Summary of key findings

Official statistical definition of homelessness (Table 1.USA)

Different statistical definitions of homelessness are used by various federal programmes and/or states. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a person is considered to be experiencing homelessness if they lack a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence. [see Table1.USA for the full definition]

Latest national estimates of homelessness and (Table 2.USA)

- 653 104 individuals, representing 0.19% of the total population (2023)
- 38.3% are women, 60.5% are men
- Point-in-time count, based on Annual Point-in-Time Count
- 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.USA)

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act regulates data collection undertaken by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Under the Act, communities participating in the Continuum of Care (CoC) programme – corresponding to a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals – must perform a point-in-time count of all people sheltered in emergency shelters, transitional housing and safe havens every year, and a point-in-time count of unsheltered individuals every other year (odd number years). Other departments are also subject to legislation mandating the collection of homelessness data. For example, the Department of Education requires that states collect and report data on students experiencing homelessness.

National homelessness strategy (Table 4.USA)

All In: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness

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

- Annual Point-in-Time Count: Communities under the Continuum of Care (CoC) programme are required conduct a count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness at least every other year, though more than 85% of CoC conduct both a sheltered and unsheltered count every year (Table 5.1.USA)
- Homeless Management Information System (HMIS): Communities collect data on persons served throughout the year; data are included in reports like HUD's Annual Homelessness Assessment Report Part 2. (Table 5.2.USA)
- Housing Inventory Count (HIC): Point-in-Time inventory of residential provider programmes (Table 5.3.USA)
- Census: Census workers collect information from people experiencing homelessness through in-person interviews or facility records (Table 5.4.USA).
- American Community Survey (ACS): Monthly rolling survey of communities on housing and homelessness, covering only the sheltered population (Table 5.5.USA)

Note: Table 5.USA presents data collection methods performed by HUD or the national census. However, other departments have additional methods to collect data on homelessness, which are not considered in Table 5.USA.

Table 1.USA. Official statistical definition of homelessness

Homelessness	According to the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH): Defining "Homeless" Final Rule, published in the federal register on December 5, 2011, homeless is defined as:
	(1) An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence, meaning:
	(i) An individual or family with a primary night-time residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground;
	(ii) An individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals); or
	(iii) An individual who is exiting an institution where he or she resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution;
	(2) An individual or family who will imminently lose their primary night-time residence, provided that:
	(i) The primary night-time residence will be lost within 14 days of the date of application for homeless assistance;
	(ii) No subsequent residence has been identified; and
	(iii) The individual or family lacks the resources or support networks, e.g., family, friends, faith-based or other social networks needed to obtain other permanent housing;
	(3) Unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age, or families with children and youth, who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition, but who:
	(i) Are defined as homeless under section 387 of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (42 U.S.C. 5732a), section 637 of the Head Start Act (42 U.S.C. 9832), section 41403 of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (42 U.S.C. 14043e–2), section 330(h) of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 254b(h)), section 3 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2012), section 17(b) of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 1786(b)), or section 725 of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a);
	(ii) Have not had a lease, ownership interest, or occupancy agreement in permanent housing at any time during the 60 days immediately preceding the date of application for homeless assistance;
	(iii) Have experienced persistent instability as measured by two moves or more during the 60-day period immediately preceding the date of applying for homeless assistance; and
	(iv) Can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time because of chronic disabilities, chronic physical health or mental health conditions, substance addiction, histories of domestic violence or childhood abuse (including neglect), the presence of a child or youth with a disability, or two or more barriers to employment, which include the lack of a high school degree or General Education Development (GED), illiteracy, low English proficiency, a history of incarceration or detention for criminal activity, and a history of unstable employment; or
	(4) Any individual or family who:
	(i) Is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a family member, including a child, that has either taken place within the individual's or family's primary night-time residence or has made the individual or family afraid to return to their primary night-time residence;
	(ii) Has no other residence; and
	(iii) Lacks the resources or support networks, e.g., family, friends, faith-based or other social networks, to obtain other permanent housing.

Table 2.USA. 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
653 104 60.5% men 38.3% women	0.19%	256 610[a]	396 494[b]	Included under ETHOS 2[b]	Not included	Included under ETHOS 1	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 ☒[c]

Note: The headline estimate is derived from data published by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Data collected by other departments are not included here. For example, the U.S. Department of Education collects data on students experiencing homelessness. For more information, see: www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/supporting-homeless-students/index.html. The gender breakdown does not sum to 100% since 1.2% of people experiencing homelessness reported in national statistics identify as transgender, a gender that is not singularly "female" or "male" or questioning.
 (a) Data refer to the unsheltered population. (b) Services for sheltered people experiencing homelessness (ETHOS 2 and 3) include a range of programmes from only night-by-night assistance (i.e., a bed) to a full-service hub. (c) The headline estimate of homelessness includes people staying in facilities restricted to women and/or families with children who are experiencing homelessness. However, these facilities are not exclusively designated for survivors of domestic violence. Therefore, the headline estimate does not consider all survivors of domestic violence experiencing homelessness.
Source: OECD Questionnaire on Affordable and Social Housing (QuASH), 2023; Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (2023), Annual Point-in-Time Count.

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

Law that governs data collection on homelessness	[The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, As Amended by S. 896 Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009](#)
Legal obligations	Communities under the Continuum of Care (CoC) programme[a] must perform a point-in-time count of all people experiencing homelessness sheltered in emergency shelters, transitional housing and safe havens every year, and a PIT count of unsheltered individuals every other year. Communities under the CoC programme must also use a homeless management information system (HMIS) and collect data from CoC and ESG funded projects. Other departments may also be subject to legislation which requires the collection of homelessness data. For example, the U.S. Department of Education also has a requirement to collect and report on data on students experiencing homelessness. *(a) The Continuum of Care (CoC) programme corresponds to a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals.*

Table 4.USA. National homelessness strategy

National homelessness strategy in place	☒ Yes: [All In: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness](#) ☐ No, but regional and/or local strategies exist ☐ No

Table 5.USA. Approaches to collect data on homelessness

45.1.USA. Annual Point-in-Time Count

Description

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires that communities under the Continuum of Care programme conduct an annual count of people experiencing homelessness who are unsheltered and sheltered in emergency shelters, transitional housing and safe havens on a single night. Each count is planned, coordinated and carried out locally, with national guidance, on a single night in January.

Type of count generated	Methods
☒ Point-in-time	• Street count
☐ Flow (period)	• Service-based method

Lead authority(ies)	Source(s) of information
• Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)	• Continuums of Care, which are local-level governments or non-profit entities, report data to HUD

Scope	Depth of data
• Continuum of Care level, state level, and national level	• Household type, demographics, and subpopulation categories (homeless veterans, homeless youth and people who are chronically homeless

Frequency	
• Annual	

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

Point-In-Time (PIT) Count | HUD.gov / U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

Point-in-Time Count and Housing Inventory Count - HUD Exchange

www.hudexchange.info/trainings/courses/point-in-time-pit-count-standards-and-methodologies-training/

5.2.USA. Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

Description

Communities collect information from projects serving families and individuals experiencing homelessness in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). The HMIS is a local information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to homeless individuals and families and persons at risk of homelessness. Each Continuum of Care (CoC) is responsible for selecting an HMIS software solution that complies with HUD's data collection, management and reporting standards. HMIS participation is a statutory requirement for recipients and subrecipients of the Continuum of Care programme and Emergency Solutions Grant funds. Data from HMIS are presented every year in the Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress.

Type of count generated	Methods
☐ Point-in-time ☒ Flow (period)	• Information management system on individuals experiencing homelessness
Lead authority(ies)	**Source(s) of information**
• Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)	• Continuums of Care, which are local-level governments or non-profit entities, report data to HUD
Scope	**Depth of data**
• National level	• Key demographic characteristics (name, date of birth, gender, race and ethnicity)
Frequency • Ongoing	• Enrolment in project data (includes transactional elements that change over time – such as an increase in income from benefit checks or a change in housing situation)

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

HMIS: Homeless Management Information System - HUD Exchange

5.3.USA. Housing Inventory Count (HIC)

Description

The Housing Inventory Count (HIC) is a Point-in-Time inventory of residential provider programmes within a Continuum of Care. The HIC provides an inventory of beds and units dedicated to serve people experiencing homelessness, and for permanent housing projects where people are homeless at entry. Each count is planned, coordinated and carried out locally during a week in January at the same time the CoC conducts its PIT count. The count is categorised by six programme types: Emergency shelter, transitional housing, rapid re-housing, safe haven, permanent supportive housing, and other permanent housing.

Type of count generated	Methods
☒ Point-in-time ☐ Flow (period)	• Service-based method

Lead authority(ies)	Source(s) of information
• Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)	• Continuums of Care, which are local-level governments or non-profit entities

Scope	Depth of data
• Continuum of Care level, state level, and national level	• Disaggregated by programme type (Emergency shelter, safe haven, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing and other permanent housing)
Frequency	
• Annual	

ETHOS Light groups included

No groups directly counted, but provides information on the availability of various types of shelter and housing resources.

Notes

[Point-in-Time Count and Housing Inventory Count - HUD Exchange](#)

5.4.USA. Census

Description

As part of the census, information is collected through in-person interviews or facility records on people living outdoors and at other locations where they are known to sleep and people at service locations. Census workers contact administrators to collaborate prior to the census to ensure the most accurate enumeration of people experiencing homelessness. The census counts people living outdoors, in emergency and transitional shelters, soup kitchens and stops where regularly scheduled mobile food vans distribute food. Service providers decide whether people at their locations will be counted by in-person interviews or facility records (paper listing of census response data for each person served or staying at the facility). The 2020 census did not provide an official count for people experiencing homelessness in the United States; however, it did enumerate people using homelessness services and people experiencing homelessness at targeted non-sheltered outside locations.

Type of count generated	**Methods**
☒ Point-in-time ☐ Flow (period)	• Population census
Lead authority(ies)	**Source(s) of information**
• US Census Bureau	• General Population
Scope	**Depth of data**
• National level	• Key demographic characteristics (age, sex, nationality, etc.)
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)
☒ 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

Census.gov

How the 2020 Census Counts People Experiencing Homelessness

Co-funded by
the European Union

5.5.USA. American Community Survey (ACS)

Description

The American Community Survey (ACS) is a monthly rolling survey of communities across the United States, including sheltered people experiencing homelessness. Areas with a population above 65 000 are surveyed annually, while five-year estimates are available for all areas. The survey is collected through mailed questionnaires, telephone interviews and visits from Census Bureau field representatives to roughly 3.5 million household addresses annually. The ACS only collects data on sheltered people experiencing homelessness.

Type of count generated	Methods
☐ Point-in-time ☒ Flow (period)	• Household Survey
Lead authority(ies)	**Source(s) of information**
• US Census Bureau	• General Population
Scope	**Depth of data**
• National level	• Key demographic characteristics (gender, race, ethnicity, etc.)
Frequency	
• Annual	

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

 American Community Survey (ACS) (census.gov)