrants' housing is a pressing policy concern. The 2023 OECD-EU indicators of immigrant integration (OECD and EU, 2023<sup>[3]</sup>) have shown that, on average across the EU, the foreign-born are almost twice as likely to be at risk of poverty and social exclusion than the native-born. They are also twice as likely to live in deprived and overcrowded accommodation.*

*Lacking to date, however, is comparative information on the incidence of homelessness among migrants.*

*This brief, jointly produced by the **OECD Social Policy Division and the International Migration Division**, both of the Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, explores the intersection of these two phenomena. It reports available data on homelessness among migrants, outlines a number of methodological challenges to measuring and comparing such data across countries, presents the latest data on homelessness among migrants, and provides recommendations to strengthen the evidence base on homelessness among migrants.*

## Challenges to measuring homelessness among migrants in OECD and EU countries

### Key findings

- Comprehensive, comparable data on homelessness among migrants in OECD and EU countries do not exist. Fewer than half of OECD and EU countries report the share of migrants in national homelessness statistics. The other 20 countries do not report homelessness statistics disaggregated by migrant status.
- While most data on homelessness among migrants use citizenship as the basis of migrant status, some countries only include in official homelessness statistics migrants with legal residence, and/or professional and personal ties to the country.
- Many of the broader methodological challenges that stymie homelessness measurement and cross-country comparisons also affect the extent to which migrants are counted (or missed) in official homelessness statistics. These include differences in how countries define and measure homelessness, which likely result in an underestimate of homelessness generally, and among migrants.
- In addition to these general challenges, there are different cross-country approaches to data collection that are specific to the case of migrants – notably relating to asylum seekers and refugees. In 11 OECD and EU countries, official homelessness statistics explicitly include people staying in temporary accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees; by contrast, in at least 20 countries, official homelessness statistics exclude individuals staying in such accommodation.
- In countries for which disaggregated data on homelessness among migrants are available, estimates suggest that migrants are overrepresented among individuals experiencing homelessness. Data cannot, however, be readily compared across countries.
- To strengthen the evidence on homelessness among migrants, governments may consider relying on multiple, coordinated approaches to collect data on homelessness; expanding the types of surveyed accommodation and support services to include low-barrier services that are accessible to migrant populations; and, where feasible, including information on country of birth in homelessness data collection.

## Availability of data on homelessness among migrants

### ***National homelessness statistics are not systematically disaggregated by migrant status.***

Fewer than half of OECD and EU countries report the share of migrants in national homelessness statistics. Countries that report the share of migrants experiencing homelessness include Austria, Belgium<sup>1</sup>, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, United Kingdom (England)<sup>2</sup>, Germany, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, the Slovak Republic and Sweden.

By contrast, around 20 OECD and EU countries – Bulgaria, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, New Zealand, Switzerland, Türkiye, the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales) and the United States – do not report homelessness statistics disaggregated by migrant status.

### Methodological challenges to measuring and comparing data on homelessness among migrants

There are a range of methodological challenges to measuring and comparing data on homelessness among migrants. These include: i) cross-country differences in how migrants are defined in homelessness statistics, ii) generalised methodological challenges that complicate the measurement of homelessness overall (and also affect the measurement of homelessness among migrants), and iii) measurement challenges that are specific to the case of migrants. As a result, official statistics on homelessness are likely to underestimate the share of migrants experiencing homelessness and, by extension, the overall extent of people experiencing homelessness.

### ***In countries that report data on homelessness among migrants, citizenship is generally used as the basis of migrant status, with a few exceptions.***

Migrants are generally defined on the grounds of their foreign place of birth (foreign-born). However, because of lack of information on the country of birth (notably in administrative registers), migration status is often proxied by citizenship (foreign population): foreigners/the foreign population are not citizens of their host country (OECD, 2023[4]). Most countries that report data on migrants experiencing homelessness classify migrants as non-citizens of the country. Exceptions include:

- In Denmark, data on migrants experiencing homelessness only cover migrants with permanent residency; data on migrants without permanent residency are collected but not reported.
- In Finland, data on migrants experiencing homelessness cover individuals who are included in the population registry yet do not possess Finnish citizenship and whose mother tongue is not Finnish or Swedish.
- In Sweden, homelessness data only cover individuals experiencing homelessness with a valid residence permit and professional or personal ties with Sweden. Data distinguish between native-born and foreign-born.
- National homelessness statistics in Colombia distinguish between native-born and foreign-born individuals experiencing homelessness.
- National homelessness statistics in Norway consider migrants as individuals immigrating to Norway who were born abroad to two foreign-born parents and four foreign-born grandparents. Persons born in Norway, including those with non-Norwegian-born parents are not considered migrants.
- National homelessness statistics in Canada distinguish among immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants when referring to the condition in which individuals experiencing homelessness entered the country.
- National homelessness statistics in the Netherlands are disaggregated by the origin of people experiencing homelessness, along five categories: i) born in the Netherlands with both parents born in the Netherlands, ii) born in the Netherlands with at least one parent born in another European country, iii) born in the Netherlands with at least one parent born outside of Europe, iv) born in another European country, v) born outside Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> In Belgium, disaggregated migrant homeless statistics are available in some cities, following a common method through a census of service providers.

<sup>2</sup> Data for the United Kingdom are reported separately for each constituent country.

## ***Homelessness statistics do not cover all forms of homelessness and thus present a partial picture of homelessness – including homelessness among migrants.***

*Generalised methodological challenges to assessing homelessness, which also affect the measurement of homelessness among migrants*

There are a number of generalised methodological challenges to homelessness measurement that are not specific to the issue of migration. Nevertheless, these challenges result in official statistics representing only a partial picture of homelessness, and reinforce the need to exercise caution when undertaking cross-country comparisons of homelessness data (for further discussion, see (OECD, 2020<sup>[5]</sup>; OECD, 2022<sup>[1]</sup>).

First, there is no international harmonised definition of homelessness, and governments define and measure homelessness in different ways. The [ETHOS Light Typology](#), which is widely used to facilitate cross-comparison of homeless statistics, outlines six different types of homelessness, including, *inter alia*, people who are sleeping rough (ETHOS 1), staying in emergency accommodation (ETHOS 2) or temporary accommodation for the homeless (ETHOS 3), and staying temporarily with family or friends (ETHOS 6). While some countries adopt a narrow approach to defining and measuring homelessness at national level (e.g., Japan, including only individuals living rough), other definitions are much broader. This means that it is not always possible to meaningfully compare homelessness statistics across countries.

Second, approaches to collect data on homelessness vary, and some data collection approaches are more suited to capture certain experiences of homelessness than others. For instance, while street counts are often used to assess the number of people living rough (ETHOS 1), they do not systematically cover individuals experiencing homelessness who are service beneficiaries (e.g., staying in temporary accommodation for the homeless) (ETHOS 3) or doubled up with family or friends (ETHOS 6) – this is particularly relevant in the case of the many refugees from Ukraine who have found temporary shelter in OECD and EU countries among family, friends or other private accommodation.

Third, the reference period for data collection on homelessness differs across countries. While some countries collect data on homelessness at a given *point-in-time* (PIT), others collect data that refer to a continuous time period, which yields a so-called *flow/prevalence* estimate. Such data cannot be compared. Further, the frequency and consistency of data collection also pose challenges, as, depending on the country, homelessness data may be collected on a monthly, quarterly, annual, bi-annual basis – or at longer intervals. Such differences represent additional challenges to cross-country comparison.

As a result, with respect to data on migrants experiencing homelessness, some national homelessness statistics cover only one ETHOS category (e.g., migrants living rough), while others capture multiple ETHOS categories (e.g., migrants living rough, as well as migrants sleeping in emergency and/or accommodation). For instance, data in the United Kingdom (England) only cover migrants sleeping rough, whereas homelessness statistics in Canada cover migrants sleeping rough and staying in shelters.

### *Methodological challenges specific to the assessment of homelessness among migrants*

Additional methodological challenges exist that are specific to homelessness among migrants. This relates in particular to how homelessness data are collected.

Service-based methods – which rely on information on the clients/users of different services that may be accessed by people experiencing homelessness – are the most common approach to collect homelessness data in OECD and EU countries. However, the extent of the support services that are surveyed varies considerably across countries: in some cases, the services surveyed are restricted primarily to shelters and emergency accommodation for people experiencing homelessness; other service-based methods canvas a much broader range of services, to also include food banks, drop-in health clinics, and/or temporary accommodation for survivors of intimate partner violence.<sup>3</sup> Some migrants (especially those without a residence permit) may not have access to services and accommodation that provide

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to suggest that all individuals who access this broader set of services are necessarily homeless. However, canvassing a broader range of service providers can help to capture individuals experiencing homelessness who do not frequent homeless shelters, because they do not feel safe or welcome, or cannot otherwise access such services).

support to people experiencing homelessness, and upon which some homelessness statistics are based (Hermans et al., 2020<sup>[6]</sup>).

Relatedly, there are significant differences across countries in whether temporary accommodation for accommodation for asylum seekers and/or refugees are included in official homelessness statistics:

- At least 6 OECD and EU countries canvas temporary accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees as part of data collection for official homelessness statistics (Canada, Colombia, France, New Zealand, Portugal and Spain).<sup>4</sup>
- At least 2 countries canvas temporary accommodation for refugees (but not asylum seekers) as part of data collection for official homelessness statistics (Germany and Norway).
- Over 20 countries<sup>5</sup> exclude temporary accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees in data collection for official homelessness statistics (Austria, Chile, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden, Türkiye and the United States).

Finally, efforts to collect and report data on homelessness may not always yield comprehensive information about individuals' migration status. Individuals who collect the data – which may include, inter alia, volunteers at street counts or social service providers at homeless shelters, for instance – may not be equipped, instructed or willing to collect information about an individual's migration status, and/or they may not have specific expertise in dealing with migrants. (Homelessness Hub, 2023<sup>[7]</sup>; Develtere, 2022<sup>[8]</sup>). Language problems may further add to this.

Accordingly, official statistics on homelessness among migrants – where they exist – are likely to underestimate the share of migrants experiencing homelessness and, by extension, the overall extent of people experiencing homelessness.

### Latest data on homelessness among migrants

***The reported share of homelessness among migrants varies significantly across countries, but such data cannot be compared.***

The share of migrants experiencing homelessness relative to the total homeless population varies considerably from one country to another, and – for the reasons outlined in this brief – data cannot be readily compared across countries (Table 1).

In countries for which disaggregated data on homelessness among migrants are available, estimates suggest that migrants are overrepresented among individuals experiencing homelessness. However, due to the considerable methodological limitations discussed in this brief, and as related OECD work has shown, many other groups, including women, young people, etc. are also likely to be undercounted in official homelessness statistics (OECD, 2020<sup>[5]</sup>; OECD, 2022<sup>[1]</sup>; Coego et al., 2024<sup>[9]</sup>; Plouin and Bargu, 2023<sup>[10]</sup>).

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<sup>4</sup> At the time of writing, this information had not yet been validated for 4 countries.

<sup>5</sup> At the time of writing, this information had not yet been validated for at least 9 countries.

**Table 1. Share of migrants among people experiencing homelessness in OECD and EU countries**

Country	Share of migrants as % of total population <sup>e</sup>	Basis of migration determination in homelessness statistics	Share of migrants as % of total population experiencing homelessness <sup>a</sup>	Year	Source of homelessness data
Austria <sup>b</sup>	17.8%	Citizenship	Around 43% of people experiencing homelessness do not possess Austrian citizenship.	2020	<a href="#">Key figures on living conditions 2020</a>
Belgium <sup>c</sup>	17.1% (Gent) 20% (Liège)	Citizenship	In Gent, 54% of people experiencing homelessness do not possess Belgian citizenship. In Liège, nearly 34% of people experiencing homelessness do not possess Belgian citizenship.	2021	<a href="#">Census of Homeless People</a>
Canada	22%	Foreign place of birth	13% of people experiencing homelessness entered Canada as immigrants, refugees, or refugee claimants.	2022	<a href="#">Coordinated Point-in-Time Counts – “Everybody counts”</a>
Colombia	3.8%	Foreign place of birth	16% of people experiencing homelessness were born outside Colombia.	2021	<a href="#">Census of Street Dwellers</a>
Costa Rica	10.2%	Citizenship	Around 21% of people experiencing homelessness do not possess Costa Rican citizenship.	2019	<a href="#">Target Population Information System</a>
Denmark	9.6%	Citizenship	22% of people experiencing homelessness do not possess Danish citizenship. Official data only include migrants with permanent residency. Data on homelessness among migrants without permanent residency are collected, but not reported.	2022	<a href="#">Mapping of Homelessness in Denmark</a>
Finland	5.4%	Citizenship	24% of the homeless population “living alone” does not possess Finnish citizenship or does not have Finnish or Swedish as a mother tongue. Official data only include migrants who are included in the population register.	2023	<a href="#">Homelessness in Finland Report</a>
Germany	14.2%	Citizenship	28% of people experiencing homelessness did not have German citizenship.	2022	<a href="#">Homelessness Reporting Act</a>
Ireland	16%	Citizenship	Among people experiencing homelessness for whom information on citizenship is available (the non-response rate for this question was 53%), 35% do not possess Irish citizenship.	2022	<a href="#">Census of Population</a>
Italy	8.5%	Citizenship	38% of people experiencing homelessness did not have Italian citizenship.	2021	<a href="#">Permanent Census of Population and Housing</a>
Luxembourg	47.2%	Citizenship	Around 91% of the beneficiaries of the Winter Action Programme for the homeless did not have Luxembourgian citizenship. Of these, 47% of the beneficiaries were citizens of an EU country and around 44% were third-country citizens.	2023	<a href="#">Winter Action Program</a>
Netherlands	27%	Foreign-born or native-born with foreign-born parentage	42% of people experiencing homelessness were born outside the Netherlands. Among these, 34% were born outside of Europe and 8% were born in another European country.	2023	<a href="#">Homeless in the Netherlands Study</a>
Norway	10.8%	Citizenship	33% of people experiencing homelessness were born outside Norway. Of these, 4% were born in an EU country.	2020	<a href="#">Nationwide survey on homelessness</a>
Portugal	10.7%	Foreign-born	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Among people living rough (ETHOS 1), less than 10% do not possess the Portuguese citizenship in most regions (except in Algarve and Lisbon’s metropolitan area, where 17% and 26% of people living rough do not possess Portuguese citizenship, respectively).</li> <li>Among people living in temporary accommodation, in all regions, 32% do not possess the Portuguese citizenship with the exception of Alentejo, where 55% do not possess Portuguese citizenship.</li> </ul>	2022	<a href="#">Survey on the Characterization of People Experiencing Homelessness</a>
Spain	11.4%	Citizenship	50% of individuals using accommodation assistance centres and restoration centres do not possess Spanish citizenship.	2022	<a href="#">Survey of the homeless people EPSH</a>

Sweden	8.4%	Citizenship	43% of people experiencing homelessness were born outside Sweden.	2017	National mapping of homelessness
United Kingdom (England) <sup>d</sup>	10.6%	Citizenship	27% of people experiencing homelessness did not have UK citizenship. Out of these, 9% were EU nationals.	2023	<a href="#">Rough Sleeping Snapshot</a>

Note: (a) Data on the share of migrants as a % of the total population experiencing homelessness are not available for the following countries: Australia, Bulgaria, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Switzerland, Türkiye, the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales) or the United States. (b) A new edition of “Key figures on living conditions” was released in 2023, but data on the share of non-Austrian citizens among the total homeless population were last published in 2020. (c) Disaggregated migrant homeless statistics are available in Belgium in some cities, following a common method through a census of service providers. These data only refer to the cities of Gent and Liège and were collected by the King Baudouin Foundation; data for some other cities are available. (d) Data refer only to individuals who are living rough (ETHOS 1). (e) The information on the “share of migrants” in the second column refers to the definition of “migrants” in the third column, except for Costa Rica where it refers to the share of persons whose mother’s place of residence at time of birth was abroad.

Note by the Republic of Türkiye: The information in this document with reference to “Cyprus” relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Türkiye recognises the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of the United Nations, Türkiye shall preserve its position concerning the “Cyprus issue”. Note by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Union: The Republic of Cyprus is recognised by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Türkiye. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

Source: Migration data are based on the OECD International Migration Database, as well as national sources for Belgium, Costa Rica, United Kingdom (England) and the Netherlands. Data on homelessness among migrants are based on country responses to the 2023 OECD Questionnaire on Affordable and Social Housing (QuASH), the national sources indicated, as well as desk research.

## Recommendations to strengthen evidence on homelessness among migrants

The methodological challenges and limitations explored in this brief reinforce the need for more comprehensive, cross-nationally comparable data on homelessness among migrants. To strengthen the evidence on homelessness among migrants, governments could consider:

- **Expanding the methodological toolbox:** Relying on multiple, coordinated approaches to collect data on homelessness, which could include, *inter alia*, street counts, service-based methods, administrative data, and other approaches [ref. forthcoming Monitoring Framework].
- **Casting a wider net:** When using service-based methods, expanding the types of accommodation and support services that are surveyed as part of homelessness data collection, to ensure that low-barrier services accessible to migrant populations, notably those without a residence permit (such as food banks, soup kitchens, drop-in health centres, etc.) are included; by extension, systematically including temporary accommodation for migrants in efforts to collect data on homelessness.
- **Understanding specific experiences:** Where feasible, including information on country of birth in efforts to collect data on homelessness to understand the specific drivers, challenges and needs of migrants experiencing homelessness, whilst safeguarding data privacy.

## References

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## Useful links

<https://www.oecd.org/migration/>

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