Summary of key findings

Official statistical definition of homelessness (Table 1.CRI)

Costa Rica defines homelessness as "men, women or family groups, without distinction of age, gender, disability condition, addiction condition, migratory status, ethnic background, sexual diversity and/or religion, with absence of a home or dwelling, in addition of being in a total or partial dependency condition, that move and wander around territories according to the means of subsistence that it generates. Usually these people live, survive and stay overnight in the streets of the main cities of Costa Rica, where the commercial and transit conditions favour the options for daily survival through the activities of begging and constant search of waste that can be useful for them."

Latest national estimates of homelessness (Table 2.CRI)

- 4 530 individuals, representing 0.09% of the total population (2023)
- 12 % are women, 88 % are men
- Point-in-time count, based on the Target Population System (SIPO)
- ETHOS Light groups included:
    - ☒ ETHOS 1: Living on the streets, in public spaces
    - ☒ ETHOS 2: Emergency accommodation (e.g., shelters)
    - ☒ ETHOS 3: Accommodation for the homeless (e.g., hostels and women's refuges)
    - ☐ ETHOS 4: People in institutions
    - ☒ ETHOS 5: People in non-conventional dwellings (e.g., caravans, cars or tents)
    - ☐ ETHOS 6: Living temporarily with others in conventional housing (e.g., sofa-surfing)

Legal framework to collect data on homelessness (Table 3.CRI)

National Statistical System Law, Number 9694 establishes the legal obligation for Costa Rica to collect different statistics, including the national census and different population studies.

National homelessness strategy (Table 4.CRI)

- National Policy for the Comprehensive Care of People in Situation of Abandonment and Street Situation (2016-2026)

Approaches to collect data on homelessness (Table 5.CRI)

- Target Population Information System (SIPO): National registry of the number of individuals experiencing homelessness (Table 5.1.CRI).
- National census: The Census includes question on homelessness (Table 5.2.CRI).

Table 1.CRI. Official statistical definition of homelessness

Homelessness	According to the Public Policy for the Comprehensive Care of People in Neglect Condition and Homeless 2016, homelessness is defined as "Men, women or family groups, without distinction of age, gender, disability condition, addiction condition, migratory status, ethnic background, sexual diversity and/or religion, with absence of a home or dwelling, in addition of being in a total or partial dependency condition, that move and wander around territories according to the means of subsistence that it generates. Usually these people live, survive and stay overnight in the streets of the main cities of Costa Rica, where the commercial and transit conditions favor the options for daily survival through the activities of begging and constant search of waste that can be useful for them."

Table 2.CRI. Data on people experiencing homelessness

National data, presented according to ETHOS Light Typology

Headline estimate of homelessness (Individuals)	% of total population	ETHOS 1 People living rough	ETHOS 2 People in emergency accommodation	ETHOS 3 People in accommodation for the homeless	ETHOS 4 People living in institutions	ETHOS 5 People living in unconventional dwellings	ETHOS 6 People staying with family/friends
4 530 88% men 12% women	0.09%	Included in headline estimate but not specified	Included in headline estimate but not specified	Included in headline estimate but not specified	Not included	Not included	Not included

Type of count: Point-in-time ☒ Flow ☐ Year: 2023

Included in headline estimate: Children (<18) ☒

Temporary accommodation for: Asylum seekers ☒ Refugees ☒ Victims/survivors of domestic violence ☐

Note: Data refer to people experiencing homelessness registered in the Target Population System (SIPO) as of February 2023. According to the administrative data provided by the Social Assistance and Mixed Aid National (IMAS), through the Social Information Form for Institutionalised Persons or Persons Without a Fixed Address (FISI) and the Form of Social Information (FIS), a total of 1 366 persons under homelessness condition received assistance by IMAS in 2023.
Source: OECD Questionnaire on Affordable Housing (QuASH), 2023; Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social (2023), Target Population System (SIPO).

Table 3.CRI. Legal framework to collect data on homelessness

Law that governs data collection on homelessness	National Statistical System Law, Number 9694
Legal obligations	National Statistical System Law, Number 9694 establishes the legal obligation for Costa Rica to collect different statistics, including the national census and different population studies. Accordingly, the National Statistics and Censuses Institute (INEC) carries out the surveys and statistical tools to address this legal duty. [...]

Table 4.CRI. National homelessness strategy

National homelessness strategy in place	☒ Yes: National Policy for the Comprehensive Care of People in Situation of Abandonment and Street Situation (2016-2026) ☐ No, but regional and/or local strategies exist ☐ No

OECD

Co-funded by the European Union

Table 5.CRI. Approaches to collect data on homelessness

5.1.CRI. Target Population Information System (SIPO)

Description

Led by the Joint Social Welfare Institute (IMAS), the number of people experiencing homelessness are counted at the national level through the Social Information Form for Institutionalized Persons or Persons Without a Fixed Address (FISI) and the Form of Social Information (FIS). Surveyors accredited by the IMAS complete these forms (primarily the FISI) or assist people experiencing homelessness to complete the forms. This allows the IMAS to differentiate between people who live permanently in institutions or social welfare centres and those who live in the street and have no fixed address. The data is incorporated into the Target Population Information System (SIPO), which determines eligibility to government-sponsored programmes.

Type of count generated	**Methods**
☒ Point-in-time ☐ Flow (period) Note: Both PIT and flow data is collected	• Information management system on individuals experiencing homelessness
Lead authority(ies)	**Source(s) of information**
• Joint Social Welfare Institute (IMAS)	• Individuals experiencing homelessness are surveyed directly
Scope	**Depth of data**
• National level	• Data disaggregated by: sex, age, province, nationality, civil status, addictions.
Frequency	
• Not specified	

ETHOS Light groups included

☒ ETHOS 1: Living on the streets, in public spaces
☒ ETHOS 2: Emergency accommodation (e.g., shelters)
☒ ETHOS 3: Accommodation for the homeless (e.g., hostels and women's refuges)
☐ ETHOS 4: People in institutions
☐ ETHOS 5: People in non-conventional dwellings (e.g., caravans, cars or tents)
☐ ETHOS 6: Living temporarily with others in conventional housing (e.g., sofa-surfing)

Note: Each ETHOS Light group includes one or more sub-categories of living situations. ETHOS Light groups are considered as "included" in the data collection approach if at least one of the sub-categories is counted.

Notes

FISI and concepts

5.2.CRI. National Census

Description

The national census includes a question on homelessness.

Type of count generated ☒ Point-in-time ☐ Flow (period)	**Methods** • Population census
Lead authority(ies) • National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC)	**Source(s) of information** • Individuals experiencing homelessness respond to the questionnaire
Scope • National level	**Depth of data** • Key demographic characteristics
Frequency • Every 10 years	

ETHOS Light groups included

☒ ETHOS 1: Living on the streets, in public spaces
☒ ETHOS 2: Emergency accommodation (e.g., shelters)
☒ ETHOS 3: Accommodation for the homeless (e.g., hostels and women's refuges)
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☐ ETHOS 6: Living temporarily with others in conventional housing (e.g., sofa-surfing)

Note: Each ETHOS Light group includes one or more sub-categories of living situations. ETHOS Light groups are considered as "included" in the data collection approach if at least one of the sub-categories is counted.

Notes

2011 Census | INEC