More than 1 million people in Germany without housing

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According to a press release issued in November by the Federal Working Group on Assistance for the Homeless (BAGW), the number of people without housing in Germany has, for the first time, risen to at least 1,029,000 in 2024. This increase directly reflects the policies of the federal and state governments, which are driving through savage social cutbacks to finance insane levels of military rearmament.

In 2023 there were 928,000 people without housing in Germany—an increase of 101,000, or 10.9 percent, in just one year. The development between 2022 and 2023 was even more drastic: the number rose from 607,000 to 928,000, an increase of 52.9 percent.

It must be borne in mind that these are only the official figures. The real number is far higher. The estimates are based on the annual "housing emergency" reporting from North Rhine-Westphalia, which records rates of people without housing at the level of districts, towns and municipalities and extrapolates them for the whole of Germany based on population figures.

Of the more than 1 million people currently without housing, around 840,000 are accommodated within the so-called "emergency housing assistance" system, that is, in municipal shelters. Seventy-four percent—around 765,000 people—are adults. Around 26 percent are children and young people, who are mostly housed together with their parents. In total, around 820,000 people affected do not hold German citizenship.

War refugees from Ukraine make up the largest group, accounting for around 25 percent. While the federal government is doing everything to escalate the war against Russia, deporting ever more Ukrainians and sending them back to the slaughter of war, refugees here are forced to live under miserable conditions.

Under the former coalition of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Greens and Liberal Democratic Party (FDP), a "special fund" of €100 billion was created for military rearmament. The current government under Chancellor Friedrich Merz, comprised of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats, is now pursuing the aim of transforming Germany into a major military power. With the support of the Left Party (Die Linke), it has agreed a gigantic special fund of €1 trillion for military rearmament and war infrastructure. The war budget for next year provides for an increase to €108 billion and is set to rise to €153 billion by 2029.

These sums are being financed through massive social cuts. "Homelessness in the Federal Republic of Germany has reached a record high and there is no end in sight," explains Susanne Hahmann, chair of the BAGW. "The causes are well known: too little affordable housing, poverty and looming cuts in the social security system."

These cuts are being pushed forward by federal and state governments. There is less and less money available for social purposes. Rents have been rising rapidly for years, social housing is disappearing, and poverty is increasing steadily. If those experiencing "housing poverty" are included, around one in five people in Germany was already affected by poverty last year. A tiny minority of just 0.6 percent of the population now owns 45 percent of total wealth. The number of forced evictions is also rising, with the result that more and more people are losing their homes.

The causes of losing one's home include rent and energy arrears, conflicts in the housing environment, evictions on grounds of "own use" by landlords, separation or divorce, and the need to move to a different area. The substantial cuts to emergency housing assistance are an additional problem. According to the BAGW, 17 percent of facilities and

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services are affected by or threatened with cuts. In addition, there are planned tougher sanctions within the new basic income support scheme (Bürgergeld). If appointments at Jobcentres are missed, benefits, including rent payments, can be sharply reduced or even cut completely.

Social welfare organisations fear that this will drastically exacerbate homelessness. It is not only through the familiar harassment practised by Jobcentres that rent payments will be cut. People dependent on benefits will also find it even harder to obtain housing at all in future. “Because landlords now also know: renting to those receiving Bürgergeld carries the risk that the authority may no longer pay the rent,” said Michaela Engelmeier of the German Social Association (SoVD).

More than a third of all tenants are already spending over 30 percent of their net income on housing. Around 6 million tenants are even paying more than 40 percent of their net income on housing costs. Households on low incomes are especially overburdened, with 37.5 percent in an extreme situation, according to the 2025 rent report of the German Tenants’ Association. In addition, around 6.3 percent of tenants are unable to heat their homes adequately.

Facilities for people without housing are increasingly being used by people in work. Almost 15 percent now have a job, an increase of 2 percentage points compared to 2015.

The bold declarations from federal and state governments that homelessness and rough sleeping in Germany will be “overcome” by 2030 are sheer cynicism. Berlin’s Senate administration recently stated that the so-called “needs forecast” for accommodation, which currently stands at around 55,000 places, will rise to more than 85,000 by the end of 2029. This corresponds to an increase of 55 percent.

In 1995 there were still 2.7 million social housing units in Germany. Thirty years later, fewer than 1 million remain. In Berlin, the number of social housing units fell from 340,000 in 2000 to around 85,000 today—only a quarter of the original stock—as a result of selloffs by state governments of the SPD and the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) or its successor, the Left Party. In 2024 there were 2,495 forced evictions in Berlin, an increase of 5.3 percent compared to 2023, when there were 2,369. Across Germany, the number of forced evictions rose over the same period from 32,669 to 35,028 in 2024 (an increase of 7.2 percent).

For the beginning of 2026, the municipal housing companies in Berlin have announced substantial rent increases for around 99,000 households, between 2.5 and 5.5 percent.

The practices of unscrupulous property corporations are further fuelling the precarious situation on the housing market. The property giant Vonovia has been forced to withdraw recent rent increases of 15 percent. The blue-chip company, listed on the DAX stock index, had justified this brutal increase in tens of thousands of cases by inventing fictitious features not provided for in the local rent index. Recently, the Berlin Regional Court ruled that this practice was unlawful. However, as Vonovia has pointed out, tenants must accept the unlawful rent rise if they have already agreed to it.

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