

Family Homelessness 101: New York City



Institute for Children,
Poverty & Homelessness

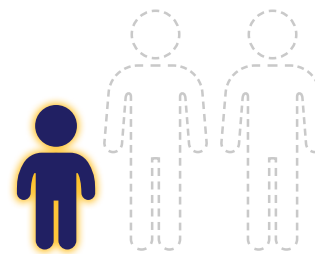
Fact Sheet | October 2026

In 2025, New York City's Department of Homeless Services (DHS) provided emergency shelter to a daily average of 58,301 individuals in families with children.¹ This included 18,057 families and more than 31,200 children, who collectively make up over 68% of all individuals living in DHS shelters.^{2,i}

For weekly updates on this data, see ICPH's [DHS Census Tracker](#).

The Hidden Homeless

The City's right-to-shelter mandate ensures that all single adults and families with children experiencing homelessness have a place to stay. Street homelessness (sometimes referred to as being unhoused) usually involves single individuals 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 because it is rarely encountered in public places. Families may be living in temporary shelters or living with others in inadequate, overcrowded spaces.



1 in 3
people in NYC
Department
of Homeless
Services shelters
are children.

Source: NYC Open Data, "DHS Daily Report," Data from May 19, 2026. Accessed May 21, 2026. https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Social-Services/DHS-Daily-Report/k46n-sa2m/about_data. Rate based on 2025 daily averages for the total number of children compared to total number of individuals.

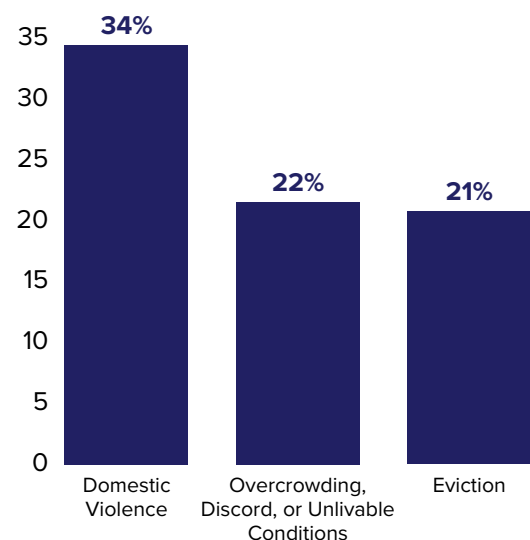
Immediate Drivers of Family Homelessness in NYC

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

- **Domestic Violence:** In Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25), which includes the time between July 2024 through June 2025, **34% of families reported entering DHS shelter due to domestic violence.**³
- **Overcrowding:** Overcrowding is the condition of having more people in a home than what is safe or suitable. During FY25, **22% of families entering shelters did so due to overcrowding, discord, or unlivable conditions.**⁴
- **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,⁵ it can broadly refer to both legal and illegal removals.⁶ During FY25, **eviction accounted for 21% of families entering shelter.**⁷

Other reasons families enter shelter might include loss of income, an illegal lockout, a fire, or financial hardship. In FY25, 23% of families entered shelter for reasons other than domestic violence, eviction, overcrowding, discord, or unlivable conditions.⁸

Top Reasons for Shelter Entry Reported to DHS (FY25)



Source: Coalition for the Homeless, "State of the Homeless: A Crisis Inherited, A Choice Ahead," 2026. <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/state-of-the-homeless-2026/#shelter-entrants>.

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 statistics presented reflect 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. <https://citylimits.org/homeless-shelter-tracker/>.

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 education. Students experiencing homelessness face higher rates of absenteeism and lower test scores compared to their housed peers.^{9,10,11}
- **Distance from Schools and Community:** Interruptions to education can also result from families being placed in shelters far from their communities and their children's schools. Over the first nine months of FY26, only 62% of families were initially placed in the same borough as their youngest child's school.¹²
- **Emotional and Social Stability:** Frequent moves and unstable living conditions can lead to increased emotional distress and difficulties maintaining social connections and relationships.¹³
- **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 conditions linked to poor nutrition, and chronic illnesses such as asthma or diabetes.^{14,15} Children who experience homelessness are also at higher risk of mental health issues, such as anxiety or depression, than their stably housed peers.¹⁶

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. New York is one of the most expensive housing and rental markets and does not meet the current need for affordable housing or sufficient housing production.^{17,18} In the NYC metro area, there are only 35 affordable and available units for every 100 extremely low-income earners.¹⁹
- **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 or education. Many underemployed workers are stuck in part-time positions, significantly affecting their income and often making it difficult to earn a living.^{20,21} 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.²²
- **Low Incomes:** Limited financial resources can hinder families' ability 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. These circumstances can force a family to relocate far from work.²³ Low incomes can also cause families to experience intense psychological stress. The constant struggle to make ends meet can lead to anxiety and other mental health challenges.²⁴
- **Food Insecurity:** People experiencing housing instability are more likely to struggle with food insecurity, and people experiencing food insecurity are also more likely to experience housing instability.²⁵ In NYC, 24% of children are food insecure, meaning they do not have enough to eat and do not necessarily know where they will obtain their next meal.²⁶ A lack of adequate nutrition can severely impact children's physical health, cognitive development, and overall well-being.²⁷
- **Child Care:** For parents experiencing homelessness, stable employment, saving, and the search for housing depend on access to consistent and affordable child care. The costs of child care can also cause financial hardship and push families further into poverty.^{28,29}

References

1. NYC Open Data, "DHS Daily Report," Data from January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025, Accessed May 21, 2026. https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Social-Services/DHS-Daily-Report/k46n-sa2m/about_data.
2. Ibid.
3. Coalition for the Homeless. "State of the Homeless 2026." June 2026. pp. 15. https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/State_ofthe_Homeless_2026.pdf. Note: The information from Coalition for the Homeless on reasons for homelessness is sourced from FOIL data provided by NYC Department of Homeless Services. The reasons for homelessness among families with children do not include New Arrivals. This data is reported as an aggregate.
4. Ibid.
5. New York City Housing Court. "Eviction." NYC Courts.gov. <https://www.nycourts.gov/new-york-city-housing-court/nyc-housing-court-eviction>.
6. Bauman, Tristia and Michael Santos. "Protect Tenants, Prevent Homelessness." National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2018. pp. 7. <https://homelesslaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ProtectTenants2018.pdf>.
7. Coalition for the Homeless. "State of the Homeless 2026." June 2026. pp. 15.
8. Ibid.
9. Advocates for Children of New York. "Educational Indicators for Students Experiencing Homelessness, 2024–2025." April 2026. pp. 3. https://advocatesforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/sth_educational_indicators_2025.pdf.
10. Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness. "Empty Seats: The Epidemic of Absenteeism among Homeless Elementary Students." ICPH.org, November 1, 2015. <https://www.icph.org/reports/empty-seats-the-epidemic-of-absenteeism-among-homeless-elementary-students/>.
11. Maria, Maribel, and Robyn Schwartz. "Homeless Students and Absenteeism." Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness, May 25, 2023. <https://www.icph.org/commentary/homeless-students-and-absenteeism/>.
12. Department of Homeless Services. "DHS Data Dashboard – Fiscal Year 2026." NYC.gov, accessed September 11, 2026. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/dashboard/tables/FY26-DHS-Data-Dashboard-Data.pdf>.
13. Dwomoh, Ivy, and Elaine A. Dinolfo. "Effects of Homelessness on Children." *Pediatric Review* 39, no. 10 (October 1, 2018): pg. 530–532. <https://publications.aap.org/pediatricsinreview/article-abstract/39/10/530/35075/Effects-of-Homelessness-on-Children?redirectedFrom=fulltext>.
14. Shonkoff, J. P., A. S. Garner, B. S. Siegel, M. I. Dobbins, M. F. Earls, A. S. Garner, L. McGuinn, J. Pascoe, and D. L. Wood. "The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress." *Pediatrics* 129, no. 1 (December 26, 2012): 232–46. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-2663>.
15. Strashun, Sabina, Saskia D'Sa, Deirdre Foley, Jessica Hannon, Anne-Marie Murphy, and Clodagh S. O'Gorman. "Physical Illnesses Associated with Childhood Homelessness: A Literature Review." *Irish Journal of Medical Science* 189, no. 4 (May 8, 2020): 1331–36. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11845-020-02233-3>.
16. Lynch, Sean, Julia Wood, William Livingood, Carmen Smotherman, Jeffrey Goldhagen, and David Wood. "Feasibility of Shelter-Based Mental Health Screening for Homeless Children." *Public Health Reports* 130, no. 1 (January 2015): 43–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003335491513000105>.
17. New York State Comptroller. "New Yorkers in Need: The Housing Insecurity Crisis." Office of Budget and Policy Analysis, February 2024. <https://www.osc.ny.gov/reports/new-yorkers-need-housing-insecurity-crisis>.
18. New York State Comptroller. "New Yorkers in Need: Homelessness in New York State." Office of Budget and Policy Analysis, January 2025. <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/pdf/new-yorkers-in-need-homelessness-nys.pdf>.
19. Emmanuel, Dan, Raquel Harati, Esther Colón-Bermúdez, and Tyler Eutsler. "The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes." National Low Income Housing Coalition, March 2026. pp. 26. <https://nlihc.org/gap>.
20. Office of the New York State Comptroller. "New York's Labor Force: Assessing 10-Year Trends and Pandemic Setbacks." Office of Budget and Policy Analysis, November 2022. pp. 10–11. <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/pdf/new-york-labor-force-2022.pdf>.
21. Collyer, Sophie, Christopher Wimer, and Matthew Maury. "Shortchanged: Underemployment in New York City." Robin Hood Foundation and Columbia University, October 2017. https://robinhood.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/POVERTY_TRACKER_REPORT7.pdf.
22. Bharat, Nisha, Jenna Cicalatello, Emily Guo, and Vennela Vallabhaneni. "Homelessness and Job Security: Challenges and Interventions." University of Michigan School of Public Health, May 11, 2020. <https://sph.umich.edu/pursuit/2020posts/homelessness-and-job-security-challenges-and-interventions.html>.
23. Bauman, Tristia and Michael Santos. "Protect Tenants, Prevent Homelessness." 2018.
24. Ridley, Matthew, Gautam Rao, Frank Schilbach and Vikram Patel. "Poverty, Depression, and Anxiety: Causal Evidence and Mechanisms." *Science* 370, no. 6522 (May 1, 2020). <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aay0214>.
25. City Harvest. "The Hidden Cost of Living: A Memo on How Housing Instability Drives Food Insecurity in NYC." City Harvest and NYU Food Environment and Policy Research Coalition, January 2025. pp. 1. <https://www.cityharvest.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/The-Hidden-Cost-of-Living-A-Memo-on-how-Housing-Instability-Drives-Food-Insecurity-in-NYC.pdf>.
26. Feeding America. "Food Insecurity Among the Overall Population in the Food Bank for New York City Service Area." Feedingamerica.org, 2025. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2023/child/new-york/organization/food-bank-for-new-york-city>.
27. Meisenheimer, Melanie. "Food Insecurity in Early Childhood." Center for the Study of Social Policy, August 26, 2018. pp. 3. <https://cssp.org/resource/food-insecurity-early-childhood/>.
28. Ross, Schuyler, Christopher Wimer, Sophie Collyer, and Yajun Jia. "Spotlight On: Child Care Hardship among New York City Parents." Robin Hood and Columbia University, May 2026. <https://robinhood.org/reports/poverty-tracker-ec-spotlight-on-child-care-hardship/>.
29. Vinh, Ryan, Danielle Wilson, Christopher Wimer, and Sophie Collyer. "Universal Child Care as Anti-Poverty Policy: Assessing the Potential Impacts of Universal 2-K and 3-K." Robin Hood and Columbia University, May 2026. <https://robinhood.org/reports/poverty-tracker-ec-universal-child-care-as-anti-poverty-policy/>.

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

(212) 358-8086
ICPH.org

 ICPH_org

 ICPHorg

 Institute for Children and Poverty