

# Family Homelessness 101: New York City



In 2024, New York City's Department of Homeless Services (DHS) provided emergency shelter to a daily average of 62,401 individuals in families with children.<sup>1</sup> This included 19,148 families and more than 32,800 children, collectively making up over 71% of all individuals living in DHS shelters.<sup>2,i</sup>

## The Hidden Homeless

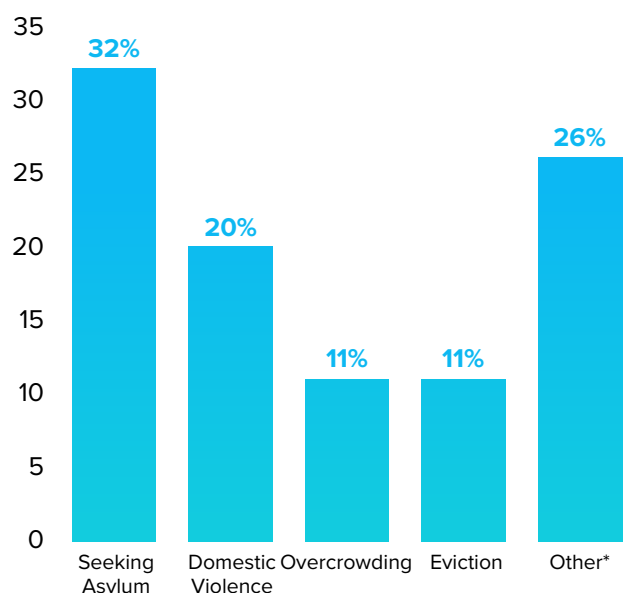
The City's right-to-shelter mandate ensures that all single adults and families seeking and found eligible for shelter will get a place to stay. Street homelessness usually involves single adults living without shelter and sleeping in public spaces or encampments, making their struggle highly visible in everyday life. In contrast, family homelessness in NYC is often less noticeable to the public because they stay in temporary shelters.

## Immediate Drivers of Family Homelessness in NYC

Several factors directly contribute to family homelessness in New York City.

- **Seeking Asylum:** Since the designation became a separate reported category in mid-to-late FY 2022, families seeking asylum have become the largest group entering shelter. Almost **32% of families entering DHS shelter cited seeking asylum as their reason** in FY 2023.<sup>3</sup>
- **Domestic Violence:** In FY 2023, **20% of families reported entering DHS shelter due to domestic violence.**<sup>4</sup>
- **Overcrowding:** Overcrowding is the condition of having more people in a home than what is safe or suitable. During FY 2023, **11% of families entering shelters did so due to overcrowding.**<sup>5</sup>
- **Eviction:** Eviction is the removal of someone from a property or home. Though it typically refers to the legal process of seeking a court order to remove a tenant,<sup>6</sup> it can broadly refer to both legal and illegal removals.<sup>7</sup> During FY 2023, **eviction accounted for 11% of families entering shelter.**<sup>8</sup>
- During FY 2023, other reasons that families gave for entering shelter included but were not limited to **immediately returning to shelter** after exiting, experiencing **unlivable conditions, discord, and a crime situation.**<sup>9</sup>

### Reasons for Shelter Entry Reported to DHS, FY 2023



Source: New Destiny Housing, *A Crisis Compounded*

\*As cited in the text, "Other reasons" for entering shelter include but are not limited to: immediately returning to shelter, unlivable conditions, and discord. For clarity, the graph shows individual reasons first and "Other reasons" last since it includes multiple responses.

i. NYC's shelter system consists of different segments, which vary based on the operating NYC agency and the population it serves (families with children, domestic violence survivors, people living with HIV/AIDS, etc.) The statistic given reflects ICPH's expertise and experience with families with children in DHS shelters. To learn more about the different segments of the shelter system in NYC, visit [City Limits' NYC shelter count](#).

Newly arrived families and immigrant families have always been part of the NYC shelter system. Prior to the large influx of families seeking asylum, however, domestic violence, overcrowding, eviction, and other challenges were more commonly cited as reasons families entered DHS shelter. In fact, around 41% of families entered DHS shelter due to domestic violence in FY 2018.<sup>10</sup>

## Impact on Children


Children in families experiencing homelessness often face significant instability. The challenges they experience include:

- **Academic Performance:** The lack of a stable home environment can result in interruptions to children's education when they experience homelessness. Children in shelter experience higher rates of absenteeism and lower test scores compared to their housed peers.<sup>11,12</sup>
- **Emotional and Social Stability:** Frequent moves and unstable living conditions can lead to increased emotional distress and difficulties maintaining social connections and relationships.<sup>13</sup>
- **Physical and Mental Health:** Children who experience homelessness can have negative health outcomes, such as an increased risk of developmental delays and behavioral problems, as well as chronic conditions associated with poor living conditions, like asthma, or malnutrition, such as diabetes.<sup>14,15</sup> Children who experience homelessness are also at a higher risk of mental health issues, such as anxiety or depression, than their stably housed peers.<sup>16</sup>

## Economic and Social Challenges

Families experiencing homelessness in NYC face numerous economic and social challenges, including:

- **Lack of Affordable Housing and High Rents:** High rental costs in NYC make it difficult for low-income families to secure stable housing. NYC is one of the most cost-burdened housing/rental markets and does not meet its current need of affordable housing.<sup>17,18</sup>
- **Job Insecurity:** Many families struggle with unstable employment and underemployment, which affects their ability to afford and maintain housing. Underemployment occurs when individuals work in jobs that do not fully utilize their skills, education, or availability. Many underemployed workers are stuck in part-time positions, significantly affecting their income, and often making it difficult to earn a living.<sup>19,20</sup> Other conditions such as a poor credit score, lack of proper interview attire, and health issues can further hinder their ability to secure well-paying jobs.<sup>21</sup>
- **Low Incomes:** Limited financial resources can hinder families' abilities to meet their basic needs. Families experiencing homelessness often face generational poverty or destabilizing events that reduce their income, such as domestic violence or eviction, which can force a family to relocate far from the adult's workplace.<sup>22</sup> Low incomes can also cause families to experience intense psychological stress, as the constant struggle to make ends meet can lead to anxiety and other mental health challenges.<sup>23</sup>
- **Food Insecurity:** Those experiencing housing instability are more likely to struggle with food insecurity, and the same is true in reverse.<sup>24</sup> As of January 2025, 24% of children in New York City were food insecure, meaning their families did not have enough to eat and did not necessarily know where they would obtain their next meal.<sup>25</sup> A lack of adequate nutrition can severely impact children's physical health, cognitive development, and overall well-being.<sup>26</sup>

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For questions or to schedule a presentation to a class or community group, please email [INFO@ICPH.org](mailto:INFO@ICPH.org).

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The Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness (ICPH) raises awareness and advances the public conversation about family homelessness through the production and dissemination of publications, resources, and other tools. Its public policy insights are informed by field-based practices in education, employment, and social services at family shelters.

For questions or to schedule meetings, presentations, or for media inquiries: [INFO@ICPH.org](mailto:INFO@ICPH.org)

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