

Homelessness worsens in New Zealand

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As the new year begins, millions of working people in New Zealand face an increasingly severe social crisis: rising unemployment and poverty, soaring living costs, and widespread, deeply entrenched homelessness.

On December 16, the Salvation Army and Community Housing Aotearoa released the results of a recent survey, which found that in Auckland, the biggest city, the number of people living without shelter more than doubled between September 2024 and September 2025 from 426 to 940.

This surge is the direct outcome of the National Party-led government's brutal austerity measures, designed to make the working class pay for the deepening economic crisis and to divert more public money to the military to prepare for war.

Government funding for housing support has been cut from \$655.4 million last financial year to \$576.5 million in the current year to June 2026.

According to the Ministry of Social Development, "There were 3,933 Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants during the September 2025 quarter, down 7,482 or 65.5 percent from the September 2024 quarter." By June 2025 more than one in three people applying for a grant were being rejected, compared with just 4 percent in March 2024.

This crackdown has coincided with increased unemployment, which reached 5.3 percent in the September quarter or 160,000 people: the biggest number since 1994. In total, as of September 410,328 people—12.7 percent of the working-age population—depend on poverty-level welfare payments, mainly due to unemployment, illness or because they are a sole parent. This figure is up 19,104 (4.9 percent) from September 2024.

The scale of social distress is documented in a Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) report titled "Dignity for All," released on December 11, based on more than

10,000 enquiries between November 2023 and April 2025. It found growing numbers of people being pushed off welfare or barred from accessing housing.

"We are seeing people who may have young children or babies coming in and they're facing imminent homelessness and they're being told [by Work and Income] that they're not eligible for emergency accommodation," the CAB's Louise May told Radio NZ.

The CAB report gives several examples of vulnerable people being denied assistance, including Inez, who "is homeless since she was made redundant and is living in her car. ... Inez is now receiving the Jobseeker benefit but has been told it may be a year before she is offered any housing."

Anya, who also lives in her car, needed a grant to repair it but this was denied by Work and Income "as their new policy is not to fix cars." Unable to move her car, she continually receives parking fines.

Naomi, a mother with twin babies, sought help from CAB after being told she no longer met the criteria for emergency housing and had to leave her accommodation with one day's notice. Work and Income "told Naomi to try and find family to stay with."

The burden of homelessness falls hardest on Māori and Pacific Island communities—who are among the most exploited workers—and on young people. Nearly half of those experiencing severe housing deprivation are under 25 years old.

Auckland community group Kick Back released a report titled "State of the Street" in early December based on its work supporting 160 young people. Of these, 62 percent were under 19 years old and 17 percent were under 16.

Many of these children were "sleeping rough, couch surfing, living in dangerous and unstable housing environments, and struggling to gain access to the

support they require.” Kick Back stated that “there is no immediate housing service designed to meet the needs of children experiencing homelessness” and government cuts were making the situation worse.

In October, the government announced a policy to stop unemployment benefits for 18- and 19-year-olds whose parents earn more than \$65,529 a year. Prime Minister Christopher Luxon—himself a landlord and former Air New Zealand CEO—dismissively told young people that “the world doesn’t owe you a living.”

The government is preparing more draconian and punitive measures against the homeless. Speaking to Newstalk ZB on December 1, Luxon confirmed that he wants to give police officers the power to issue “move on” orders to rough sleepers, particularly in central Auckland.

While a government statement declared that under the plan rough sleepers would get “mental health, addiction, and housing support,” it only promised “207 additional social houses” in Auckland. This is a drop in the ocean compared with the level of need, even if the houses are actually built, which is far from guaranteed.

The real attitude of the ruling elite was expressed by Auckland’s right-wing mayor Wayne Brown, who told the *New Zealand Herald* on November 8 that “scruffy-looking” homeless people were causing “economic damage” and should be transported “out into the countryside” away from areas frequented by tourists.

The opposition Labour Party and the Greens have issued hypocritical statements condemning the government for cutting housing entitlements. “I don’t understand how Christopher Luxon can sleep at night when he has presided over decisions that have cast families onto the street. There will be many people spending Christmas without a roof over their head because of him and his government,” Labour housing spokesperson Kieran McNulty said in a December 17 statement.

In fact, homelessness increased significantly under the 2017-2023 Labour-Greens coalition government. Census figures show that the number of people experiencing “severe housing deprivation”—including people sleeping outdoors, in cars, garages, and in overcrowded or otherwise uninhabitable conditions—increased from 99,462 in 2018 to 112,496 people (2.3 percent of the population) in 2023.

Labour’s “Kiwibuild” scheme—a 2017 election

pledge to build 100,000 “affordable” houses—was a complete fraud. By early 2024 only 2,335 had been built by private companies under the scheme, mostly in Auckland, where they were sold for an average of \$613,437—far out of reach of low-wage workers.

The last Labour government handed out tens of billions of dollars to big business to protect profits during the pandemic, presided over a speculative property bubble, and rejected any measures to increase tax on New Zealand’s billionaires. Meanwhile, the number of children living in poverty and the number of families relying on food parcels increased, along with homelessness.

None of the capitalist parties offers any solution to the crisis facing working people. Putting an end to homelessness requires the mobilisation of the working class based on a socialist program, to expropriate the banks, big businesses and major landlords. The wealth and resources accumulated by the super-rich—as well as the billions of dollars wasted on military spending—must be redirected to guarantee high-quality housing for all and to put an end to poverty and inequality.



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