



# CENSUS 2022

## A Profile of Homeless Persons in South Africa, 2022



IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH DATA ECOSYSTEMS



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Statistics South Africa  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



# **A Profile of Homeless Persons in South Africa, 2022**

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACRONYM/ ABBREVIATION	DESCRIPTION
CAPI	Computer-assisted personal interview
CATI	Computer-assisted telephonic interview
CAWI	Computer-assisted web interview
COVID	Coronavirus disease
DSD	Department of Social Development
EA	Enumeration area
GIF	Geospatial Information Frame
ICESR	International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
IGH	Institute of Global Homelessness
IOL	Independent Online
IRDP	Integrated Residential Development Programme
ISUP	Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NDP	National Development Plan
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAPI	Paper and pen personal interviews
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDI	Special dwelling institutions
Stats Act	Statistics Act No. 6 of 1999
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Fund
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNSTATS	United Nations Statistics Division
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

## FOREWORD

Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) has released a number of Census 2022 thematic reports, and the report on homelessness is one of them, aimed at providing valuable insights into this growing phenomenon. Key findings on the prevalence of homelessness by province, location, sex, age, population group as well as reasons for homelessness are profiled. The information profiled in this report provides empirical evidence to inform appropriate policies and interventions to address and manage homelessness by focusing on specific groups such as youth, children, women and families.

The findings show that the prevalence of homelessness is less than 1%, estimated at 0,09% nationally. Over the period 1996–2022, there has been an upward trend in the number of homeless persons (from 13 135 in 1996 to 55 719 in 2022). The results show that homelessness varies across the nine provinces, with Gauteng having the largest share of homeless persons at 46%; it is less prevalent in the Northern Cape and Mpumalanga at 1,1% and 2,3% respectively. Looking at homelessness at district level, it is noted that homelessness was more prevalent in metropolitan areas compared with non-metropolitan areas (74,1% and 25,9% respectively). Of the eight metropolitan areas, the City of Tshwane recorded the largest share of homeless persons (18,1%), followed by the City of Johannesburg (15,6%). The Nelson Mandela Bay metropolitan area recorded the lowest proportion of homeless persons (2,7%).

Homeless persons were categorised into two groups, those that lived on the streets – also termed roofless – and those that were in shelters, with the former constituting about 71% and the latter 29,2%. The results showed that 7 in 10 homeless persons (70,8%) were roofless compared with homeless persons in shelters.

Findings on demographic characteristics show that homelessness is more prevalent among males compared with females. In Census 2022, 7 in 10 (70,1%) homeless persons were male. Looking at age, homeless persons were largely adults (44,6%) and youth (43,8%). Smaller proportions of the homeless population were children aged 0–14 at 5% and older persons aged 60 years and older at 7%.

Population group variations show that homelessness was more prevalent among black Africans (76,7%) compared with other population groups. It was also noticed that the majority of homeless persons were unmarried (84,5%). Migration patterns show Gauteng as the primary destination for both internal and international migrants, with Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as the top countries of origin for homeless foreign nationals.

The cause of homelessness in South Africa has been explored for the first time in Census 2022. Economic factors such as unemployment and lack of income, along with family-related issues (disputes, death and dissolution) and substance abuse were identified as the main drivers of homelessness in South Africa.

Sex variations in reasons for homelessness showed that the majority of women (78,4%) cited economic reasons, a percentage above the national average of 62,5%. The findings suggest that for interventions on



addressing homelessness to be effective, the focus must be on creating employment opportunities, income-generating initiatives, and ensuring equal access to housing.



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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Homelessness is a known global phenomenon, more prevalent in cities and towns, affecting persons of all races in developed and developing countries. Homeless persons remain one of the most vulnerable groups, with extensive needs ranging from food and clothing to basic services such as bathing facilities and access to primary health care. A myriad of vulnerabilities put the lives of homeless persons in danger on a daily basis.

Many negative outcomes have been reported as a result of homelessness, including a negative impact on physical health, worsening of mental illnesses, substance abuse and negative outcomes for children and youth born on the streets (Hall, 2019).

From a historical perspective, homelessness in South Africa is inextricably linked with the lingering colonial and apartheid legacies of migrant labour, controlled urbanisation policies and the creation of racially segregated residential areas that resulted in huge housing backlogs. The literature shows that South African history left a heirloom that is hard to eradicate, including homelessness attributed to several socio-political factors such as the forceful removal of people from their land that in turn led to landlessness, housing backlog, migration and urbanisation, unemployment, broken families and crime, etc. (Naidoo, V., 2010; Maverick, 2024; Cross & Seager, 2010). Despite the apartheid era having ended three decades ago and the government's continued efforts to address land and housing issues, homelessness continues to be a problem (Moyo, et al., 2015). Furthermore, homelessness has been associated with multiple detrimental health, safety, economic, social isolation, and low self-esteem outcomes for the person experiencing it (Hopkins, et al., 2024; Fornaro, et al., 2022). Consequently, the impact of homelessness does not only end at the person who is homeless, but also impacts society at large.

Studies continue to highlight the direct and indirect costs of homelessness linked to affected individuals and society at large, including municipalities paying for shelters, the cost of homeless persons using health services, policing services and the criminal justice system. It is argued that chronic homelessness is thus costlier to government and other private institutions (Ricord, et al., 2022; Pleace, 2015; Culhane, et al., 2002; IOL, 2024; TheLancet, 2023).

Addressing homelessness is not easy due to various reasons, including lack of reliable statistics, inadequate policies and interventions, limited resources, and lack of standardised definitions at global and national levels. Research has shown that countries with effective programmes in addressing homelessness have the following in place: historical data and collect data frequently; better systems of data collection and information sharing between service providers; targeted prevention measures such as looking for people "at risk"; and "housing first initiatives" (Flock & Benjamin, 2019). It is argued that successful homelessness programmes are also those that blend and combine approaches, taking into consideration the voices of those with lived experiences in homelessness. Data on some of the countries that conduct frequent counts of the homeless population

include Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia and Japan. It is no wonder that these countries have documented best practices in addressing homelessness (OECD, 2024).

In South Africa, information on homelessness is collected as part of the population census count, and censuses remain one of the primary sources of data on homelessness. Censuses are also critical vehicles in harmonising the measurement and collection of data on homelessness to inform national and global policy- and decision-making (Casey & Stazen, 2021). Censuses 1996, 2001 and 2011 were conducted using traditional methods of paper and pencil whilst Census 2022 was the first digital census. Conducting a digital census transformed processes and operations previously utilised in South African censuses, including cartography (census mapping), questionnaire development, data collection, data processing, data analysis and dissemination. Census digitisation offered an opportunity for efficient questionnaire development methods, leading to enhanced and improved questionnaire design.

South Africa conducts a *de facto* census – the population is counted based on where they were found on the census reference night. This approach translates into the use of different types of data collection tools/questionnaires, each set administered to a targeted group. In Census 2022, the four groups were:

- the population that live as households;
- the population living in special dwelling institutions (SDIs);
- the transient population – persons who were on the move during the census night and did not return to their normal place of residence the following day (e.g. persons leaving the country on the census night); and
- the homeless population – persons with no form of shelter on the reference night and no known residential address, including those who were accommodated in tents erected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 1.2 Purpose of this report

This report profiles persons who were homeless at the time of Census 2022, their demographic characteristics, and reasons for homelessness. Specific objectives of the report include:

- to profile the prevalence of homelessness in South Africa;
- to profile characteristics of homeless persons; and
- to explore the root causes of homelessness in South Africa.

This information is paramount in providing empirical evidence to be considered when designing and implementing appropriate policies, interventions, programmes and guidelines on homelessness. Indicators profiled in this report will thus go a long way in informing differentiated programmes, for example those linked to the youth and older persons. Equally, rehabilitation programmes that are age- and gender-specific need to take into account factors such as geographical locations where homelessness is more prevalent, and addressing specific causes of homelessness among specific groups.

### 1.3 Policy and legislation addressing homelessness

“Homelessness is regarded as a profound assault on dignity, social inclusion and the right to life. It is a prima facie violation of the right to housing and violates a number of other human rights in addition to the right to life, including non-discrimination, health, water and sanitation, security of the person and freedom from cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment.” (UN, 2019). The global development agenda on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) addresses the development and transformational needs of various persons, particularly vulnerable groups such as homeless persons. Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESR) states that every individual has the “right to an adequate standard of living, including basic income, food, housing, water, sanitation and clothing and the continuous improvement of living conditions” (Programme on Women’s Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2015). However, one of the critiques of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) indicators was the exclusion of homeless persons in household-based surveys due to the design and methods of such surveys (Carr-Hill, 2013). Although none of the 17 SDGs specifically address homelessness, homelessness is relevant to at least three SDGs (SDG 1, 3 and 11). SDG 1 aims to eradicate poverty and all its forms. SDG Indicator 1.4.1 refers to the “proportion of the population living in households with access to basic services”. Poverty has been reported to be the root cause of homelessness globally. Therefore, measuring and monitoring poverty without considering the homeless population will not be accurate (UN-Habitat, 2021). While SDG 3 aims to promote well-being and healthy lives for all, studies have shown that the health and well-being of homeless persons are always at risk due to exposure to harsh conditions. One of the studies argued that homelessness leads to illnesses both physical and mental (Hopkins, et al., 2024). Other researchers found that, at times, illnesses cause people to lose their jobs and family members, resulting in homelessness (Seager & Tamasane, 2010; Olusola & Ademola, 2003).

In addition, SDG 11 aimed at making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable indirectly touches on the subject of homelessness. Target 11.1 further states that member states must ensure “access for all”, including homeless persons, to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums. Being homeless is a clear state of no access to housing and therefore no basic services (UN-Habitat, 2021).

In June 2020 the UN Economic and Social Council adopted a resolution where homelessness was an issue deserving deep attention by the UN (UNESCO, 2020). This resolution acknowledges that structural factors such as poverty, climate change, health, and human rights are the main drivers of homelessness. The resolution recommends that homelessness “needs to be addressed through urgent national, multilateral and global responses” (Casey & Stazen, 2021) . This resolution paved a positive way for countries to strengthen their efforts in addressing homelessness. Data play a crucial role in measuring efforts and progress towards addressing homelessness.

The right to adequate housing is one of the most recognised basic human rights outlined in the South African Constitution. Moreover, the National Development Plan 2030 advocates for a better life for all.

The legal framework for housing in South Africa includes the Constitution (Bill of Rights section 26), Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (1994), Housing Act 107 of 1997, Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act 19 of 1998, Housing Consumers Protection Measures Act 95 of 1998 (amended by Act 27 of 1999), Rental Housing Act 50 of 1999 (amended by Act 43 of 2007), Housing Development Agency Act 23 of 2008, Social Housing Act 16 of 2008, and the Integrated Residential Development Programme (IRDP). At national and local planning levels, efforts are being made to have policies on homelessness that are evidence-based. There have been a number of initiatives made by metropolitan areas such as the City of Cape Town and City of Tshwane, and other metropolitan areas are working towards similar policies (Finch, 2013; City of Tshwane, 2015).

Efforts to deal with homelessness are underway in South Africa, supported by evidence of social housing programmes that are meant to provide affordable housing to low-income households and improve the living conditions of those in informal settlements. It is estimated that over 3,3 million low-cost homes have been built in South Africa (Marutlulle, 2021). In November 2023, the Department of Social Development (DSD) commissioned the development of a national homelessness policy in South Africa (Groenewald, et al., 2023). Currently, the Green Paper on Homelessness in South Africa is under discussion. In addition, DSD funds or provides emergency shelters for people finding themselves homeless due to situations in their lives, and there are other welfare programmes meant to aid the poor in South Africa.

#### **1.4 The concept of homelessness**

Defining homelessness internationally has been abstract. This has led to various countries, agencies and institutions using their own definitions for the purposes of their work. This has led to difficulties in comparing indicators on homelessness. Data collected globally further use different methods, scope and frequency. However, efforts to standardise the definition are in progress in some European countries, which may form a foundation for other regions to follow suit (OECD, 2020). The Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH) worked towards addressing the definition predicament in 2015 by working with their partners globally to develop a global framework for conceptualising and measuring homelessness (IGH, 2019). (Tipple & Speak, 2005) explored empirical context against which it is possible to give a unique answer to the question of who is homeless or what homelessness is. They then define a “home” as a place where a person can establish meaningful social relations with others through entertaining them in his/her own space, or where the person can withdraw from such relationships. That is, they view a home as a place where a person can define the space as their own, where they can control its form and shape. The homeless condition is then the corollary of a home as explained above.

The definition of homeless slightly changed in the last four censuses. In Censuses 1996, 2001 and 2011 the definition of homeless remained the same, defined as “persons who had no form of shelter on census night and no known residential address”. Census 2022 slightly expanded the definition to include homeless persons counted in shelters. This change was informed by international standards for measuring homelessness. At a global level, the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSTATS, 2009) recommended the grouping of homeless persons into two broad categories:

- a) Primary homelessness (or rooflessness): This category includes persons living on the streets or without a shelter or living quarters.
- b) Secondary homelessness: This category may include persons with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation (including dwellings, shelters or other living quarters), and persons usually resident in long-term 'transitional' shelters or similar arrangements for the homeless. This category also includes persons living in private dwellings but reporting 'no usual address' on their census form.

Other scholars in South Africa offer broader views on the concept of homelessness, indicating that homelessness incorporates lack of and poor quality of shelter. Other reports argue that homelessness in South Africa is more of a systematic issue than an individual concept. (Obioha, 2019) argued that definitions offered by international institutions do not conform to the situations of homelessness in developing countries like South Africa. In South Africa, a homeless person does not have a permanent primary residence, they live in a building or structures that they have no right over, live on the streets, occupy a room in a motel, sleep in a vehicle, or live in any other unstable or non-permanent situation.

Research has shown a rise in the number of homeless persons in South Africa (Naidoo, 2010; Hawker, 2007; Summit, 2015). This upward trend in the prevalence of homelessness has been attributed to rapid urbanisation, poverty and inadequate housing (Bose, et al., 2023; Akinluyi & Adedokun, 2014). It is predicted that 7,8 million people will be living in cities, and this will almost double in the year 2050 (UNDP, 2022). This will further put pressure on service delivery, which is already grappling with the influx of urban dwellers. It is also argued that urban "gentrification" has consequences such as rising property values and rental rates, which in turn push low-income households into perilous living arrangements including squatter settlements and homelessness (Chamie, 2017). People move to big cities in search of jobs and other economic opportunities only to find themselves homeless and poor (Akinluyi & Adedokun, 2014). Cities have limited capacity to deal with large inflows of low-skilled migrants and therefore, governments are overwhelmed, leading to poor or lack of services of basic needs such as housing and other resources.

## **1.5 How the homeless were counted**

Statistics South Africa only collects data on the homeless population during population and housing censuses. Traditionally, homeless persons were counted on census night. However, in Census 2022, due to technological challenges on the census night, counting homeless persons could not be completed as planned. For most provinces, the counting of homeless persons thus continued during the data collection period in February–May 2022.

During Census 2022 planning, provincial offices identified hotspots for homeless persons to ensure a complete count. Confirmation of all hotspots was done before census enumeration commenced, and this was to ensure that enumerators covered targeted places to count this subpopulation without omission or duplication. Fieldworkers/enumerators were to ensure all areas including streets/doorways/in front of shops/pavements; under bridges; parks; river banks; dumping sites; veld/bush; abandoned buildings/vehicles; encampments; and

other places that are not meant for human habitation were covered. Homeless persons counted in such areas are referred to as “roofless homeless persons” throughout this report.

The enumeration of homeless persons in shelters was conducted using a short electronic questionnaire for special dwelling institutions (SDIs). Shelters for homeless persons formed part of SDIs. By definition, SDIs are establishments that provide a communal type of accommodation where people sleep over on the reference night, differentiated by length of stay (duration) and service provision, and are generally available to people for reasons of employment, study, special needs, legal requirement or recreation. These include shelters for homeless persons.

Whilst roofless homeless persons were counted using individual questionnaires, where each person was enumerated on their own questionnaire, those in shelters were counted using the questionnaire for institutions (SDIs). Some of the differences between the two questionnaires are highlighted in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1 – Data items and questionnaire type**

Homeless questionnaire	Special dwelling institutions (SDIs) questionnaire
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Type of homeless location</li> <li>- Name and surname</li> <li>- Sex</li> <li>- Age</li> <li>- Population group</li> <li>- Marital status</li> <li>- Province of birth</li> <li>- Citizenship</li> <li>- Highest level of education</li> <li>- Reasons for homelessness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Name and surname</li> <li>- Sex</li> <li>- Age</li> <li>- Population group</li> </ul>

**1.6 Limitation on data**

Although there have been improvements in the methods and questionnaire development to inform the measurement of homelessness in South African censuses, data gaps still exist. For example, only homeless persons who were counted on the street were able to provide information on reasons for homelessness and their level of education. However, homeless persons counted from shelters could not provide this information due to differences in questionnaires applicable to each subpopulation. The population in collective living quarters – including shelters – only provided information on their demographics such as age, sex and population group.

Another gap in the census data is that of users not being able to identify families and households that are homeless. The current census methodology of counting homeless persons allows for the administration of individual questionnaires to homeless persons. That is, every person who was homeless was counted using a separate questionnaire. This translates into the inability to link persons as a household or family even if some were related as husband and wife or mother and children. Research in other countries has shown that there is an emerging phenomenon of households residing on the streets. Future censuses need to account for such households and their living circumstances to devise adequate interventions.

## **1.7 Layout of the report**

Chapter One of the report provides background on homelessness, the impact of homelessness, legislation and policy framework, and international guidelines on housing. These are used as a basis to monitor and measure the progress made in reducing homelessness. Chapter One also presents some of the existing definitions of homelessness and further provides methodologies used in censuses for the enumeration of the homeless population in South Africa. Chapter Two profiles locations where the homeless were found and the demographics and other socio-economic characteristics of homeless persons, whilst Chapter Three profiles the migration of homeless persons. Chapter Four looks at reasons for homelessness and Chapter Five presents a summary of key findings.



## **CHAPTER TWO: PREVALENCE OF HOMELESSNESS**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The focal point of this chapter is to profile key findings on the prevalence of homelessness by location, sex, age, population group and education, among other parameters. It covers indicators such as median age, population group variations, marital status and level of education. The information provides empirical evidence to inform appropriate policies and interventions to address and manage homelessness, focusing on specific groups such as the youth, children, women and families.

### **2.2 Trends in homelessness**

The results presented in Table 2.1 provide trends in homelessness in the last two decades based on census data. Censuses remain the only data source that provides a useful snapshot of homelessness at national, provincial and district levels. Generally, South Africa recorded a substantial increase in the number of homeless persons (from 13 135 in Census 1996 to 55 719 in Census 2022), with prevalence of homelessness at 0,03% in 1996 and 0,09% in 2022 respectively. The results showed that both the number and share of persons experiencing homelessness increased over the period 1996–2022.

**Table 2.1 – Population size by questionnaire type, Censuses 1996, 2001, 2011 and 2022**

	Census 1996		Census 2001		Census 2011		Census 2022	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Household-based population	39 798 523	98,07	44 295 046	98,83	50 961 443	98,44	61 367 659	98,94
Institution-based population	771 915	1,90	509 909	1,14	746 050	1,44	601 502	0,97
<b>Homeless population</b>	<b>13 135</b>	<b>0,03</b>	<b>14 823</b>	<b>0,03</b>	<b>39 713</b>	<b>0,08</b>	<b>55 719</b>	<b>0,09</b>
Transient population	-	-	-	-	23 354	0,05	2 623	0,00
<b>South Africa</b>	<b>40 583 573</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>44 819 778</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>51 770 560</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>62 027 503</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: Census 1996, 2001, 2011 and 2022.

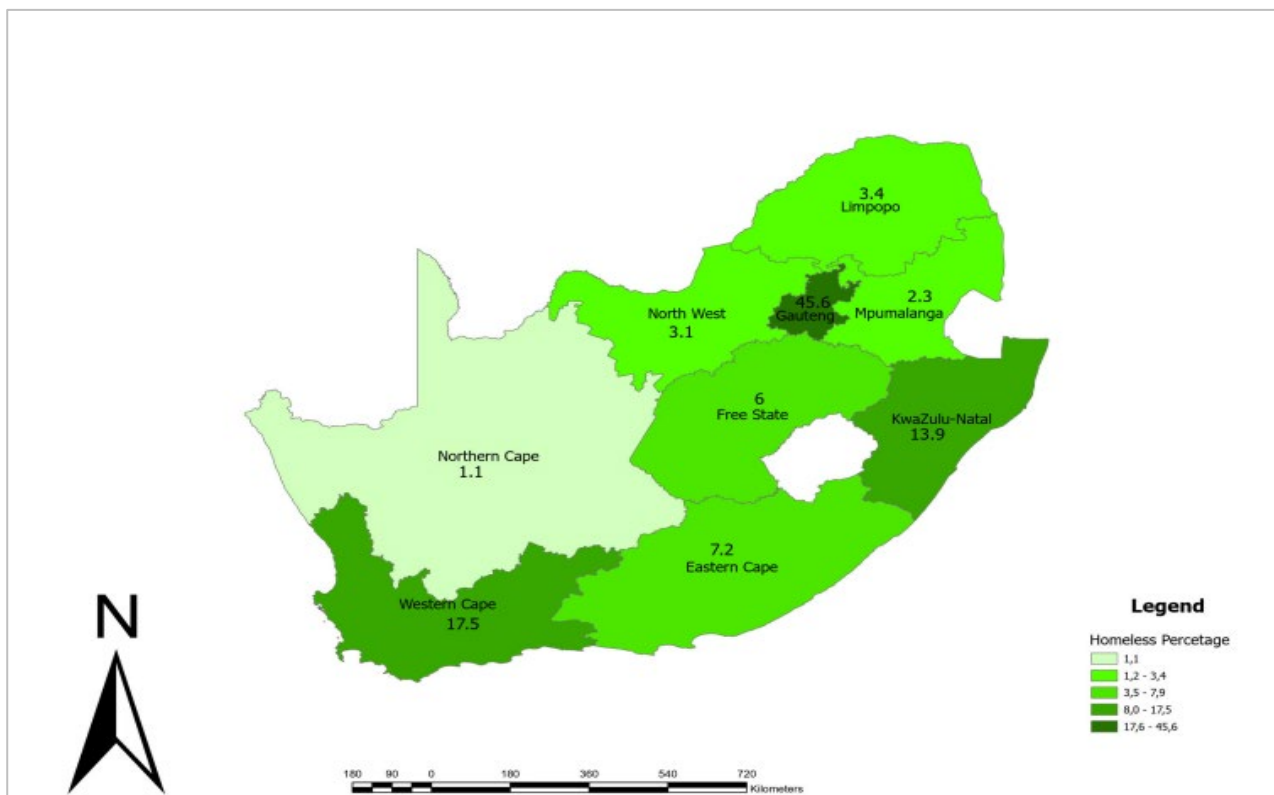
It is interesting to note from Census 2022 that the prevalence of homelessness in South Africa is comparable to that reported in European countries, which ranges from 0,07% to 0,33%.<sup>1</sup> Although the homeless population constitutes less than 1% of the total population, the upward trend in homelessness depicts a phenomenon that has become a common rather than an exceptional experience to many South Africans over the last three decades. It is therefore paramount that attention is given to policies and targeted interventions in response to the observed upward trend in homelessness in order to mitigate its impact.

<sup>1</sup> Abbé Pierre Foundation & FEANTSA (2024) "Ninth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2024"  
[https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Activities/events/2024/9th\\_overview/Rapport\\_-\\_EN.pdf](https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Activities/events/2024/9th_overview/Rapport_-_EN.pdf)

### 2.3 Prevalence of homelessness by province

Globally, homelessness often varies by region, city, town as well as other settlement types. Map 2.1 presents results on the prevalence of homelessness in each of the nine provinces in South Africa. It is evident that homelessness is more prevalent in highly urban provinces; such as Gauteng and Western Cape. Gauteng recorded the biggest share of homeless persons with 45,6%, followed by Western Cape at 17,5%. Northern Cape and Mpumalanga recorded the lowest prevalence (1,1% and 2,3% respectively).

**Map 2.1 – Prevalence of homelessness by province, Census 2022**

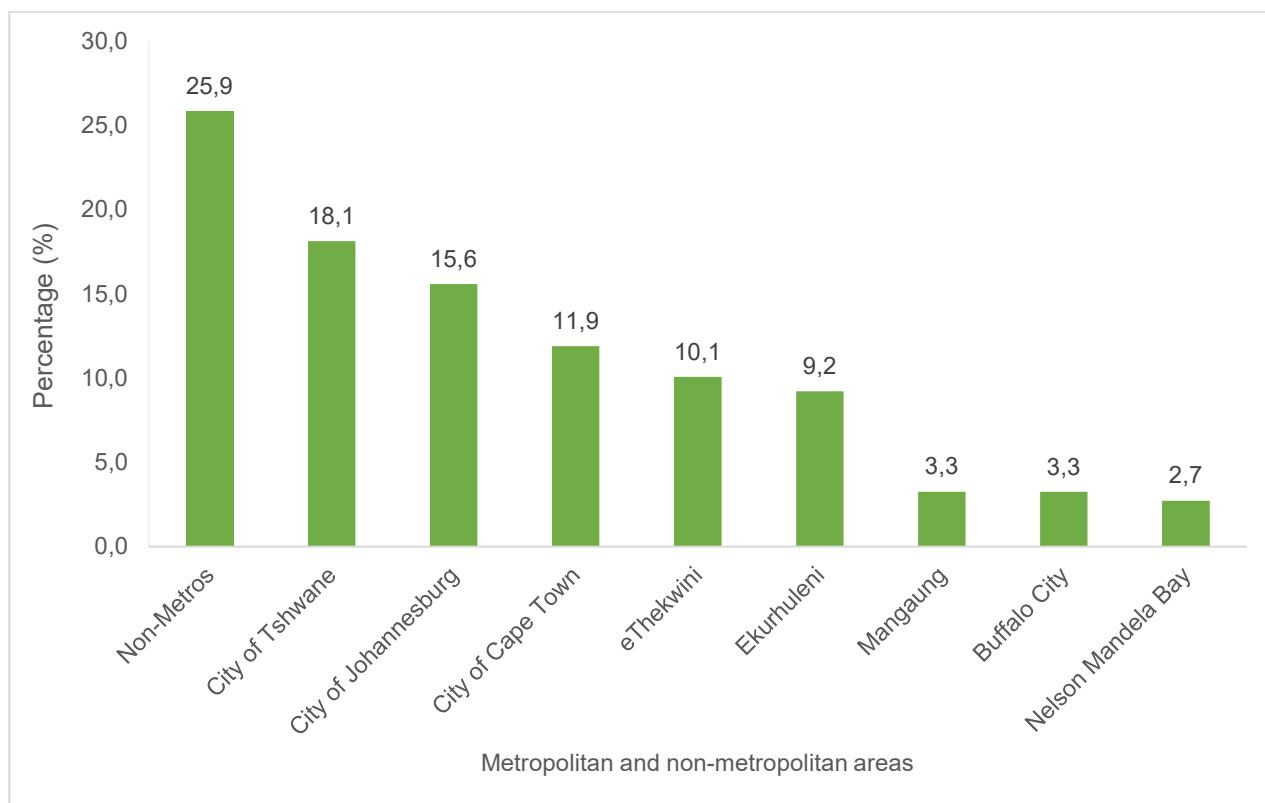


Source: Census 2022.

### 2.4 Prevalence of homelessness at district level, Census 2022

Figure 2.1 presents findings on homelessness in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Results showed that homelessness was more prevalent in metropolitan areas (74,1%) compared with non-metropolitan areas (25,9%). Within metropolitan areas, the City of Tshwane recorded the highest proportion of homeless persons (18,1%), followed by the City of Johannesburg (15,6%). The Nelson Mandela Bay metropolitan area recorded the lowest proportion of homeless persons (2,7%). The findings are in line with what is historically known – the prevalence of homelessness in metropolitan areas.

**Figure 2.1 – Prevalence of homelessness by district (metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas), Census 2022**

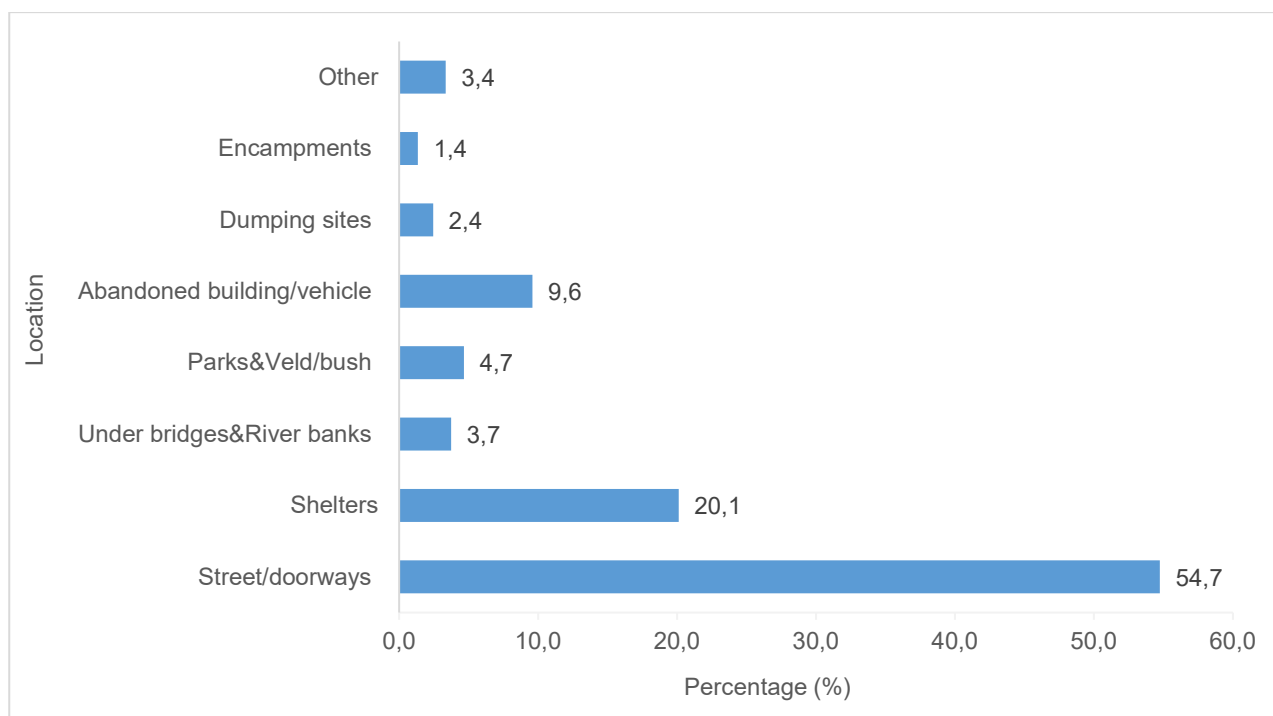


The South African Cities Network (2004) as cited in Makiwane et al. (2010) highlighted the fact that large cities bear the burden of unemployment due to migration. People leave rural areas in the hope of finding a job in the city, but most end up living on the streets.

**2.5 Type of location where homeless persons lived at the time of the census**

For the first time in a South African census, a question on the type of location where the homeless person was sleeping on census night was asked. The results presented in Figure 2.2 show that more than half (54,7%) of homeless persons were residing on the streets/in doorways, in front of shops or on the pavement, followed by those who were in shelters at just 20,1%. Abandoned buildings/vehicles were the third (9,6%) most popular places for homeless persons to sleep, followed by parks and veld/bushes, and under bridges or on river banks.

**Figure 2.2 – Percentage distribution of homeless population by type of location, Census 2022**



**2.6 Homelessness and sex**

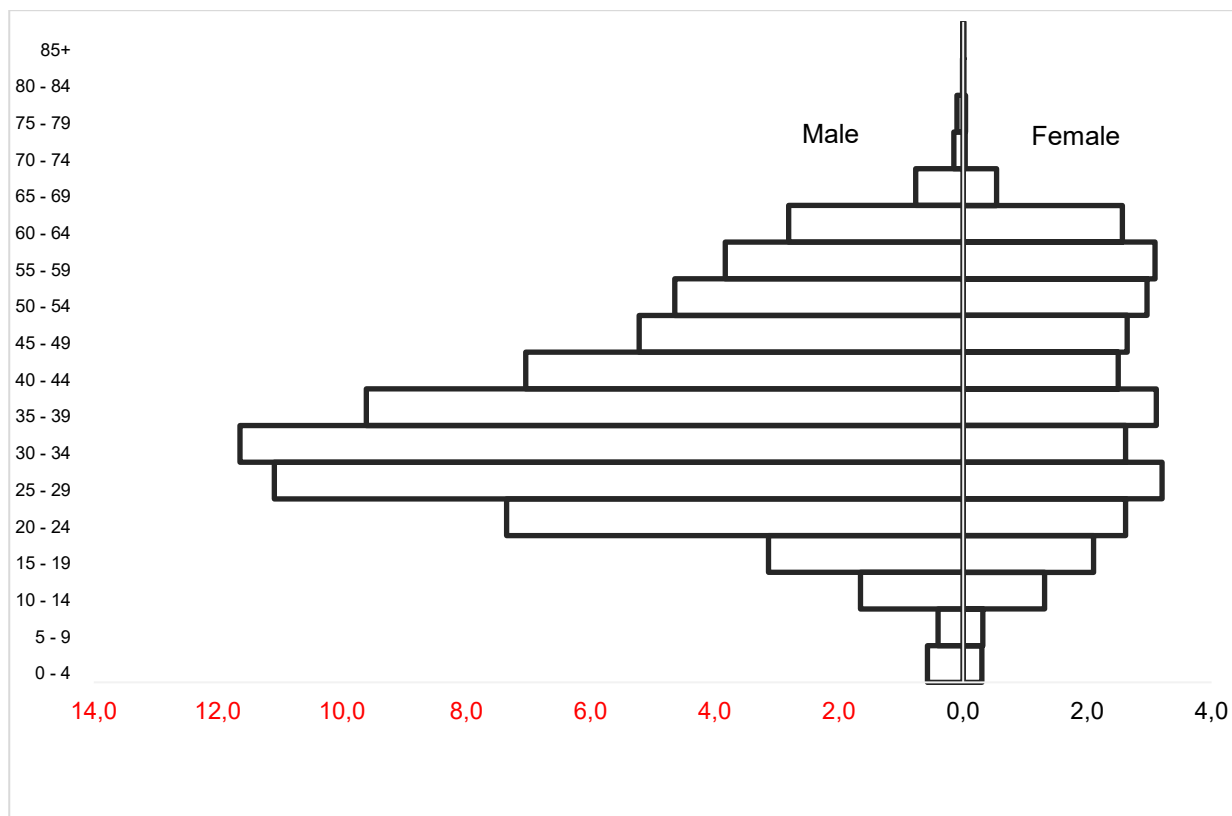
This section presents the homeless population by sex in the last three censuses. The results on sex variations across the three censuses revealed that homelessness is more prevalent among males compared with females. The results in Table 2.2 show that there were substantial differences in the number and percentage of male and female homeless persons, mainly observed in Censuses 2001 and 2022. While sex patterns are consistent, the trend shows a four percentage point increase in male homeless persons in the last two decades (from 65,8% in Census 2001 to 70,1% in Census 2022).

**Table 2.2 – Population size by questionnaire type and sex, Censuses 2001, 2011 and 2022**

Questionnaire type	2001			2011			2022		
	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes
<b>Number</b>									
Household-based population	21 077 732	23 217 313	<b>44 295 046</b>	24 711 220	26 250 223	<b>50 961 443</b>	29 711 481	31 656 178	<b>61 367 659</b>
Institution-based population	346 558	163 351	<b>509 909</b>	440 566	305 484	<b>746 050</b>	326 229	275 273	<b>601 502</b>
Homeless population	9 750	5 073	<b>14 823</b>	23 684	16 029	<b>39 713</b>	39 052	16 667	<b>55 719</b>
Transient population				13 321	10 033	<b>23 354</b>	1 995	628	<b>2 623</b>
<b>Total population</b>	<b>21 434 040</b>	<b>23 385 737</b>	<b>44 819 778</b>	<b>25 188 791</b>	<b>26 581 769</b>	<b>51 770 560</b>	<b>30 078 757</b>	<b>31 948 746</b>	<b>62 027 503</b>
<b>%</b>									
Household-based population	47,6	52,4	<b>100,0</b>	48,5	51,5	<b>100,0</b>	48,4	51,6	<b>100,0</b>
Institution-based population	68,0	32,0	<b>100,0</b>	59,1	40,9	<b>100,0</b>	54,2	45,8	<b>100,0</b>
Homeless population	65,8	34,2	<b>100,0</b>	59,6	40,4	<b>100,0</b>	70,1	29,9	<b>100,0</b>
Transient population				57,0	43,0	<b>100,0</b>	76,1	23,9	<b>100,0</b>
<b>Total population</b>	<b>47,8</b>	<b>52,2</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>48,7</b>	<b>51,3</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>48,5</b>	<b>51,5</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Further analysis looking at age-sex structure using a population pyramid is presented in Figure 2.3, and depicts a male-dominant homeless population largely constituted of youth and adult males.

**Figure 2.3 – Homeless population pyramid, Census 2022**



Although the observed sex variations are similar to those observed globally, emerging research shows that women’s homelessness is “hidden” by practices of women facing violence and exploitation finding alternative measures of avoiding sleeping on the streets. Such practices include staying with friends/acquaintances. Secondly, census counts of homeless persons are centred around roofless persons. This type of homelessness remains dominated by men. It is highly probable that most homeless women would be accommodated in shelters for homeless persons, especially in countries with advanced policies for managing homelessness.

Looking at Census 2022 results in Table 2.3, homelessness is dominated by males irrespective of the homelessness type. However, slight variations exist between the roofless and those in shelter. Among male homeless persons, the results showed a four percentage point difference between roofless and sheltered males (70,8% and 67,3% respectively). The results concur with findings in other countries, which show that there are more homeless male persons on the street than those accommodated in shelters.

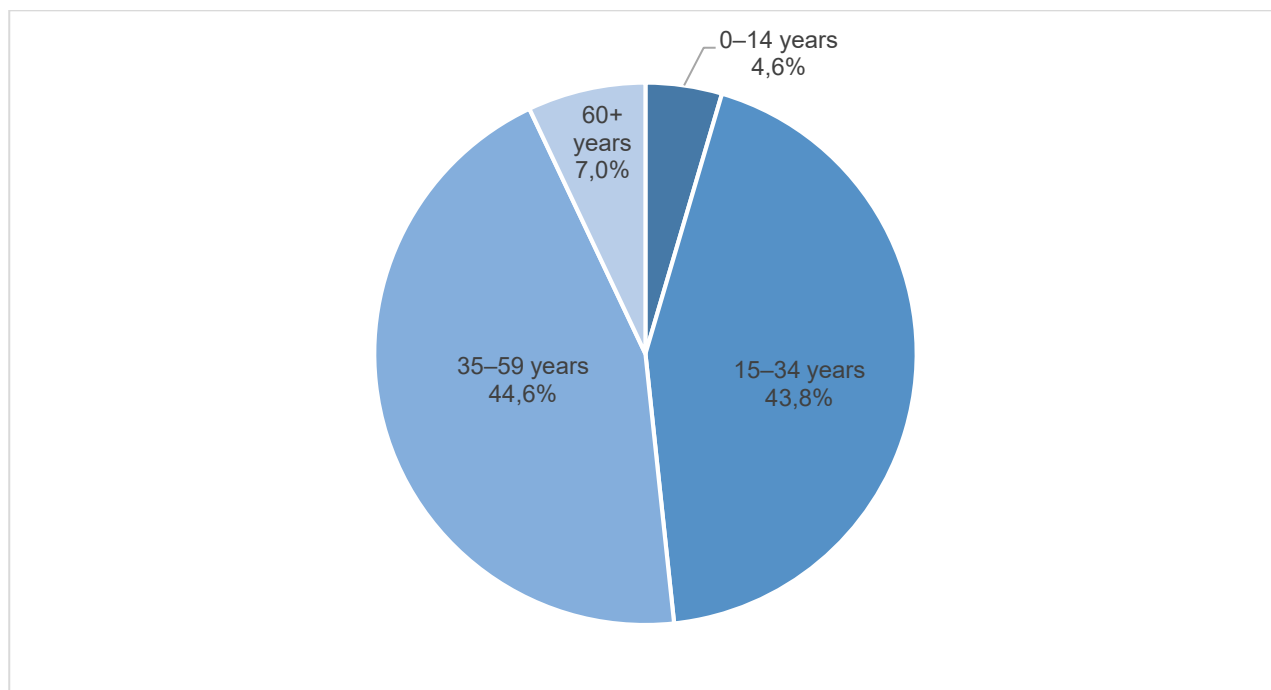
**Table 2.3 – Homeless population by type of homelessness and sex, Census 2022**

Type of homelessness	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
	Number			%		
Roofless	31 506	13 006	<b>44 512</b>	70,8	29,2	<b>100,0</b>
In shelter	7 546	3 661	<b>11 207</b>	67,3	32,7	<b>100,0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>39 052</b>	<b>16 667</b>	<b>55 719</b>	<b>70,1</b>	<b>29,9</b>	<b>100,0</b>

**2.7 Homelessness and age**

Analysis of functional age groups, commonly known as broad age groups, is presented in Figure 2.4. The results show critical variations across age groups, with the dominant image being that of youth (15–34 years) and adults (35–59 years). The share of homeless youth was about 44% whilst that of homeless adults was slightly more with one percentage point (45%). It is interesting to note that within the homeless population, the share of youth and adults was more or less the same. It is also noted that older homeless persons (60 years and older) constitute 7% and children aged 0–14 were about 5%.

**Figure 2.4 – Percentage distribution of homeless population by age, Census 2022**

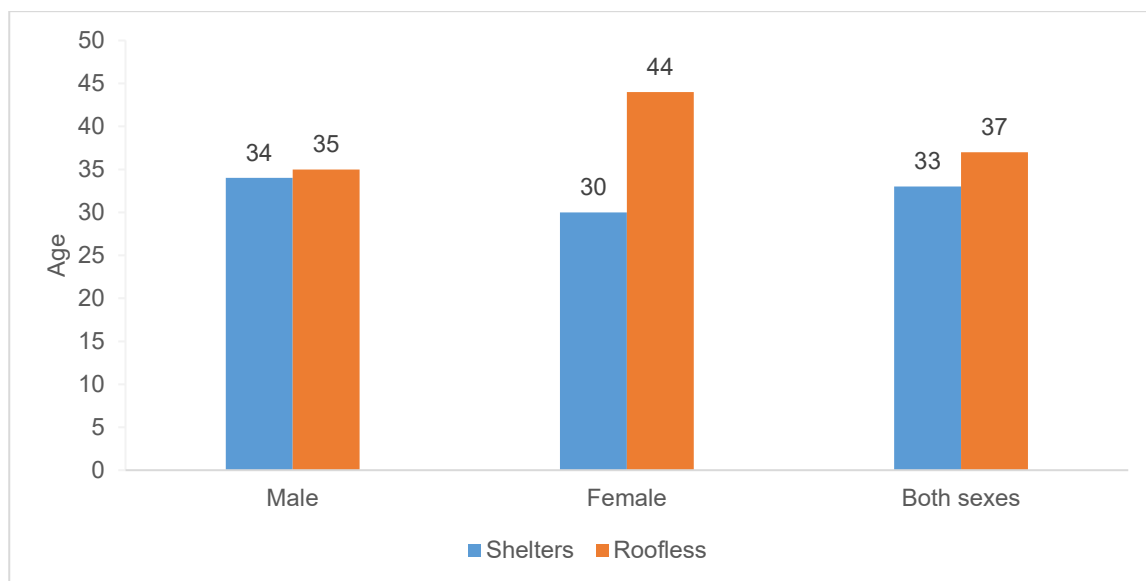


**2.8 Median age of homeless persons**

Figure 2.5 presents findings on the median age of homeless persons. Overall, the median age of a roofless person was higher than that of a homeless person in a shelter (37 and 33 years respectively). Looking at sex variations, while the profile of females reflects a significant age difference of 14 years between homeless persons who were roofless and those in shelters (44 and 30 years respectively), the male profile on the other hand reflects minimal differences between the two homeless categories (35 and 34 years respectively).



**Figure 2.5 – Median age of homeless population by type of location and sex, Census 2022**

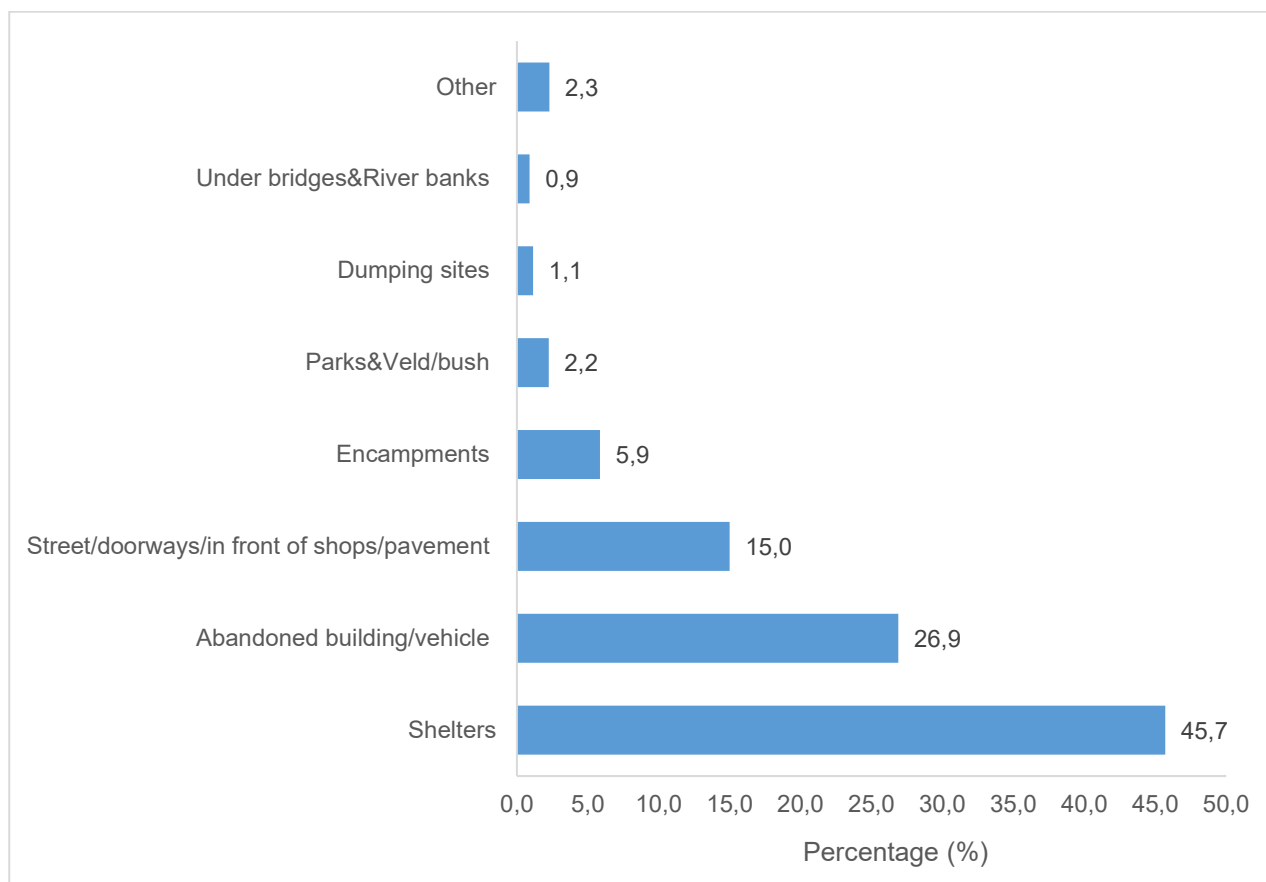


The strong presence of youth and adult homeless persons and, on the other hand, children and older persons prompted a need for further analysis on age variations and place of residence. The results presented in Figure 2.6 revealed that almost half of homeless children were accommodated in shelters (45,7%). Of greater concern is that more than a quarter (26,9%) were residing in abandoned buildings or vehicles.

The findings on the age of homeless persons and place of residence at the time of the census are presented in Figures 2.6, 2.7, 2.8. and 2.9. Analysis is based on functional/broad age groups. This is mainly because people of different ages are impacted differently by living circumstances.

Figure 2.6 presents results on children aged 0–14 years and the place/location where they were counted. Homeless children were mostly found in shelters (45,7%), followed by those in abandoned buildings/vehicles (26,9%). The lowest proportion of homeless children was found under bridges/on river banks.

**Figure 2.6 – Percentage distribution of homeless children aged 0–14 years by place of residence, Census 2022**

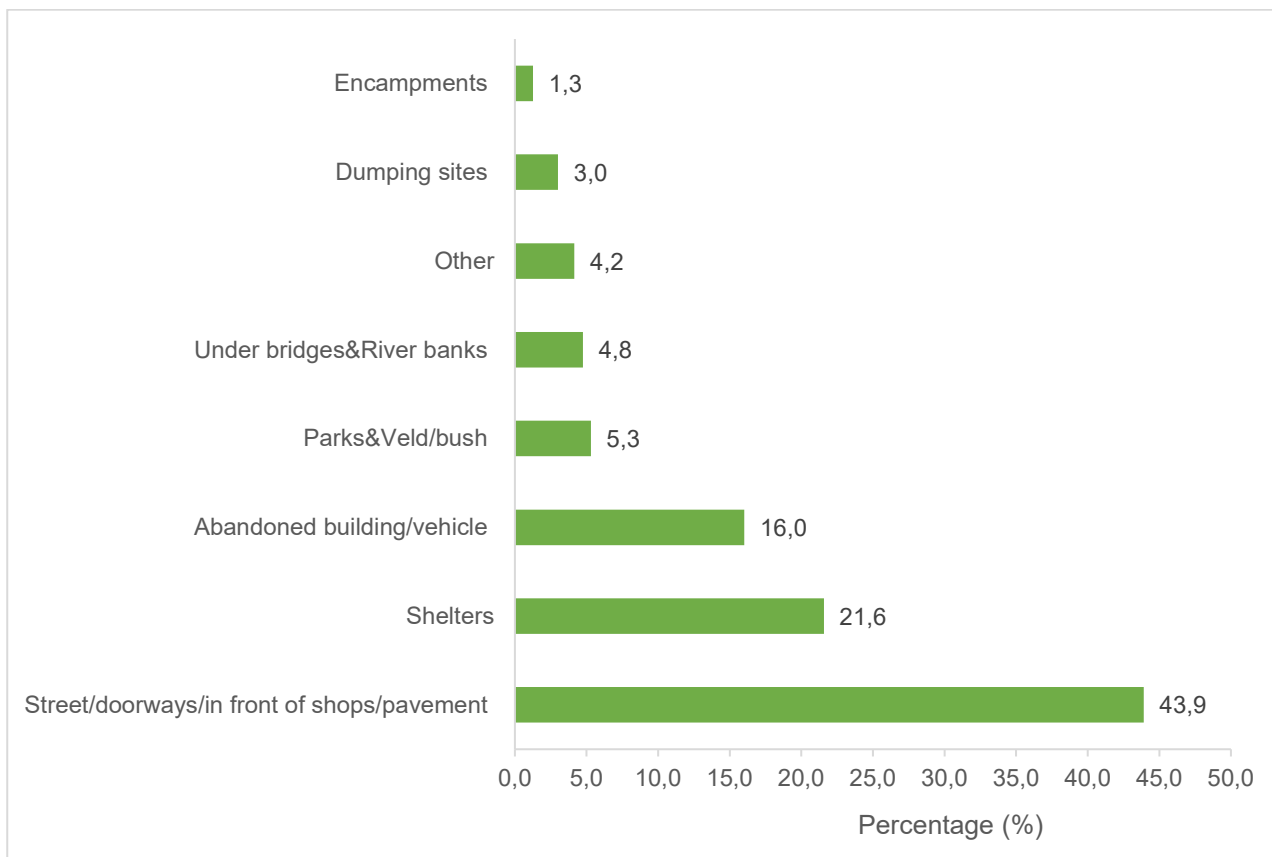


Note: Percentages exclude unspecified age (1 845).

Findings imply that at least children had some form of cover. Children on the streets are vulnerable to different forms of abuse such as child trafficking, exploitation, and exclusion from access to basic services and other rights (education and healthcare).

The results in Figure 2.7 present an analysis of homeless youth by type of place/location of residence. It is noted that four in ten homeless youths (43,9%) were residing on streets/in front of shops/pavements at the time of the census. Evidence suggests that there are several factors that drive young people to the streets; these include family instability associated with domestic violence, neglect, parental substance abuse and family conflict (Consortium for Street Children, 2020). These factors were found to be the leading forces for young people to find themselves on the streets. The areas where the homeless youth were mostly found (roofless) do not have any form of protection. This means homeless youth are vulnerable to different forms of risks such as health, crime and hunger. The types of locations do not allow an individual to keep their belongings safe (Tenai & Mbewu, 2020).

**Figure 2.7 – Percentage distribution of homeless youth (15–34 years) by place/location of residence, Census 2022**

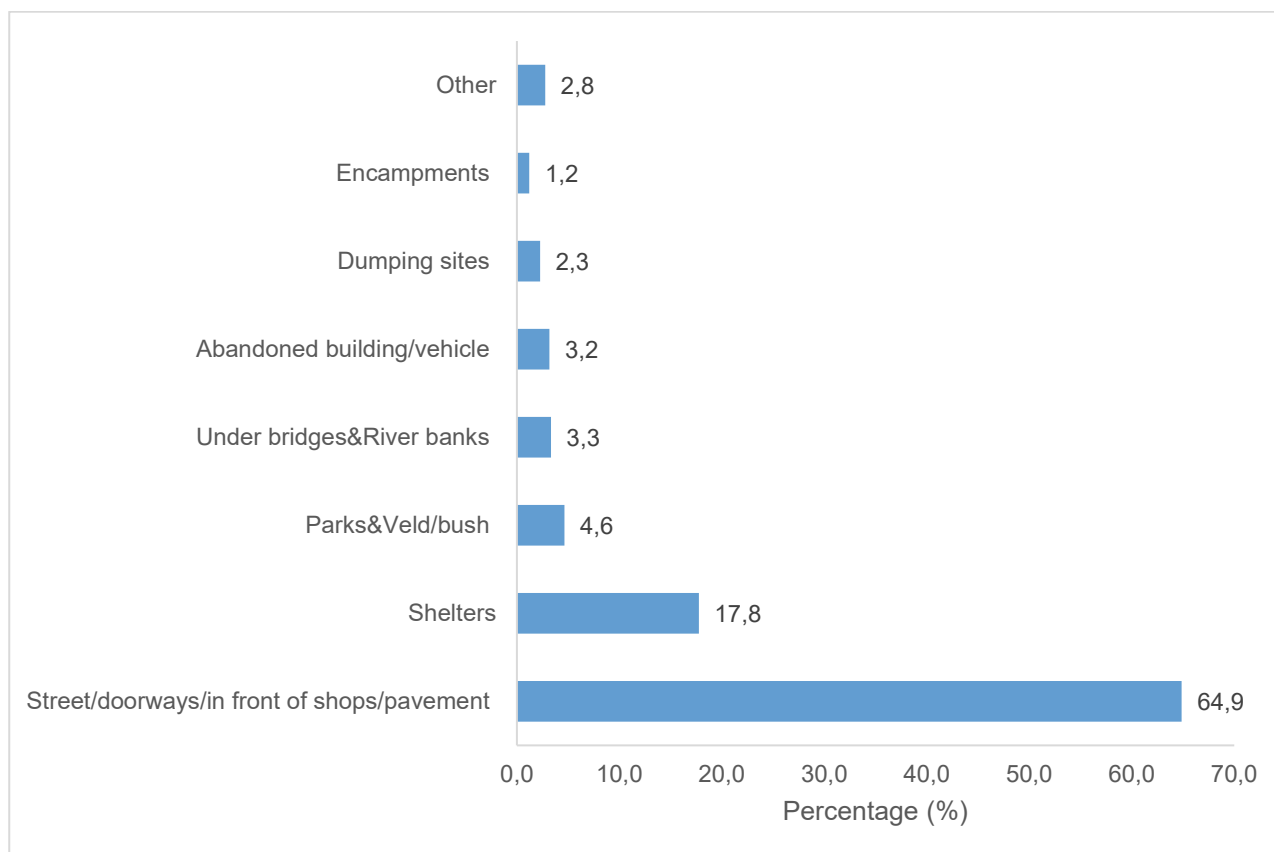


Note: Percentages exclude unspecified age (1 845).

Furthermore, younger adults are reported to be more exposed to stressful life events which in turn create more chaos in their lives around the time of their homeless episode, making it difficult for them to be housed. Young people have to navigate a number of conflicting challenges such as establishing independence, obtaining their education and seeking employment, and establishing romantic relationships (Tompsett, et al., 2009).

The profile of adult homeless persons presented in Figure 2.8 showed that almost two-thirds (64,9%) of adult homeless persons were residing on the streets/doorways/in front of shops (roofless) and about 18% were residing in shelters. Only 1,2% of homeless adults were found in encampments, which was the least prevalent type of location where this population was found. Living on the streets at such an age creates a number of challenges.

**Figure 2.8 – Percentage distribution of homeless adults (35–59 years) by place/location of residence, Census 2022**

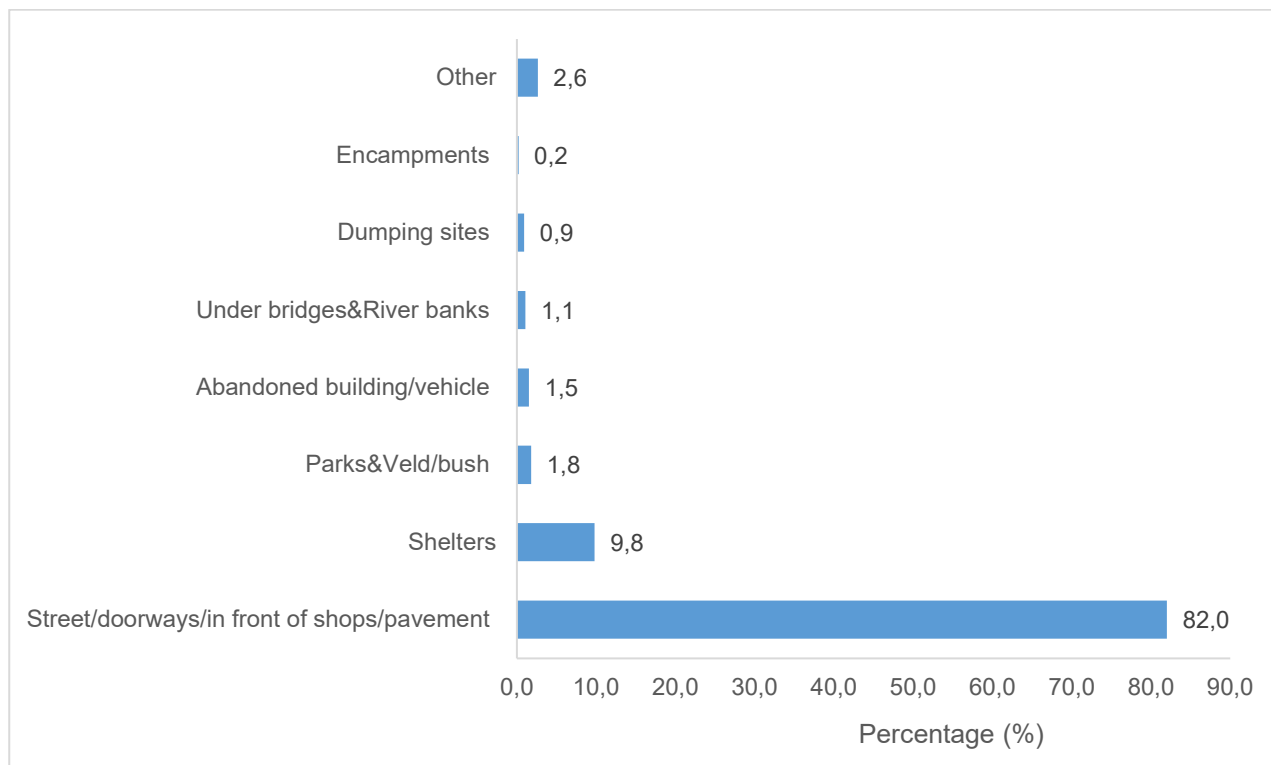


Note: Percentages exclude unspecified age (1 845).

Studies have shown that people living on the streets have difficulties in accessing services that can help in escaping homelessness, such as housing support or application for housing assistance, job training, and healthcare (Shelter, 2017; Crisis, 2021; Olufemi, 2002). Given that the majority of this age group is in their prime working age, residing on the streets denies them life-changing opportunities, translating into future challenges such as dependency on old-age grants. This is mainly attributed to the fact that homeless persons have no safe place to keep documentation such as identification and others required for job searching. Research has shown that homeless adults often face bureaucratic hurdles and lack information relevant for them to escape homelessness (Crisis, 2021).

Figure 2.9 presents an analysis of older homeless persons aged 60 years and older by place/location of residence. It is concerning to note that the majority (82%) of homeless older persons were living on the streets/doorways/in front of shops (roofless), etc., and only about a tenth (9,8%) of them were found in shelters.

**Figure 2.9 – Percentage distribution of homeless older persons aged 60 years and older by place/location of residence, Census 2022**



Note: Percentages exclude unspecified age (1 845).

Research showed that there is a visible number of older persons found on the streets in South African cities (IOL, 2018). IOL further stated that both the streets and shelters are not suitable for older persons. Being an older person has its own challenges; older persons are usually emotionally distressed and feel lonely (Thompson, et al., 2010). Therefore, being on the streets without any form of support to survive would worsen their vulnerability, becoming more susceptible to health problems due to lack of access to healthcare, lack of food and other facilities that promote better health (Grenier, et al., 2016; Rewathy, 2018).

## 2.9 Homelessness by population group

The results of the analysis of population group variations in homelessness are presented in Table 2.4. Looking at the profile of homeless coloured persons, 82,2% were residing on the streets, a proportion above the national average of 69,6%. More than a third (33,2%) of black Africans and white homeless persons were residing in shelters.

**Table 2.4 – Homeless population by type of homelessness and population group, Census 2022**

Type of homelessness	Black African	Coloured	Indian or Asian	White	Total
	<b>Number</b>				
Roofless	17 261	4 961	185	1 055	<b>23 462</b>
Shelters	8 593	1 075	54	525	<b>10 247</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>25 854</b>	<b>6 036</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>1 580</b>	<b>33 709</b>
	<b>%</b>				
Roofless	66,8	82,2	77,4	66,8	<b>69,6</b>
Shelters	33,2	17,8	22,6	33,2	<b>30,4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

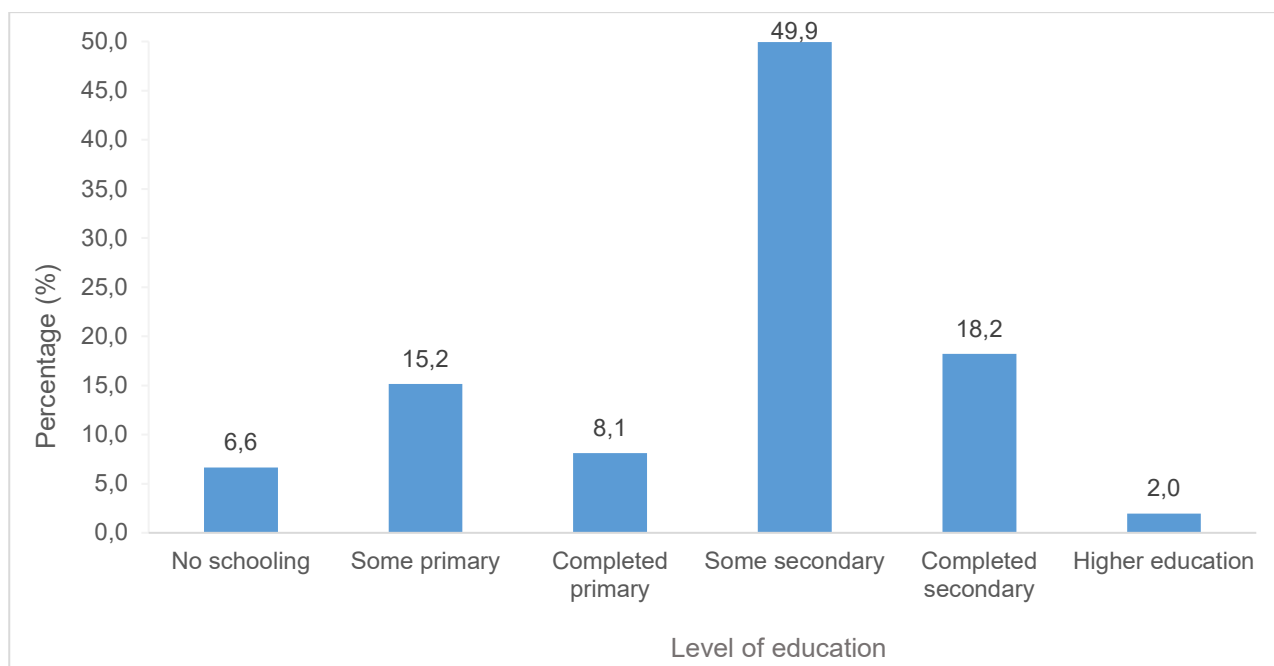
Note: Total number of homeless persons excludes "Other" population group (22 010).

Olufemi (1998) associated the large number of homeless black Africans and coloureds to racial segregation accommodation policies during the apartheid period, when these population groups were restricted to townships or locations. Furthermore, Olufemi (1998) argued that many ended up squatting, living in the backyards of white households or, as a last resort, living on the streets. He further aligns the small number of homeless Indians with the strong cultural support system practiced by Indian communities.

## 2.10 Homelessness and educational attainment

In Census 2022, a question on the level of education was included in the questionnaire for homeless persons who were 5 years and older. The results presented in Figure 2.10 show that almost half (49,9%) of homeless persons residing on the streets had attained some secondary education. The findings are partly indicative of most homeless persons dropping out of school. Only 2,0% of the roofless population completed some form of higher education. This relatively small percentage might reflect that those with higher education have greater access to resources and opportunities, making them less likely to become homeless. A study by Kok et al. (2010) on the homeless population in South Africa indicated that the educational levels of the majority of street homeless persons are not sufficient to enable them to enter the job market.

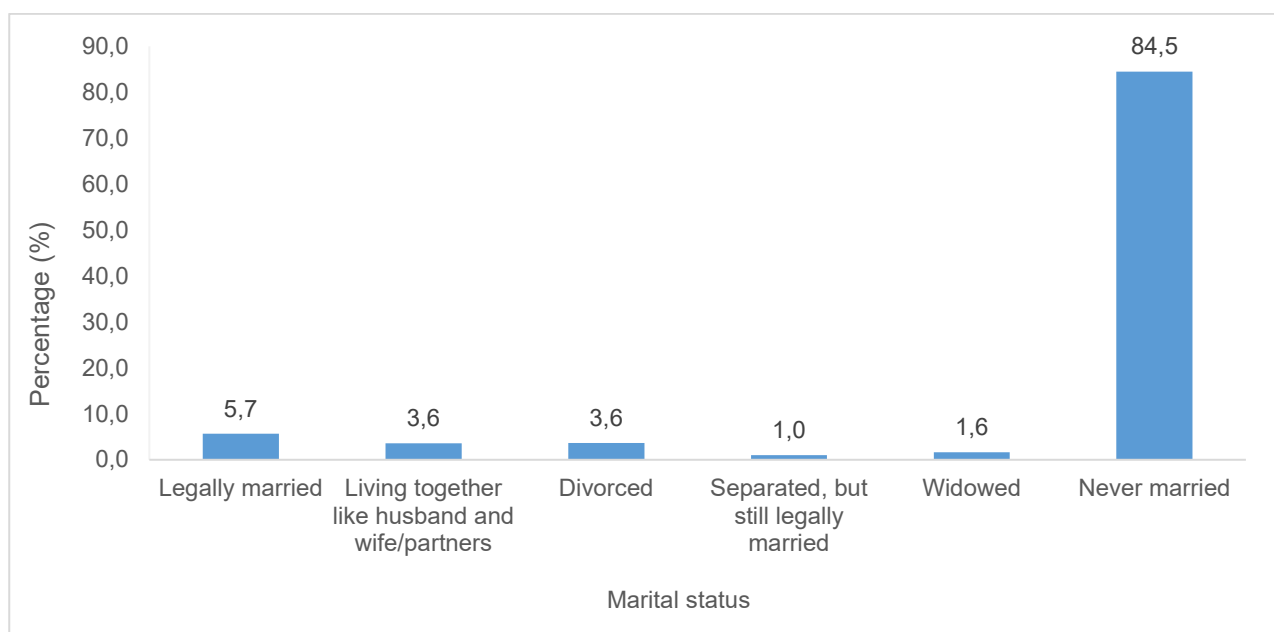
**Figure 2.10 – Percentage distribution of homeless population by level of education, Census 2022**



**2.11 Homelessness and marital status**

The questionnaire on homelessness used in Census 2022 asked a question on marital status to those 12 years and older. The results on the marital status of homeless persons presented in Figure 2.11 showed that the majority of persons residing on the streets were never married (84,5%), and those that were legally married constituted about 6%. Such marital status profiles among roofless homeless persons may be attributed to unsuitable living conditions to promote the forming of households and families.

**Figure 2.11 – Homeless population aged 12 years and older by marital status, Census 2022**



## CHAPTER 3: MIGRATION AND HOMELESSNESS

### 3.1 Introduction

In Census 2022, some questions linked to migration were included in the questionnaire for counting homeless persons. These questions included place of birth and citizenship. These questions were only asked to homeless persons who were roofless/on the streets. Therefore, homeless persons in shelters are not part of the analysis in this chapter.

### 3.2 Place of birth

In the context of South African censuses, place of birth refers to province of birth. Response categories for this question include the nine provinces and a category for “born outside South Africa”. Persons with responses linked to the nine provinces were coded as “born in South Africa”. The results in Table 3.1 show that the majority of homeless persons (93%) were South African nationals. These results clearly indicate that South African-born individuals are faced with a myriad of socio-economic challenges in the country, including the lack of adequate housing.

**Table 3.1 – Number and percentage distribution of homeless persons by place of birth, Census 2022**

Place of birth	Number	%
Born in South Africa	21 690	93,0
Born outside South Africa	1 624	7,0
<b>Total</b>	<b>23 314</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Note: Percentages exclude 'Do not know' and 'Unspecified'.

Table 3.2 shows the percentage share of homeless persons born and still residing in a particular province and those who were residing in another province. Provincial variations showed that the majority of homeless persons (93,4%) were born and still lived in Gauteng, followed by Western Cape with 63,7%. With the exception of Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Free State, more than half of homeless persons born in other provinces were residing in Gauteng. It is interesting to note that seven in ten homeless persons born in Limpopo (74,3%) were living in Gauteng. The second-largest sending province of homeless persons to Gauteng was Mpumalanga (67,6%). About 60% of the homeless persons born outside South Africa were residing in Gauteng, followed by 23,7% residing in Western Cape. This indicates that Gauteng is perceived as the economic powerhouse of the country where individuals migrate in the hope of better opportunities.



**Table 3.2 – Distribution of homeless by province of birth and province of enumeration, Census 2022**

Province of birth	Province of enumeration								
	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP
Western Cape	63,7	0,6	0,3	0,1	0,4	0,4	34,0	0,4	0,2
Eastern Cape	11,3	30,6	0,2	0,4	4,2	0,5	52,5	0,3	0,0
Northern Cape	7,2	0,7	31,7	1,1	0,4	1,0	56,8	1,0	0,2
Free State	1,9	0,7	1,6	48,9	1,7	1,9	43,3	0,1	0,1
KwaZulu-Natal	0,8	0,3	0,2	0,3	58,8	0,6	38,3	0,6	0,0
North West	0,8	0,2	1,0	1,3	0,4	42,9	52,7	0,3	0,4
Gauteng	1,6	0,5	0,3	0,7	1,5	1,0	93,4	0,6	0,4
Mpumalanga	0,7	0,1	0,1	0,1	0,5	0,7	67,6	29,5	0,7
Limpopo	0,5	0,1	0,0	0,1	0,3	0,8	74,3	2,0	21,9
Outside South Africa	23,7	0,1	0,3	5,4	3,9	0,8	59,8	2,5	3,5

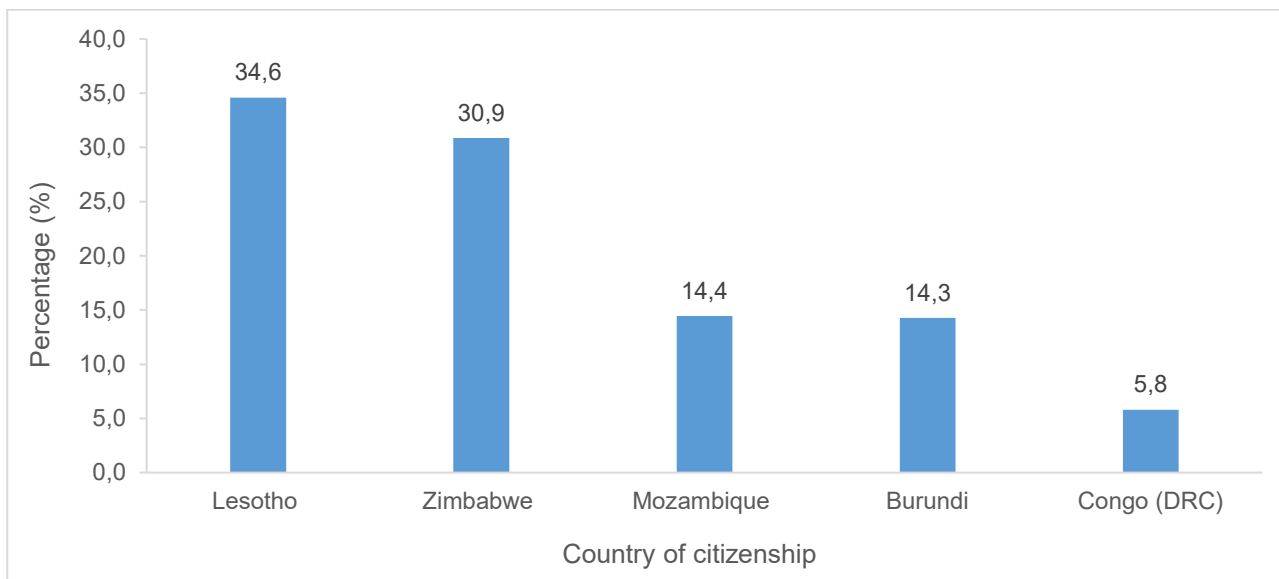
Note: Percentages exclude 'Do not know' and 'Unspecified'.

Gauteng continues to be the economic hub of the country compared with other provinces and attracts many people in search of economic opportunities, some of whom end up becoming homeless (Gauteng Government, 2024). A study by (Thobejane, 2020) supports this finding that people prefer to migrate to Gauteng rather than other provinces in pursuit of better standards of living. Urbanisation attracts people to cities, and Gauteng is an urbanised province with the majority of its population living in urban areas (Stats SA, 2023). Urbanisation leads to overpopulation, which results in a scarcity of housing and insufficient space for housing causing overcrowding, the development of slums, competition for job opportunities and poverty (Thobejane, 2020). Gauteng has the “golden” economy and largest population in South Africa; however, it is the smallest province in land area, meaning it is densely populated (Stats SA, 2023).

### 3.3 Homeless persons by country of citizenship

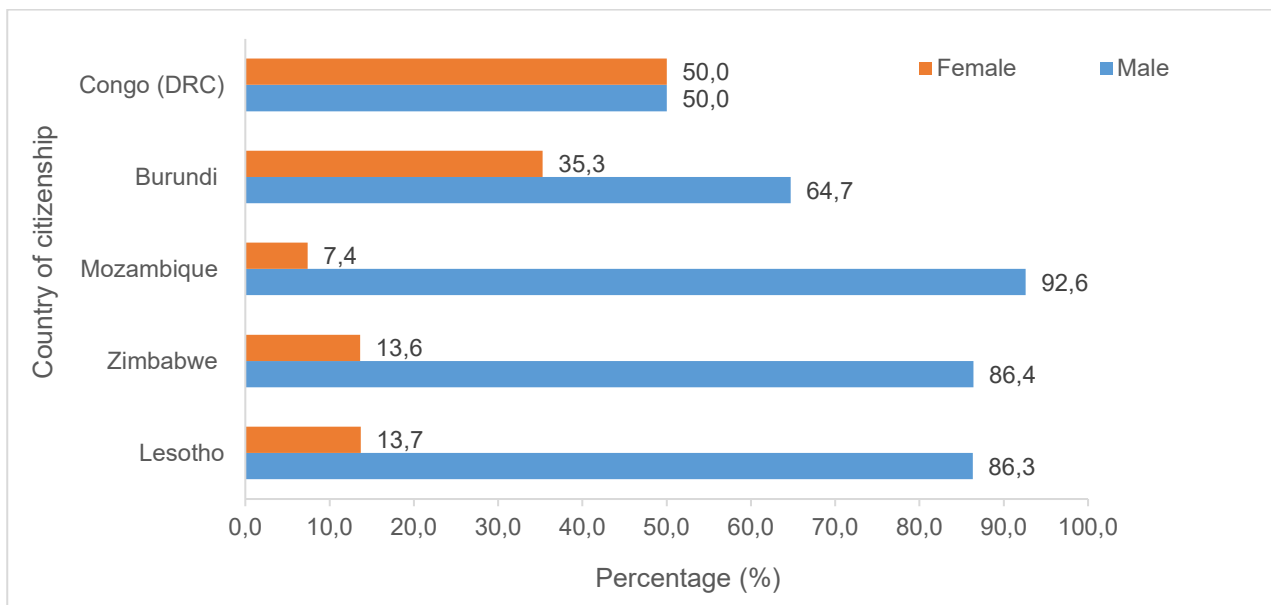
Figure 3.1 presents homeless persons born outside of South Africa by country of citizenship. Data show that the top five countries where homeless people are reported to be citizens are Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Amongst the top five countries, Lesotho had the highest percentage (34,6%), followed by Zimbabwe with 30,9%. The country with the lowest percentage amongst the top five was the DRC with 5,8%. This pattern is different from the pattern on the top ten sending countries for immigrants in South Africa (StatsSA, 2024).

**Figure 3.1 – Percentage of homeless population by country of citizenship; top five countries, Census 2022**



The results presented in Figure 3.2 show sex variations in homelessness by country of citizenship. It is noted that homeless persons born outside South Africa were mostly males, as depicted in four out of the five top countries (Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Burundi). It is interesting to note an equal proportion of homeless persons from the DRC.

**Figure 3.2 – Percentage distribution of homeless persons by sex and country of citizenship; top five countries, Census 2022**



The observed dominance of foreign male homeless persons may be attributed to the fact that mines in South Africa historically attracted males from neighbouring nations.

## CHAPTER 4: REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS

### 4.1 Introduction

Homelessness in South Africa is a widespread social issue that highlights the broader challenges in the country such as inequality, poverty and the breakdown of family structures (Housing Development Agency, 2013). Understanding the reasons why homelessness occurs in South Africa is critical for developing and implementing effective strategies to mitigate its impact and address the broader structural and systemic factors that perpetuate it.

Research conducted globally identifies common factors contributing to homelessness, such as unemployment, rising housing costs, housing shortages and increasing social disintegration. In countries like the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK), unemployment, a lack of affordable housing and mental health challenges are reported as the main reasons for homelessness (Fitzpatrick, et al., 2013; US Department of Housing & Urban Development, 2022). In South Africa the same reasons exist, exacerbated by the historical legacy of apartheid, migration and substance abuse (Plagerson & Mthembu, 2021).

Despite various efforts aimed at reducing homelessness, the number of persons on the streets and living in shelters continues to rise. For any intervention aimed at reducing homelessness, the underlying causes must be understood in order to implement long-term, holistic solutions (Tissington, 2011). This chapter looks at the reasons for homelessness in South Africa by analysing the Census 2022 data by sex, age, population group, marital status and province, providing critical insights for designing relevant interventions to support this vulnerable population.

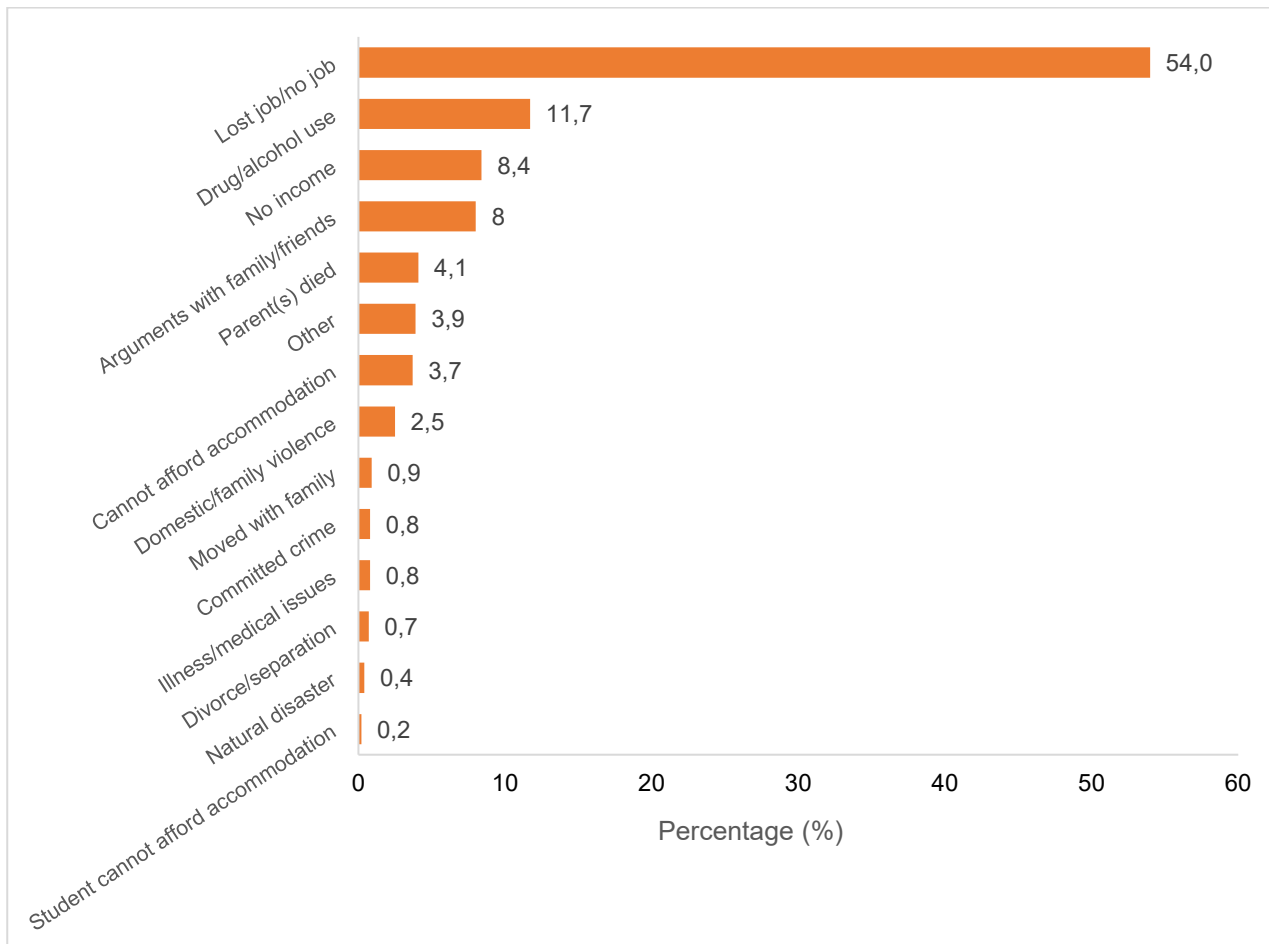
The final question asked to the homeless population in the Census 2022 was the main reason for their homelessness. Thirteen possible reasons were provided, along with an option for “Other” and “Do not know”. Enumerators emphasised to respondents that whilst there could be multiple reasons for their homelessness, only the main reason should be provided. This marked the first time that a question on the reason for homelessness was included in the national census. It is important to note that this question was only asked to the roofless population, not to the homeless population residing in shelters.

### 4.2 Main reasons for homelessness

Figure 4.1 shows that unemployment was the primary reason for homelessness provided by the majority (54%) of the homeless population. Drug and alcohol use accounted for 11,7%, 8,4% of the population cited lack of income, and 8% pointed to conflicts with friends and family. These findings are consistent with studies that highlight unemployment as a significant stress factor for poor households in South Africa, often leading to homelessness. Substance abuse, family conflicts and domestic violence are also frequently cited as contributing factors to homelessness (Roets, et al., 2016). In other countries such as the UK and the US, similar reasons for homelessness are reported, with the primary cause being the inability to afford housing,

rising rent, poverty and job loss (Filipenco, 2023). South Africa's persistently high unemployment rate results in a lack of income security, making it difficult for individuals to access housing (Marutlulle, 2021).

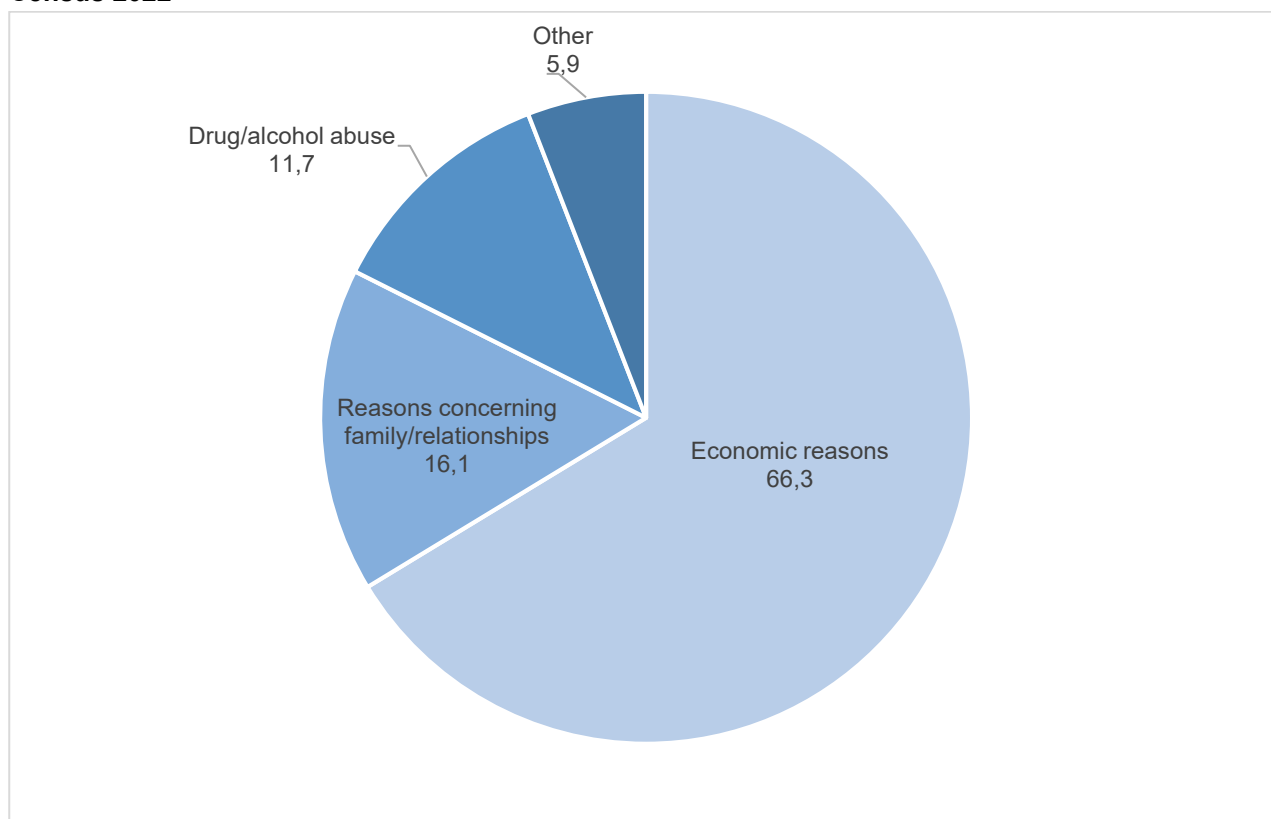
**Figure 4.1 – Percentage distribution of homeless population by reasons for homelessness, Census 2022**



Note: Percentages exclude “Do not know” (1 062) and “Unspecified” (3 914).

For the purpose of analysis, several reasons for homelessness were grouped together (Appendix B). Figure 4.2 shows the percentage share of these grouped reasons contributing to homelessness in the country. Nearly two-thirds (66,3%) of the homeless population provided economic reasons as the main reason for their homelessness. Family-related issues (16,1%), drug or alcohol abuse (11,7%) and other reasons (5,9%) accounted for the remaining third of the reasons.

**Figure 4.2 – Percentage distribution of homeless population by grouped reasons for homelessness, Census 2022**



Note: Percentages exclude Do not know (1 062) and Unspecified (3 914).

### 4.3 Reasons for homelessness by sex

This section explores sex variations in the reasons for homelessness. Table 4.1 shows the reasons for homelessness reported by female and male respondents. The most common reasons cited by the majority of homeless men were economic reasons (56,2%), followed by drug/alcohol abuse (14,5%) and arguments with friends/family (9,2%). Among the female homeless population, these three reasons were the most common. However, a slightly larger proportion reported arguments with friends/family (4,8%) as the reason for their homelessness, compared with drug/alcohol abuse (4,4%). Economic reasons were cited as the main reason for homelessness by just under four-fifths (78,4%) of homeless women. A study by Roets et al. (2016) highlighted that women are disproportionately affected by arguments with family, including domestic disputes. In some cases, women are forced to leave their homes to escape abusive relationships, often without financial security. Another study on homelessness (Carney, et al., 2023) found that substance abuse emerges as a more prevalent factor among homeless men in South Africa.

**Table 4.1 – Distribution of homeless population by reasons for homelessness and sex, Census 2022**

Reason for homelessness	Sex					
	Number			%		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Students cannot afford accommodation	59	11	<b>70</b>	0,2	0,1	<b>0,2</b>
Natural disaster	111	46	<b>157</b>	0,4	0,4	<b>0,4</b>
Divorce/separation	217	66	<b>283</b>	0,8	0,6	<b>0,7</b>
Committed crime	286	34	<b>320</b>	1,0	0,3	<b>0,8</b>
Illness/medical issues	262	66	<b>328</b>	0,9	0,6	<b>0,8</b>
Moved with family	205	133	<b>338</b>	0,7	1,2	<b>0,9</b>
Domestic/family violence	765	209	<b>974</b>	2,7	1,9	<b>2,5</b>
Cannot afford accommodation	1 170	285	<b>1 455</b>	4,1	2,6	<b>3,7</b>
Other	1 221	305	<b>1 526</b>	4,3	2,7	<b>3,9</b>
Parent(s) died	1 405	217	<b>1 622</b>	4,9	2,0	<b>4,1</b>
Arguments with family/friends	2 617	532	<b>3 149</b>	9,2	4,8	<b>8,0</b>
Drug/alcohol use	4 129	493	<b>4 622</b>	14,5	4,4	<b>11,7</b>
Lost job/no job/no income	15 983	8 709	<b>24 692</b>	56,2	78,4	<b>62,5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>28 430</b>	<b>11 106</b>	<b>39 536</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

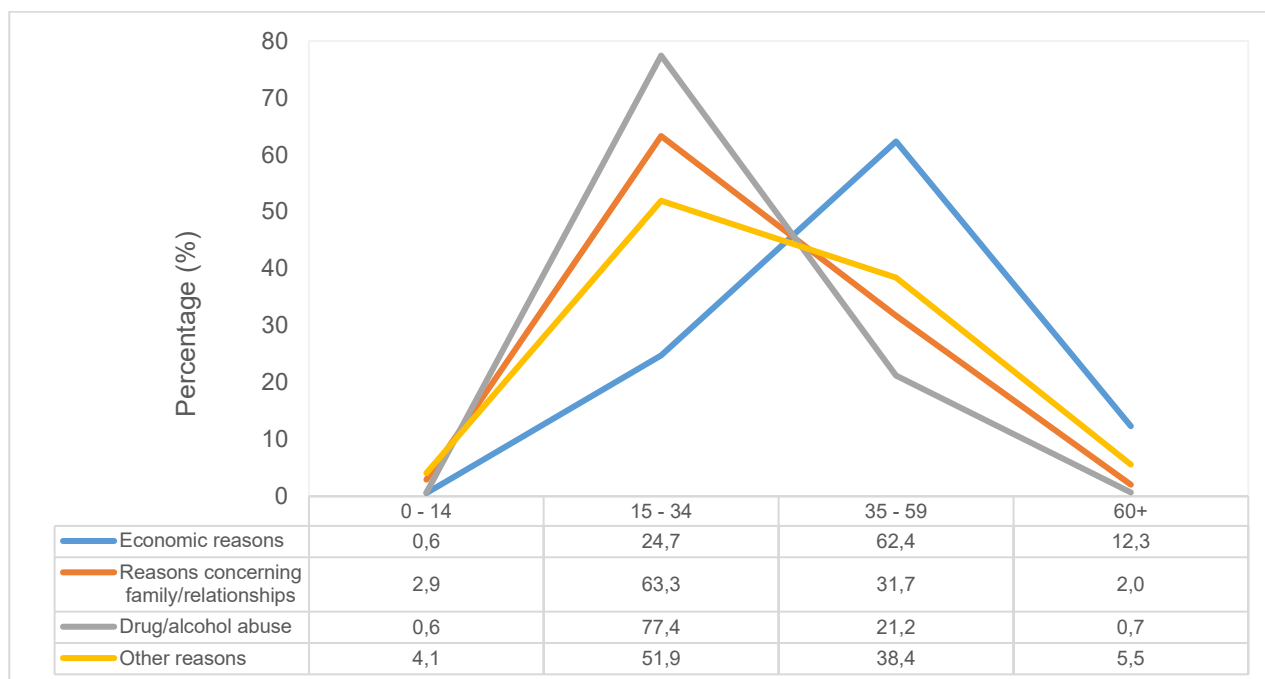
Note: Totals exclude "Do not know" (1 062) and "Unspecified" (3 914).

#### 4.4 Reasons for homelessness and age

The relationship between age and the reasons for homelessness in South Africa reveals distinct patterns, with younger individuals more frequently citing drug/alcohol use and older age groups often attributing their homelessness to economic factors. When disaggregating the reasons for homelessness by age, it becomes evident that individuals between the ages of 15 and 34 are nearly three times more likely to experience homelessness due to drug or alcohol use (7,4%) compared with those aged 35–59 (21,2%). Substance abuse is a serious issue among South Africa's young homeless population, with substances like alcohol, cannabis, and methamphetamines ("tik") commonly abused (Carney et al., 2021). Globally, substance abuse rates among homeless youth are also disproportionately high and in the US, a study revealed that 85% of homeless youth reported substance use (Thompson, et al., 2015).

Over one-third (62,4%) of those citing economic reasons for their homelessness were between the ages of 35 and 39. Older homeless individuals frequently cite economic reasons such as unemployment and lack of affordable housing as primary causes of their homelessness. Those in the 15–34 (63,3%) and 35–39 (31,7%) age groups were more likely to be affected by reasons concerning family such as divorce, arguments with family, and domestic violence.

**Figure 4.3 – Percentage distribution of homeless population by reasons for homelessness and broad age groups, Census 2022**



Note: Percentages exclude “Unspecified age” (1 341), “Unspecified” (3 914), and “Do not know” reason (916).

#### 4.5 Reasons for homelessness and population group

Table 4.2 shows the main reasons for homelessness across the four population groups in the country. In most of the population groups, with the exception of the coloured population, economic reasons accounted for the highest proportion of reasons for homelessness. In contrast, a slightly higher proportion of coloured individuals reported family-related reasons (39,4%) as their main reason for homelessness compared with those citing economic reasons (36%).

Given South Africa’s apartheid history and persistent economic inequalities, homelessness varies across the black African, coloured, Indian/Asian and white population groups. Black Africans who were disadvantaged economically continue to be more affected by poverty and limited access to housing and employment compared with their white, Indian/Asian and coloured counterparts (Tissington, 2011).

**Table 4.2 – Percentage distribution of homeless population by main reasons for homelessness and population group, Census 2022**

Population group	Main reason for homelessness									
	Economic reasons		Family/relationships		Drug/alcohol abuse		Other reasons		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Black African	6 936	42,0	4 165	25,2	3 830	23,2	1 598	9,7	16 529	100,0
Coloured	1 693	36,0	1 854	39,4	613	13,0	546	11,6	4 706	100,0
Indian/Asian	61	33,9	54	30,0	45	25,0	20	11,1	180	100,0
White	472	47,8	261	26,4	121	12,3	133	13,5	987	100,0
<b>Total</b>	<b>9 162</b>	<b>40,9</b>	<b>6 334</b>	<b>28,3</b>	<b>4 609</b>	<b>20,6</b>	<b>2 297</b>	<b>10,3</b>	<b>22 402</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Note: Percentages exclude “Other” population group (94), “Unspecified” population group (17 040), “Do not know” reasons (1 046), and “Unspecified” reasons (3 900).

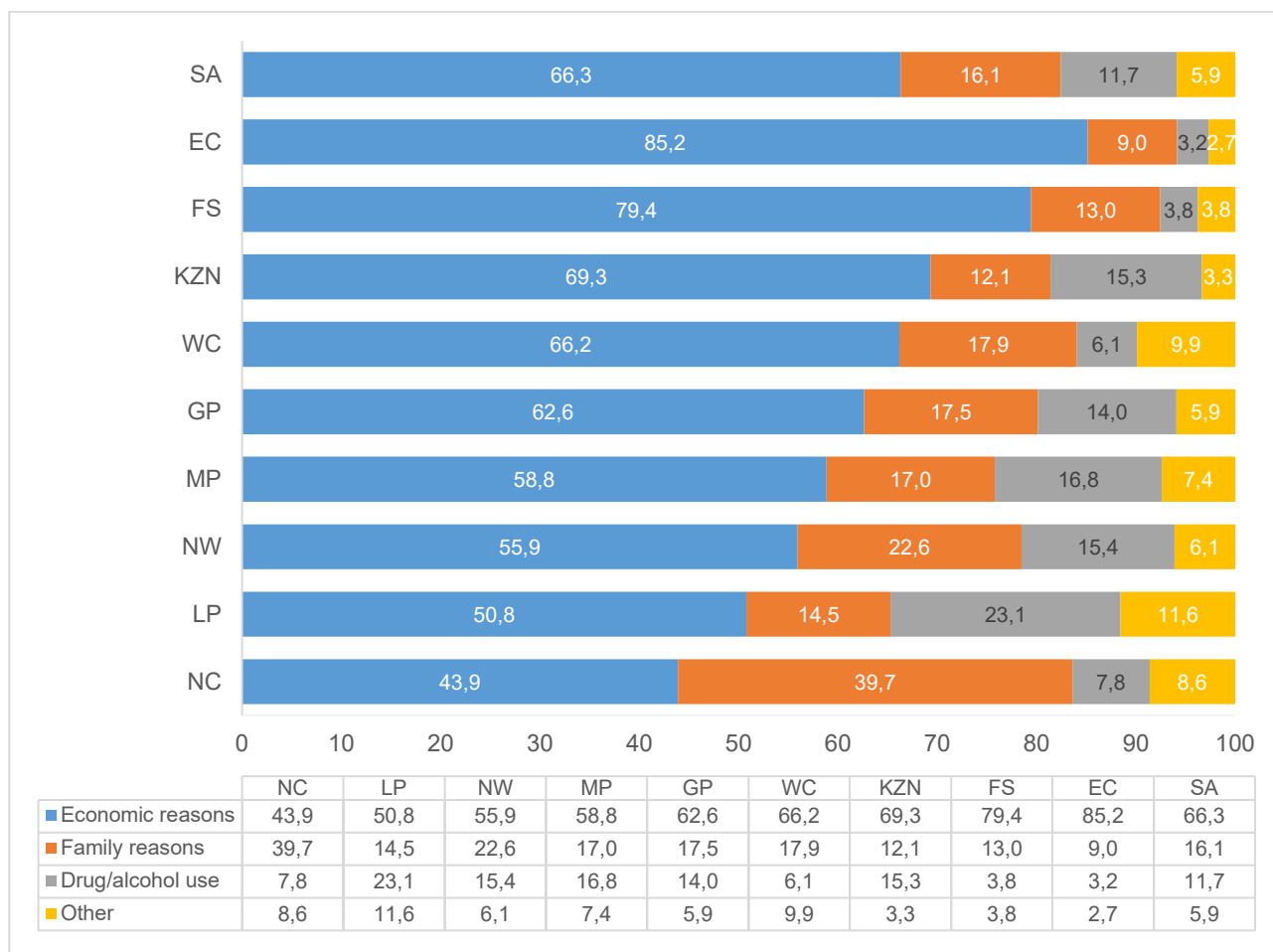
#### 4.6 Reasons for homelessness by province

Homelessness in South Africa varies across provinces due to factors such as migration, economic activity and unique social issues. For example, the Western Cape experiences significant in-migration and is characterised by the high cost of housing and a high prevalence of substance abuse (Roets, et al., 2016; Herron, 2023). In Gauteng, homelessness is likely driven largely by economic factors, as many individuals from other provinces and neighbouring countries relocate there in search of economic opportunities.

As shown in Figure 4.4, the reasons for homelessness vary across the provinces. In all provinces, economic factors accounted for the main reason for homelessness. However, variations exist in the percentage contribution in each province. In the Eastern Cape, the overwhelming majority (85,2%) were homeless as a result of economic reasons, followed by the Free State (79,4%) and KwaZulu-Natal (69,3%). In contrast, only 43,9% of the homeless population in the Northern Cape cited economic reasons as the main reason for their homelessness. Just less than two-fifths (39,7%) reported reasons concerning family as their main reason for homelessness in this province, the highest percentage when compared with other provinces. Limpopo’s homeless population had a comparatively large proportion (23,1%) that were homeless because of drug/alcohol use. In the Eastern Cape (3,2%), Free State (3,8%), Western Cape (6,1%) and Northern Cape (7,8%), low proportions of the homeless population – below the national proportion of 11,7% – provided alcohol/drug use as a reason. The analysis by province could be an important input in drafting differentiated strategies to address the problem of homelessness.



**Figure 4.4 – Provincial distribution of homeless population by reasons for homelessness and province, Census 2022**



Note: Percentages exclude “Do not know” (1 062) and “Unspecified” (3 914).

## CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY

This report profiled the prevalence and type of homelessness, characteristics of homeless persons as well as causes of homelessness in South Africa. Measuring homelessness in South Africa changed slightly in Census 2022. For the first time, beyond measuring prevalence, additional questions such as reasons for homelessness, educational attainment and place of birth were asked. The inclusion of such questions has enriched data on the characteristics of homeless persons, and common causes of homelessness have been identified. This information remains critical in understanding who is homeless and such information is paramount in informing the drafting of new policies and reviewing of existing ones.

Homelessness increased substantially from 13 135 in 1996 to 55 719 in Census 2022, although the prevalence of homelessness remained less than 1%, estimated at 0,09%. Some provinces, particularly urban ones such as Gauteng and Western Cape, are grappling with the issue of homelessness. Provincial variations show that homelessness was more prevalent in Gauteng, with nearly half (45,6%) of homeless persons residing in this province. Homelessness was less prevalent in the Northern Cape and Mpumalanga (1,1% and 2,3% respectively).

Findings on characteristics of homeless persons confirmed what has been observed in other countries; homelessness is more prevalent among males compared with females, and this was the case for both South African nationals and foreign-born homeless persons. Profiling homeless persons by age showed that the youth and adults contributed the largest share.

Findings on migration and homelessness revealed the majority of the persons experiencing homelessness were born in South Africa. However, several homeless persons were foreign nationals from neighbouring countries, most of whom were citizens from Lesotho (34,6%) and Zimbabwe (30,9%).

The cause of homelessness in South Africa has been explored for the first time in Census 2022. Findings revealed that the primary cause of homelessness in South Africa was largely joblessness. Sex variations indicated that 78,4% of homeless women and 56,2% of homeless men cited economic reasons. For interventions to be effective, the focus must be on creating employment opportunities, income-generating initiatives, and ensuring equal access to housing.

In conclusion, homelessness in South Africa is on the rise and the most affected persons in the population are male youth and adults, who mainly attributed their homelessness to economic reasons. The development and implementation of relevant interventions to address homelessness should therefore focus on creating employment opportunities and income-generating initiatives.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Distribution of homeless population by reasons for homelessness, Census 2022

Reason for homelessness	Number
Lost job/no job	21 362
No income	3 330
Divorce/separation	283
Illness/medical issues	328
Drug/alcohol use	4 622
Arguments with family/friends	3 149
Cannot afford accommodation	1 455
Student, but cannot afford student accommodation	70
Domestic/family violence	974
Natural disaster	157
Parent(s) died	1 622
Committed crime	320
Moved with family	338
Other	1 526
<b>Total</b>	<b>39 536</b>

Note: Totals exclude "Do not know" (1 062) and "Unspecified" (3 914).

### Appendix B: Grouped reasons for homelessness

Broad category – reason for homelessness	Reasons for homelessness
Economic reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lost job/no job</li> <li>• No income</li> <li>• Cannot afford accommodation</li> <li>• Student, but cannot afford student accommodation</li> </ul>
Reasons concerning family/relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divorce/separation</li> <li>• Arguments with family/friends</li> <li>• Domestic/family violence</li> <li>• Parent(s) died</li> <li>• Moved with family</li> </ul>
Drug/alcohol use	Drug/alcohol use
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical reasons</li> <li>• Natural disaster</li> <li>• Committed crime</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul>



