# 2.3 million evictions across the US in 2016

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A team of researchers from Princeton University, led by sociologist Matt Desmond, has begun compiling a database of evictions throughout the United States. The first of its kind, the database found that at least 2.3 million evictions were filed in 2016, a rate of 4 evictions per minute, underscoring the heightening housing crisis in the United States a decade after the collapse of the housing market.

Desmond's project, Eviction Lab, has thus far collected 83 million records from 48 states and the District of Columbia. "We're in the middle of a housing crisis, and that means more and more people are giving more and more of their income to rent and utilities. Our hope is that we can take this problem that's been in the dark and bring it into the light," Desmond recently told NPR.

This scourge of evictions, Desmond reports, is rooted in the stagnation of wages combined with escalating housing prices. "Incomes have remained flat for many Americans over the last two decades," Desmond explained, "but housing costs have soared… between 1995 and today, median asking rents have increased by 70 percent, adjusting for inflation." As a result, he notes, there is a "shrinking gap" between families' income and their rent expenses.

Desmond's assertion is borne out by research done by other organizations. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), workers earning the federal minimum wage ($7.25 hourly) would have to work an average of 94.5 hours weekly in order to afford a basic, one-bedroom apartment. The NLIHC's annual report on low income housing, released in March, states that about 8 million people nationwide pay greater than 50 percent of their income for rent.

"The problem is not that low-income people aren't working hard enough. The problem, rather, is that many jobs don't pay enough for low-income people to afford to pay the rent," Diane Yentel, the president and CEO of the NLIHC told City Lab.

In the midst of the shrinking rent-to-income ratio, public housing is not rising to meet the needs of low income family. In his interview with NPS, Desmond explained, "...Wait a minute, where's public housing here? Where's housing vouchers? Doesn't the government help? And the answer is, it does help, but only for a small percentage of families. Only about 1 in 4 families who qualify for housing assistance get anything. So when we picture the typical low income American today, we shouldn't think of them living in public housing or getting any kind [of] housing assistance for the government, we should think of folks who are paying 60, 70, 80 percent of their income and living unassisted in the private rental market. That's our typical case today."

The Hampton Roads region of Virginia, which comprises seven cities, including Virginia Beach, Norfolk, and Newport News, has one of the highest eviction rates in the nation. According to Eviction Lab, all the region's cities issued eviction orders three times more than the national average in 2016. Landlords asked courts to issue eviction orders for at least a fifth of rental households in Hampton Roads that year.

In Hampton Roads, the housing issues are manifold. As in many parts of the country, incomes in the region have not risen in proportion to demanded rent. In addition, public housing is not only failing to answer to the problem but is actually exacerbating it. Three of Norfolk's public housing developments—Calvert Square, Tidewater Gardens, and Young Terrace—are slated for "overhaul" over the next 10 years. Altogether, the developments currently house about 4,200 people, many of whom will be displaced by the planned renovations.

In April, Ben Carson, the Director of Housing and Urban Development, visited Norfolk and praised the city for its plans to replace these public housing developments with mixed-income housing. "The overall plan is very well thought out. It's something that will garner a lot of support and I think it will likely be included in the opportunity zone," Carson said during his visit. Opportunity zones are economically disadvantaged areas targeted for redevelopment by HUD. Investors who develop in opportunity zones are eligible for tax

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deferments until 2026.

Carson sloppily dodged questions posed by concerned residents of these housing developments during his visit. “In talking to the mayor and some of the council members,” he said in front of the news cameras, “they are very carefully looking at the displacement issue and they are taking it into account in their planning, so I don’t think it’s going to be a big issue.”

The city, however, is not counting on public housing residents coming back to the area. Officials cite the nearby Broad Creek development, which “redeveloped” 767 units in the former Bowling Green and Roberts Village housing developments; a mere 150 of the developments’ original residents returned to the new, mixed-income housing. While the city chooses to frame this as a choice made freely, it is more likely that residents simply could not wait for the new developments.

The Hampton Roads eviction rate is extraordinarily high, but it is not the only region where housing authorities are increasingly more interested in developing real estate than providing affordable housing for low income workers. Opportunity Zones have been designated in at least 15 states and one territory since HUD initiated its redevelopment scheme in January.

Matthew Desmond points out that Eviction Lab can only provide a portion of the real impact of eviction in the US. As he told NPR “...the estimates that we have are stunning, but they’re also too low,” given the myriad ways that people can be evicted without landlords bothering to file for an order. He noted the many deleterious effects evictions have upon individuals and families, from the resulting condition of homelessness to poor job and school performance.

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