

November 2014

The Rising Number of Homeless Families in NYC, 2002–2012:

A Look at Why Families Were Granted Shelter, the Housing They Had Lived in & Where They Came From

Summary

The substantial increase in the number of families in the city's homeless shelters during the tenure of the Bloomberg Administration has been well documented. Far less is generally known about the living situations of those families just before entering the shelter system: Why were families granted eligibility for shelter and have the reasons changed over time? What type of housing did they live in and were families in overcrowded apartments? Which neighborhoods did they come from?

In order to seek answers to these and related questions, IBO has examined extensive data compiled by the city's Department of Homeless Services on families with children entering the city's shelter system. Our study stretches across an 11-year period from fiscal years 2002 through 2012. Over this period, the number of entries into family shelter rose from 6,400 in 2002 to a peak of more than 12,000 in 2010, before declining to about 8,500 entries in 2012. Among IBO's key findings:

- Over the 2002-2012 period, the share of families eligible for shelter due to eviction or domestic violence rose while the share of families entering due to overcrowding fell considerably—although according to other city data the share of overcrowded apartments citywide remained relatively unchanged.
- Nearly 60 percent of the families entering the city's shelter system during the study period had most recently lived either in buildings containing rent-regulated apartments (43 percent) or in public housing (16 percent).
- More families lived in the Bronx prior to entering the shelter system than any other borough. But on the basis of neighborhoods, the largest number of families entering shelter came from three Brooklyn neighborhoods—over 2,000 families each from Crown Heights North, East New York, and Stuyvesant Heights.
- Nearly 10 percent of the shelter entrants during the study period came from just 30 of the city's more than 2,000 census tracts. The 30 census tracts account for about 2 percent of the city's population.

New York City spends more than \$900 million annually on its homeless shelter system and related services (for families and single adults). A better understanding of where people lived and the situations they experienced right before entering the shelter system can help the city craft policies and programs that ensure its funding is used to provide more effective homelessness prevention services and run the kind of emergency housing most needed by families.

Introduction

When Mayor Bill de Blasio took the oath of office on New Year's Day he assumed control of a homeless shelter system with a record high population; that month an average of 10,611 families with children slept in the city's shelter system each night. When Mayor Michael Bloomberg began his first term 12 years earlier (January 2002), an average of about 6,500 families with children slept in shelters each night. Despite launching an ambitious plan in 2004 to reform the city's approach to homeless services and end chronic homelessness in 10 years, the number of families with children living in the city's homeless shelter system increased dramatically during the Bloomberg Administration.

In this brief, the Independent Budget Office examines data on families with children that entered the New York City shelter system from 2002 through 2012 to better understand families' living situations prior to entering shelter (all references to years are fiscal years, except when noted). While a significant share of the shelter system's growth during this period can be attributed to a decline in the number of families exiting shelter for permanent housing, there has also been an increase in the number of families entering shelter. The number of entries into shelter grew from nearly 6,400 families in 2002 to a peak of more than 12,000 in 2010, before declining to about 8,500 families in 2012.

Two policy decisions by the Bloomberg Administration made finding permanent housing more difficult. First, the city switched from a policy of prioritizing homeless families for federal housing subsidies to providing a rental subsidy for some families leaving shelter, only to end the rental subsidy program a few years later.

Since taking office, the de Blasio Administration has begun to implement new policies, including creating new rental subsidy programs and announcing that homeless families would receive priority referrals for some vacant public housing apartments. While these changes are likely to affect the size of the shelter population, the magnitude of the impact is still unclear. It also remains to be seen what effect the changes will have on the number of families seeking to enter the city's shelter system. Because data for this analysis is from 2002 through 2012, this paper does not reflect trends under the de Blasio Administration.

In order to gain access to emergency shelter in New York City, families must apply for shelter and prove that they have no other housing resources available. While some analysts have questioned the validity of the city's eligibility

determinations, the data collected by the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) during this process provides useful information about families' living situations prior to entering shelter. Using this data, IBO analyzed trends in family homeless shelter entry, including changes in the reasons families are found eligible for shelter, the type of housing families lived in before entering shelter, and which neighborhoods in the city they resided in before entering shelter. This analysis sheds light on how both the family shelter census and the city's family shelter eligibility process have changed over a decade.

Shelter Intake and Eligibility

Right to Shelter. Unlike other major cities, New York City is legally required to provide shelter to homeless families and single adults. This right to shelter was first established in 1981 after homeless men, represented by the Legal Aid Society, brought a class action lawsuit, *Callahan v. Cary*, against the city. The Callahan consent decree, which settled the litigation, established the right for homeless single men and set basic standards for shelter operation. Shortly afterward, in 1983, a second lawsuit—*Eldredge v. Koch*—incorporated single women into the Callahan decree. In 1986, the Appellate Division of the State Supreme Court ordered the city to provide emergency housing to homeless families with children in the case *McCain v. Koch*, although this and other subsequent lawsuits over the right of families to shelter were not completely settled until December 2008. (See “History of the Family Intake and Eligibility Process” on page 4.)

During the more than 30 years since the Callahan decree, the city has established shelter systems for families with children, families without children, and single adults. Each system operates with distinct rules and procedures, many of which originated through court orders. A significant distinction between shelter for families (families with children and those without) and the adult shelter system is that families must demonstrate that they have no other housing option available to them in order to be deemed eligible for shelter. This process is based on court orders, consent decrees, settlement agreements, and New York State public assistance regulations and administrative directives.¹ There is no comparable eligibility review process for single adults. Although the city proposed an eligibility process for single adults in November 2011, state courts prevented the implementation of the policy change because the city did not put it through the regular city rulemaking processes. The courts did not rule on the merits of the policy change.

Family Intake and Eligibility Process. Families with children seeking shelter apply at a central location, known as the Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) Center in the Bronx.² Families arriving at PATH must provide identification materials to establish that they are a family. Prior to the eligibility process, they are screened for health issues and domestic violence. If there are special medical issues, they are referred to on-site contracted medical staff. If a family reports domestic violence, they are referred to the Human Resources Administration's (HRA) No Violence Again (NoVA) program staff at PATH. Depending on the outcome of the interview with HRA staff, families may be placed in the city's specialized domestic violence shelter system, which is separate from the DHS shelter system, or return to the general application process. All other families then meet with HRA diversion caseworkers who interview families to determine if they can avoid shelter through a variety of prevention services, including anti-eviction legal services, family mediation, or one-time rental assistance. If these services do not apply, families meet with a DHS family worker for a shelter eligibility interview.

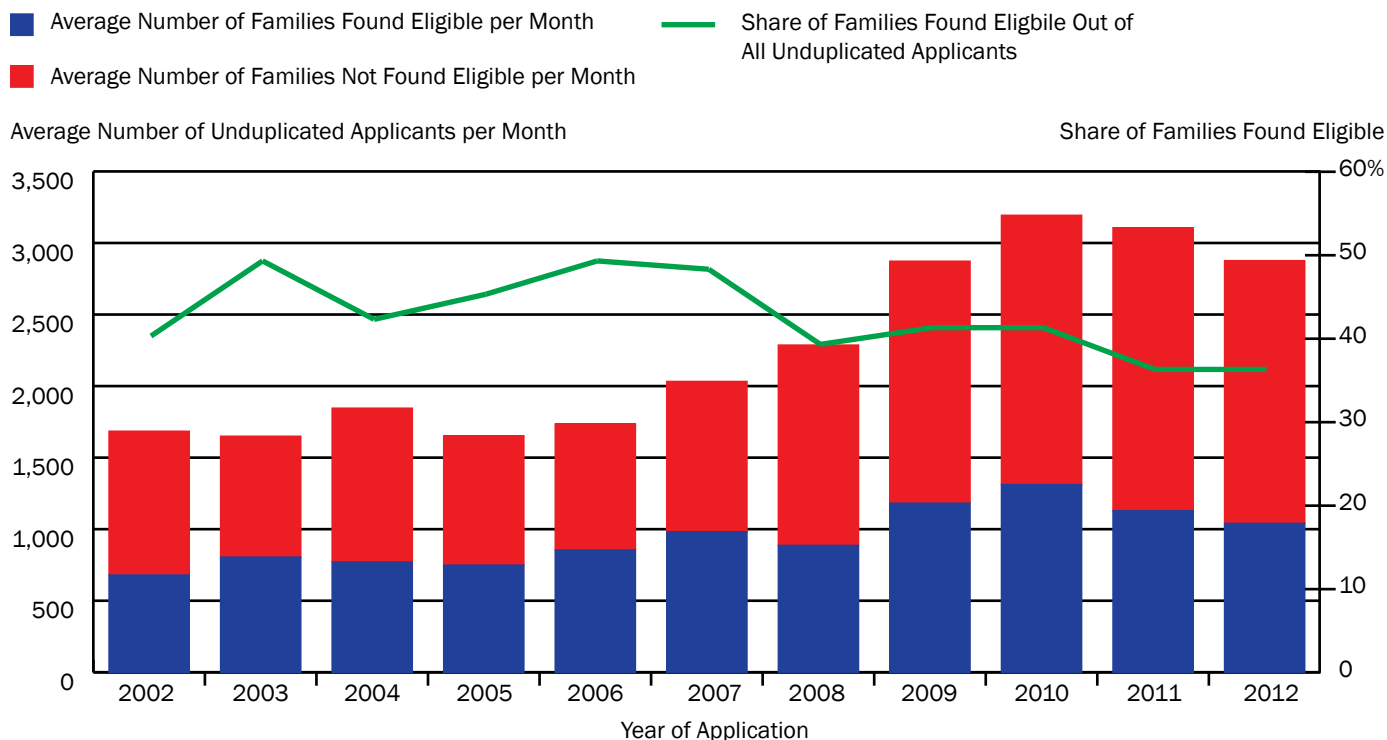
During the eligibility interview, DHS staff collects information and, when applicable, documentation on the family's reason for homelessness, the family's housing history, sources

of income, employment history, and other demographics. The families are once again screened for health issues and domestic violence. Families are given a provisional placement in shelter for up to 10 days while DHS staff investigates the information given in the eligibility interview.³

Depending on the family's situation, the investigation includes calling landlords to assess evictions, visiting former homes to investigate claims of overcrowded conditions or health and safety violations, reviewing applicable documentation, and speaking to friends or family with whom the applicant has previously lived. If no other housing option is deemed viable, DHS finds the family eligible for shelter. If other housing is deemed available, or if the family fails to provide the required information during the investigation, the family is found ineligible for shelter. In addition, some families who apply for shelter make their own arrangements and do not complete the eligibility process. Families found ineligible may request a legal conference with a DHS lawyer and/or fair hearing from the state to dispute a determination of ineligibility. They also may apply for shelter again.

In 2012, the city spent \$19.1 million on shelter intake and eligibility reviews for families with children—about 2

Decreasing Share of Families Found Eligible for Shelter



SOURCE: Department of Homeless Services

NOTE: Family applicants include families with children and adult families as the two classifications were not disaggregated in Department of Homeless Services data until fiscal year 2009.

New York City Independent Budget Office

History of the Family Intake and Eligibility Process

- **June 1983:** Legal Aid Society files *McCain v. Koch*. At issue is whether homeless families with children are entitled to emergency shelter under the State Plan for Emergency Assistance to Families with Needy Children and the equal protection clauses of the New York Constitution, and the U.S. Constitution.
- **May 1986:** Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court issues a preliminary ruling in *McCain v. Koch* and finds that there is a likelihood of success on the claim that families with children have a legal right to emergency shelter. The court grants “a preliminary injunction barring the denial of emergency shelter to homeless families.” Homeless family intake is done primarily at four Emergency Assistance Units (EAUs) in Human Resources Administration (HRA)-operated welfare centers located in each borough except Staten Island.
- **August 1993:** After years of shelter census growth, the Dinkins Administration begins using eligibility determinations as a condition for entry into family shelter. The same year the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), previously a division of HRA, is established. The city begins closing three of the four EAUs and centralizes family shelter intake at the EAU in the Bronx.
- **August 1996:** The Giuliani Administration tightens the eligibility investigation process and shifts the focus from a social service needs assessment conducted by caseworkers to an eligibility investigation conducted by fraud investigators.
- **January 2003:** In order to reduce the volume of litigation pertaining to family shelter, the Legal Aid Society, representing homeless families, and the Bloomberg Administration enter into a stipulation for a two-year litigation moratorium, during which a Family Homelessness Special Master Panel is charged with evaluating the family shelter system, including the EAU and eligibility determinations. Shortly after, the panel releases a report with recommendations to improve family shelter intake, including replacing the EAU, speeding up the application process, and ensuring consistent application of eligibility rules.
- **September 2004:** Mayor Bloomberg announces “Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter”—a plan to reduce homelessness by two-thirds in 5 years and end chronic homelessness in 10 years. The plan incorporated many recommendations of the Special Master Panel.
- **September 2004:** DHS introduces Homebase as a pilot homelessness prevention program in the six community districts most heavily represented among the last addresses of shelter entrants. In 2007, the program is expanded to 11 more districts and by January 2008 Homebase is operating citywide. Services to divert families from homeless shelters include family and landlord mediation, budgeting assistance, emergency rental assistance, public benefits advocacy, and job search assistance.
- **November 2004:** A new interim EAU called Prevention Assistance Temporary Housing Center (PATH) opens in the Bronx, while the city prepares to demolish and rebuild the existing EAU. Families new to the shelter system enter through the interim PATH center while families reentering the system are processed at the old EAU. New procedures are introduced at the PATH center to reduce time throughout the application process, provide more opportunities to access prevention services, and provide clients with enhanced access to services combatting domestic violence and child welfare services.
- **July 2006:** The old EAU is closed. All families with children are processed through the interim PATH center.
- **December 2008:** The Bloomberg Administration and the Legal Aid Society settle four longstanding lawsuits pertaining to family shelter, including *McCain v. Koch*, known by then as *McCain v. Bloomberg*. The settlement, known as the Boston settlement, ensured the right to shelter for families, outlined procedures for assessing shelter eligibility, and ordered the city to make certain data on the eligibility process is publicly available. The settlement also vacated the court orders that up to that point governed the family shelter system. The settlement provisions that set eligibility process procedures and made data available sunset in December 2010.
- **May 2011:** The new, renovated PATH intake center opens at the former EAU location in the Bronx and the interim center is closed.

percent of DHS's \$900.5 million total budget that year. This included the salaries of 328 intake personnel, 155 of whom were field investigators, also known as fraud investigators, who assessed families' homelessness claims. Spending on family intake as a share of the agency's total budget, along with intake staff levels, have remained relatively stable from 2002 through 2012, the period covered by this report.

Shelter Eligibility: Decreasing Share of Families Found Eligible.

While the city saw a significant increase in applications to emergency shelter for families from 2002 through 2012, it became more difficult to enter shelter during that period. (Due to data constraints families are defined here to include those with and without children).⁴ In 2002, an average of 1,685 unduplicated families applied for shelter each month and an average of 40 percent of those (about 680 families) were deemed eligible and placed in shelter; if a family applied for shelter multiple times within the same month, it is included in the total for that month only once. The remaining families were either found ineligible for shelter by DHS or made their own housing arrangements with or without the assistance of DHS diversion staff and therefore did not complete the eligibility process. In 2012, about 71 percent more families—an average of 2,877 each month—applied for emergency shelter, while on average 36 percent, or 1,041 applicants a month, were found eligible for shelter by DHS. Overall, during 2002 through 2007, the first half of our study period, the share of families applying for shelter each month that were determined to be eligible was 46 percent. In 2008 through 2012, the second half of our study period, the average eligibility rate for families fell to 39 percent.

In addition to a decline in the share of families being found eligible for shelter over the study period, an increasing number of families applied for shelter more than once before they entered shelter. In 2002, 62 percent of families that entered the family shelter system were ruled eligible on their first application. By 2012, that share had declined to 55 percent of the entering families.⁵ Families that apply for shelter more than once include families found ineligible for shelter on their first application, families that began an application and failed to complete the eligibility process, and some families that were found eligible but for some reason did not enter shelter after their initial application.

Family Shelter Data and Methodology

In this report IBO examines data on families with children that entered the New York City shelter system from 2002

through 2012. While we report yearly data, we also split the study period into two segments 2002 through 2007 and 2008 through 2012; the start of the latter period coincides with the beginning of the most recent recession. The data, provided by DHS, contains information on 95,906 entries into the family homeless shelter system. Entries are defined for this paper as families entering the DHS shelter system either for the first time or those returning after a period of more than 30 days out of shelter. Included in the 95,906 entries is information on 75,888 distinct families. About 20 percent of families entered the shelter system more than once during the 11-year study period, and are therefore included more than once in the analysis. Of those families that entered more than once, 76 percent entered twice with an average of a little over two years between entries. The data provided to IBO does not include information on families that were found ineligible for shelter.

Data for each entry includes:

- Demographic information, such as race and family size;
- The dates on which each family entered and left shelter;
- The primary reason why DHS staff determined the family eligible for shelter, which is based on the agency's investigation into the family's prior living situation; and
- The family's most recent address prior to entering shelter.

Eligibility reasons used by DHS include eviction, overcrowding at prior residence, domestic violence, discord that is judged not to be domestic violence, unlivable conditions at prior residence, aging out of foster care, involvement with the child welfare system, release from jail or a rehabilitation facility, and living on the street. During the study period DHS began recording greater detail on families eligible due to domestic violence. "Offered DV Shelter" was added as an eligibility reason in mid-2009 and flags that families were offered shelter in the city's specialized, but time-limited, shelter system for domestic violence (DV) survivors, but chose to be placed in DHS shelter. "DV Shelter Timed Out" was added in mid-2011 to flag families who had previously been in the city's domestic violence shelter system and entered the DHS system after reaching the maximum length of stay in the DV shelter (180 consecutive days).⁶ Families that were offered and accepted placement in the city's specialized DV shelters and who did not enter the DHS shelter system at a later date are not included in the data for this analysis.

Eligibility reasons are missing for 1,969 entries (2 percent of the total entries during the study period). Slightly less than half of the missing reasons are for families that entered shelter in 2012, the year DHS converted to a new data system. As a result of this data conversion, eligibility reasons are missing for 11 percent of entries in 2012.

IBO geocoded families' addresses (if located in New York City) prior to entering the shelter system in order to match them with other city building data. This includes a database of buildings that had registered as having rent-regulated apartments from 2004 through 2011 provided by the New York State Division of Homes and Community Renewal, a database of public housing developments from the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), data on building size and use from the city's Department of Finance, and data on the housing's location, including neighborhood and census tract, from the Department of City Planning.

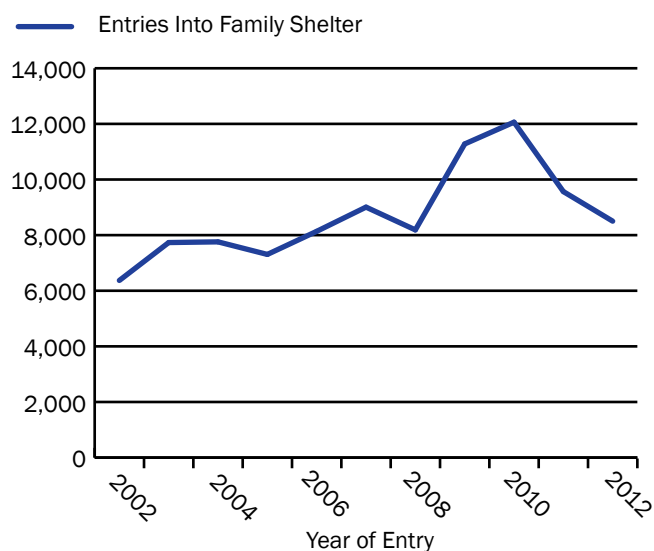
IBO was able to geocode prior address data for 79 percent of the shelter entry records, using the city's Geosupport Desktop Edition. IBO was unable to geocode the remaining 21 percent of entries for three primary reasons: The last address field was missing for 12 percent of the entries, mainly during the first half of the study period (2002-2007) when on average 26 percent of entries were missing a prior address each year; another 6 percent of the total entries listed a prior address outside of New York City and therefore could not be matched with city building data, and 3 percent of addresses were in New York City, but could not be geocoded.

Family Shelter Entrance Peaks in 2010

While the number of entries into family shelter system increased overall from 2002 through 2012, most of this growth took place in 2009 and 2010—during the Great Recession—before declining a bit in the last two years of the study period.

In 2002, in the midst of a recession, 6,370 families entered the shelter system.⁷ This increased by 21 percent in 2003 to 7,733 family entries, as the local economy continued to contract. Over the next several years, entries remained relatively stable and averaged about 8,000 per year. The start of the 14-months-long Great Recession resulted in a 38 percent increase in the number of families entering shelter, growing from 8,188 in 2008 to 11,278 in 2009.⁸ The number rose again, as the recession continued into 2010 reaching 12,062, the highest annual entries into shelter during the study period. As the recession ended, entries to family shelter declined over the next two years

Family Shelter Entrance Peaks in 2010



SOURCE: IBO analysis of data provided by the Department of Homeless Services

New York City Independent Budget Office

with 8,502 families entering shelter in 2012. While increases in entries to shelter are correlated with economic downturns, other factors including policies regarding shelter eligibility, the availability of housing subsidies, and the introduction of homeless prevention programs are also likely to affect the number of families coming in to shelter.

Demographics. The overwhelming majority of families entering the shelter system—93 percent—were led by women, a share that has remained relatively stable during the study period. In terms of race and ethnicity, more than half of the heads of families who provided information on race/ethnicity identified as black.⁹ This share increased slightly over the study period, growing from an average of 59 percent in 2002 through 2007, to an average of 61 percent in 2008 through 2012. The share of families headed by a Hispanic head of household dropped from an average of 38 percent in 2002 through 2007 to an average of 31 percent in 2008 through 2012, while the share of white families increased during the same periods, from an average of 2 percent in 2002 through 2007 to an average of 5 percent in 2008 through 2012. Each year 1 percent to 4 percent of entrants identified their race/ethnicity as “other.”

The average age of the head of household increased during the study period, while the average family size declined. In 2002, the average age of the applicant for shelter was 30 years old and the average family size was 3.7 members. In 2012, the average age of the head of household was 32, while the average family size was 3.3. On average, 10 percent of families entering shelter each year were headed

by a pregnant mother, a share that remained relatively steady during the study period.¹⁰

Increased Causes for Shelter Entry: Evictions & Domestic Violence

Over the study period, the share of families eligible for shelter due to eviction or domestic violence rose, while the share of families entering shelter due to overcrowding fell, according to the DHS eligibility reasons.¹¹

The most common reasons that DHS found families eligible for shelter over the 2002 through 2012 study period were eviction (28 percent), overcrowding (23 percent), and domestic violence (23 percent).

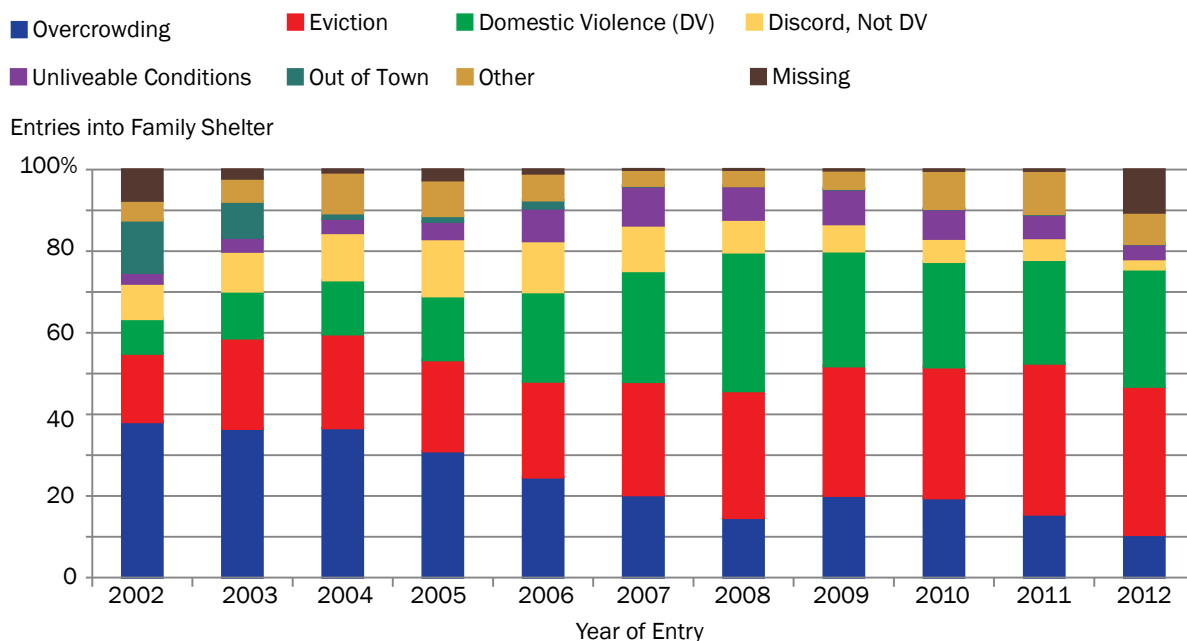
Together these three reasons accounted for nearly three-quarters of the shelter entries. Another 8 percent were found eligible because of discord, 6 percent because of unlivable conditions, 9 percent had some other reason, and 2 percent were missing data.

Because DHS staff select just one reason and the roots of family homeless are often more complex, the eligibility reason is somewhat limited as a proxy for the cause of family homelessness. Still, it provides useful information on the families' living situations prior to entering shelter and how this has changed over time.

Decline in Families Eligible Due to Overcrowding. From 2002 through 2006, the most common reason why DHS determined families eligible for emergency shelter was because their prior living situation was overcrowded. This could mean, for example, that the family's prior residence lacked adequate rooms for children of different genders to sleep, because there were not enough separate beds (or couches) for unrelated adults, or because the presence of extra furniture to accommodate the doubled-up family presented a fire hazard. In 2002, 2,431 entries into shelter (38 percent) were because of overcrowded prior living conditions. Overcrowding remained the most common eligibility determination through 2006, when 2,001 or 25 percent of the entries to shelter were due to doubled-up living conditions. However, the number and share of families found eligible due to overcrowding declined fairly steadily during the study period, with the exception of a slight uptick in 2009 and 2010—the years with the greatest number of shelter entries. In 2012, only 898 entries to shelter (11 percent of the annual total) were due to overcrowded prior living conditions. The decline of overcrowding as a reason families were found eligible for shelter coincided with a decrease in the average family size of shelter entrants.

Additionally, the relationship between shelter applicants from overcrowded situations and their host families shifted during the study period. While the large majority of

Increasing Share of Entries Due to Eviction, Domestic Violence



SOURCE: IBO analysis of data provided by the Department of Homeless Services

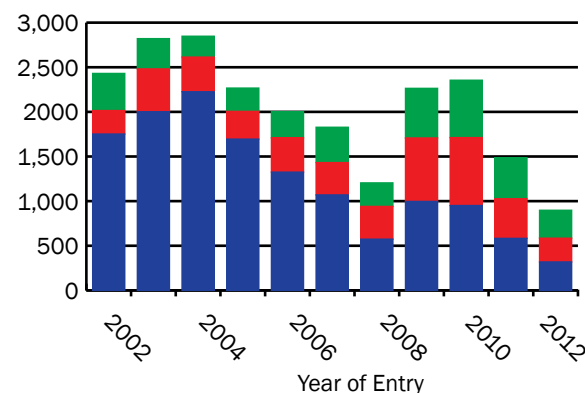
NOTE: In fiscal year 2012, the Department of Homeless Services converted to a new data system. As a result of this data conversion, eligibility reasons are missing for 11 percent of families.

New York City Independent Budget Office

Fewer Overcrowded Families Entering Shelter

- Overcrowding: Parent Primary Tenant
- Overcrowding: Other Relative Primary Tenant
- Overcrowding: Unrelated Primary Tenant

Entries Into Family Shelter



SOURCE: IBO analysis of data provided by the Department of Homeless Services

New York City Independent Budget Office

overcrowded families lived with their parents before shelter during the first six years of the study period, this declined dramatically and appears to account for most of the drop in the number of overcrowded eligibility determinations. For example, in 2002, 72 percent of overcrowded shelter entrants were living with a parent before shelter while only 35 percent of overcrowded families had been living with their parents preshelter in 2012. While the share of families living with unrelated household members and relatives other than parents also changed, the number of families in overcrowded situations living with persons to whom they were not related or relatives other than parents remained relatively stable during the entire study period. In 2002, 416 families lived with unrelated individuals before shelter and in 2012 that number was 313. Similarly, in 2002, 263 families coming from an overcrowded housing situation lived with relatives other than parents, nearly identical to the 266 living with relatives other than parents in 2012. The number living with parents preshelter, however, plummeted from 1,752 in 2002 to 319 in 2012.

Citywide Share of Overcrowded Housing Remains Relatively Steady. While the number of families entering shelter due to overcrowding declined considerably during the study period, the share of overcrowded apartments citywide did not appear to change significantly, according to city data. In order to provide some context for the DHS data, IBO analyzed the rate of overcrowding in rental housing for the city overall using data from the triennial New York City Housing Vacancy Survey (HVS).¹² According to the 2002

HVS, 3.9 percent of the city's rental housing stock was classified as severely overcrowded—meaning there are more than 1.5 household members for each room in the unit. That share dropped slightly in the 2005 HVS, to 3.7 percent. According to the 2008 and 2011 surveys, the share of severely overcrowded housing was 4.0 percent and 4.3 percent, respectively.¹³

It is unclear whether fewer families applied for shelter from overcrowded situations over the study period, or if DHS determined that fewer families in overcrowded housing qualified for shelter because IBO did not have access to data on families that were found ineligible for shelter. However, the decrease in shelter entries due to overcrowding coincides with the overall decline in the shelter applicant eligibility rate over the study period. This is despite the share of overcrowded housing remaining fairly steady citywide.

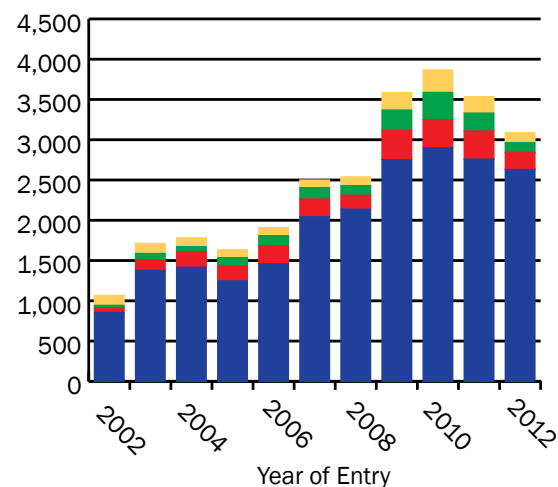
Increase in Families Eligible Due to Eviction. As the number of families found eligible for shelter due to overcrowding decreased over time, those entering shelter because of eviction moved in the opposite direction, more than tripling from 1,066 entries in 2002 (17 percent of all entries that year) to a peak of 3,866 entries in 2010 (32 percent). Eviction overtook overcrowding as the most common eligibility reason for homeless families in 2007 when 28 percent of families (2,499) entered shelter due to eviction, compared with 23 percent (1,909) the year prior. Although the number of entries to shelter due to eviction dropped in 2011 and 2012, the share remained high—at 37 percent and 36 percent of entries, respectively—because the total number of entries into family shelter was also falling. According to DHS, in order to be determined eligible for shelter due to an eviction families may present a Marshal's Legal Possession Notice (the final stage of an eviction proceeding), housing court filings, or other documents, as proof that an eviction has occurred.

DHS breaks down the eviction eligibility determination by tenancy—whether the applicant to shelter was evicted, or if they were living with someone else who was evicted, causing them to seek shelter. This distribution has stayed relatively consistent during the study period. From 2002 through 2012, 79 percent of families found eligible for shelter due to eviction were themselves the evicted tenants. About 9 percent of those entering shelter because of eviction did so because their parent or parents were evicted. The remaining 12 percent of entries due to eviction were split evenly between families previously living with someone other than a relative or a relative other than their parents.

Rise in Families Entering Shelter Due to Eviction

■ Applicant Primary Tenant ■ Parent Primary Tenant
■ Unrelated Primary Tenant ■ Relative Primary Tenant

Entries into Family Shelter



SOURCE: IBO analysis of data provided by the Department of Homeless Services

New York City Independent Budget Office

Citywide Number of Evictions Rise. To provide some context for these findings, IBO looked at citywide eviction data during the study period. Overall, the number of evictions has increased, however, not nearly as much as the number of entries into shelter due to eviction. According to data compiled by the City Marshals at the Department of Investigation, in calendar year 2002 there were 23,697 residential evictions citywide. (Eviction data is only available by calendar year). The number fell slightly in 2004 and 2005 to about 22,000 evictions each year, before rising fairly steadily through 2009, when 26,499 households were evicted. Evictions fell slightly again in 2010 to 25,655, before reaching a peak for the study period at 27,636 evictions in 2011—17 percent higher than in 2002.¹⁴ In contrast, the number of families found eligible for shelter due to eviction grew by 130 percent during the same period.

Increase in Families Eligible Due to Domestic Violence.

The number and share of families determined eligible for shelter because of domestic violence has also increased significantly during the study period, probably the result of improvements in how the city screens applicants for domestic violence.

In 2002, only 540 families (8 percent of entries) were found eligible for shelter because of domestic violence. This increased dramatically over the study period, beginning with a 65 percent increase in 2003 to 892

families or 12 percent of entries that year. The number and share of families entering shelter because of domestic violence continued to grow. In 2008, 34 percent of entries (2,783) were due to domestic violence—making it the most common eligibility determination that year. The number of survivors of domestic violence entering shelter peaked the following year, at 3,172 entries (28 percent). While the number of families eligible for shelter on the basis of domestic violence has declined since 2009, domestic violence survivors still accounted for an average of 27 percent of shelter entrants from 2010 to 2012.

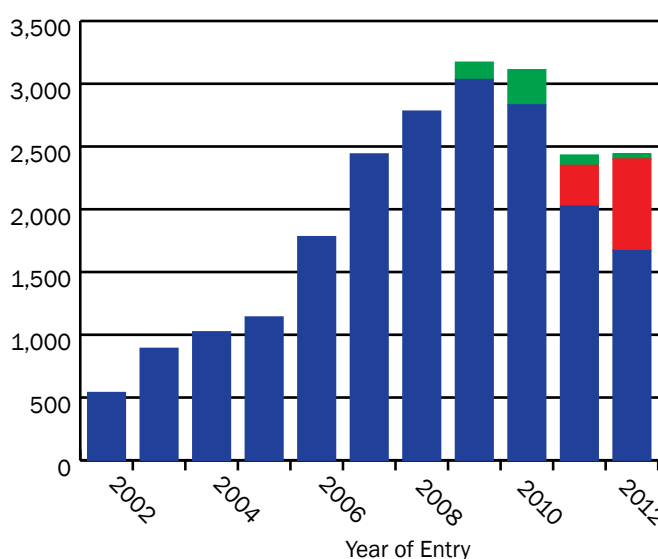
One likely reason that entries to shelter attributable to domestic violence have grown by so much more is because the city became better at screening for it. During the study period, more opportunities were added for families to identify as survivors of domestic violence. Furthermore, the city implemented additional safeguards to ensure that families were not sent back to live at prior residences where an abuser might find them.

Beginning in the second half of 2011, DHS added detailed classifications of families entering shelter because of

Rise in Families Entering Shelter Due to Domestic Violence

■ Domestic Violence Eligible
■ Domestic Violence Eligible:
Domestic Violence Shelter Timed-Out
■ Domestic Violence Eligible:
Declined Offer of Domestic Violence Shelter

Entries Into Family Shelter



SOURCE: IBO analysis of data provided by the Department of Homeless Services
NOTES: "Declined Offer of DV Shelter" and "DV Shelter Timed-Out" are data classifications added during the study period. See Data and Methodology section for more information.

New York City Independent Budget Office

domestic violence, including whether or not the family had previously been in the city’s domestic violence shelter system. The city operates a distinct shelter system for survivors of domestic violence, separate from the general family shelters. The Human Resources Administration, not DHS, administers these shelters. There are currently 2,288 domestic violence shelter beds in the city, about one-third more than the 1,680 beds in 2002. DV shelter is confidential—the locations of the shelters are not public—and families receive specialized services. However, it is also time-limited; families can only stay up to 180 consecutive days. Families can enter the DV shelter system via various processes, including DHS family shelter intake. As previously mentioned, if a family has a history of domestic violence they are referred to the HRA No Violence Again unit at PATH and are assessed by a social worker. There can be several outcomes of this assessment:

- The family can be found ineligible for DV shelter and continue through the normal DHS intake process;
- They can be found ineligible for DV shelter with preclusions, meaning that while the NoVA unit determined that the family was ineligible for DV shelter, there is a history of domestic violence and the family should be precluded from returning to certain addresses during the DHS eligibility investigation;
- They can be found eligible for and placed in DV shelter and leave the DHS system; or
- They can be found eligible for DV shelter and placed in the DHS shelter system if there are no specialized shelter vacancies, if they refuse DV shelter, or if have already timed out of the DV shelter system.

In 2012, the only full year with this data available, 30 percent of families entering a DHS shelter because of domestic violence did so after having timed-out of a specialized DV shelter.

Number of Reported Incidents of Domestic Violence Grew. Similar to what we found when looking at total evictions in the city, the number of reported incidents of domestic violence in the city grew over the study period, although not nearly as much as the increase in the number of entries to shelter due to domestic violence. In the 2002 calendar year, 222,492 domestic incident reports were filed with police. (Domestic incident report data is only available by calendar year.) That number increased to 247,651 in 2003, but fell to roughly 221,000 by 2006. Over the next six years, however, the reported number of domestic incidents increased fairly steadily. In 2011, there were

257,813 domestic incident reports filed—16 percent higher than 2002, compared with a 204 percent increase in the number of applicants entering shelter because of domestic violence during the same period.¹⁵

Housing Prior to Shelter

Based on the most recent addresses families provided at shelter intake, more than half of the families entering the city’s shelter system lived in buildings that registered with the state as having rent-regulated apartments or were operated by the New York City Housing Authority (commonly referred to as NYCHA, or public housing) immediately prior to shelter, with the largest share coming from regulated housing. Of those entries from buildings that were not identified as having regulated units or as being part of public housing, the vast majority came from buildings with fewer than six units (rent regulation generally only applies to buildings with six or more units). It is important to note that while regulated buildings are required to file annual registrations with the state, not all owners register each year; therefore some of the housing coded as unregulated may actually contain rent-regulated units. A small share of entries came from specialized housing, such as residential treatment or rehabilitation programs.

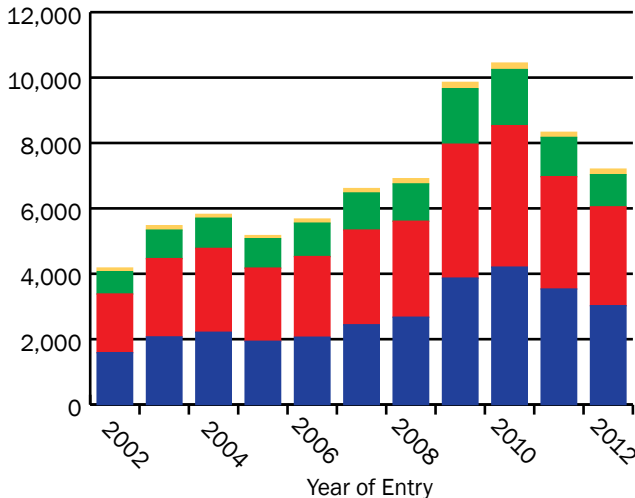
There was a modest increase in the share of entries to shelter from unregulated, privately owned housing over the study period—rising from 38 percent in 2002 to 42 percent in 2012, while the share coming from NYCHA and rent-regulated housing decreased a bit. In 2002, 16 percent of entries were from NYCHA and 43 percent from rent-regulated housing, compared with 14 percent from NYCHA and 42 percent from regulated housing in 2012. However,

Largest Share of Families Entering Shelter Come from Rent-Regulated Housing, 2002-2012		
Prior Housing Type	Number of Entries	Share of Entries
Rent-Regulated Private Housing	32,166	43%
Unregulated Private Housing	29,610	39%
Public Housing (NYCHA)	12,261	16%
Specialized Facility	1,609	2%
TOTAL	75,646	100%
SOURCES: IBO analysis of data provided by the Department of Homeless Services, New York City Housing Authority, Department of Finance, and the New York State Division of Homes and Community Renewal NOTE: IBO was able to geocode and match prior address data with city building data for 79 percent of the 95,906 entries to shelter during the study period. See Data and Methodology for more information. New York City Independent Budget Office		

More Than Half of Family Shelter Entries Come From Rent-Regulated or Public Housing

Unregulated Private Housing Rent-Regulated Private Housing
Public Housing (NYCHA) Specialized Facility

Entries Into Family Shelter



SOURCE: IBO analysis of data provided by the Department of Homeless Services, New York State Division of Homes and Community Renewal, Department of Finance, and New York City Housing Authority

NOTES: IBO was able to geocode and match prior address data with city building data for 79 percent of the 95,906 entries to shelter during the study period. See Data and Methodology for more information.

New York City Independent Budget Office

because more addresses were missing in the first half of the study period, this difference may be spurious, the result of omitted data.¹⁶ The increase in entries from unregulated housing does mirror citywide trends on the increase of unregulated housing in the city, however. According to the Housing Vacancy Survey in 2002, 59 percent of the city's housing was rent-regulated while 53 percent was rent-regulated in 2011.¹⁷

Entries from Rent-Regulated Private Housing. Of those shelter entries that were matched with New York City building data over the 2002 through 2012 study period, the largest share—43 percent (32,166 entries)—had a rent-regulated building as the address immediately prior to shelter. But we cannot determine if the specific unit that the family lived in was still under rent regulation. The majority of the entries from rent-regulated buildings (63 percent) were from pre-World War II walk-ups with a median of 24 units. In addition to traditional rent-regulated housing, this count includes 1,883 entries from Mitchell Lama developments, a housing program established in the 1950s to develop moderate-income rental and limited-equity cooperative housing.

Nearly a third of the entries to shelter from rent-regulated buildings were eligible due to eviction (32 percent). An additional 24 percent of families coming from rent-regulated buildings were found eligible for shelter because of overcrowded housing, 21 percent because of domestic violence, 8 percent due to discord that was not ruled to be domestic violence, and 5 percent due to unlivable housing conditions.

Entries from Unregulated Private Housing. The second largest share among shelter entries with matched addresses—39 percent—came from privately owned housing that had not registered as having regulated units during the study period. This may include some housing with affordability restrictions because the buildings are receiving government subsidies, such as federal project-based Section 8 or Low-Income Housing Tax Credit financing. It is also possible that some of the buildings in this category contain rent-regulated units but the landlord failed to register the building with the state, at least during the study period. Of the 29,610 entries from unregulated buildings over the study period, more than 84 percent were from buildings with fewer than six units. Nearly half came from one- or two-family homes.

Similar to families previously living in rent-regulated housing, roughly a third of entries to shelter from unregulated housing were due to eviction (34 percent). An additional 21 percent were due to domestic violence, 20 percent because of overcrowded housing, 8 percent because of unlivable housing conditions, and 7 percent were due to discord not ruled to be domestic violence.

Entries from Public Housing. Slightly more than 16 percent (12,261) of entries had a NYCHA public housing development listed as their address prior to shelter. Some of the most common NYCHA developments listed were Patterson Houses in the Bronx (201 entries), Butler Houses in the Bronx (187 entries) and Castle Hill Houses in the Bronx (181 entries). Not all of these families were necessarily official tenants of NYCHA before entering shelter, however. Some may have been doubled up sharing NYCHA apartments rented to family or friends. In fact, unlike regulated and unregulated housing, the most common eligibility reason for families entering homeless shelters from public housing was overcrowding, followed by domestic violence. A smaller share of families coming from public housing entered shelter due to eviction than from the other housing types.

Of the entries to shelter where the most recent address was a NYCHA development, 28 percent were found eligible

About One Third of Shelter Entrants from Private Housing Eligible Due to Eviction, 2002-2012

Eligibility Determination	Prior Housing Type					
	Rent-Regulated Private Housing		Unregulated Private Housing		NYCHA Public Housing	
	Number	Share	Number	Share	Number	Share
Eviction	10,312	32%	9,951	34%	2,089	17%
Overcrowding	7,678	24%	5,926	20%	3,455	28%
Domestic Violence	6,785	21%	6,294	21%	3,165	26%
Other	2,583	8%	2,405	8%	1,218	10%
Discord, Not Domestic Violence	2,511	8%	2,156	7%	1,428	12%
Unlivable Conditions	1,735	5%	2,325	8%	686	6%
Missing	562	2%	553	2%	220	2%
TOTAL	32,166	100%	29,610	100%	12,261	100%

SOURCES: IBO analysis of data provided by Department of Homeless Services, New York City Housing Authority, Department of Finance, and the New York State Division of Homes and Community Renewal

NOTE: Totals may not sum due to rounding.

New York City Independent Budget Office

because of overcrowded housing, 26 percent because of domestic violence, 17 percent due to eviction, 12 percent because of discord that was not ruled to be domestic violence, and 6 percent due to unlivable housing conditions.

Majority of Housing Prior to Shelter Located in the Bronx and Brooklyn.

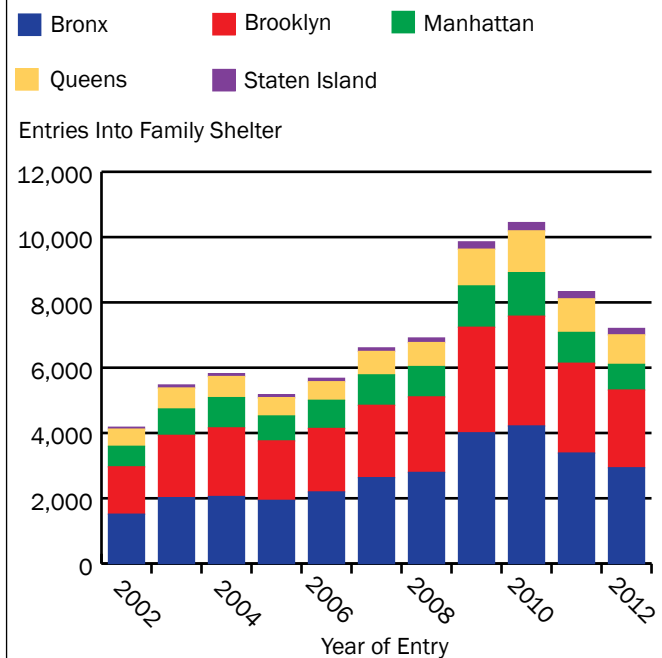
Over the 2002 through 2012 study period, addresses of families prior to their shelter entrance were concentrated in the Bronx, central Brooklyn and upper Manhattan. The largest share of preshelter addresses were in the Bronx (39 percent), followed by Brooklyn (34 percent). About 13 percent of families listed prior addresses in Manhattan, with roughly 12 percent of entries coming from housing located in Queens and 2 percent from Staten Island. These distributions show an over-representation of shelter entries from the Bronx and, to a lesser extent, from Brooklyn. According to the 2010 census, 31 percent of New York City households lived in Brooklyn, followed by 27 percent in Queens, 19 percent in Manhattan, 17 percent in the Bronx, and 6 percent in Staten Island.

There was an increase in the share of shelter entries from the Bronx over the study period—rising from 36 percent in 2002 to 41 percent in 2012, while the share coming from Manhattan and Brooklyn declined. In 2002, 15 percent of entries were from housing in Manhattan and 35 percent from housing in Brooklyn, compared with 11 percent from Manhattan and 33 percent from Brooklyn in 2012. However, because more addresses were missing in the first half of the study period, these differences may be attributable to omitted data.

There were also some differences across boroughs in the reasons families were eligible for shelter over the period

studied. A smaller share of Manhattan families was found eligible due to eviction compared with the families coming from other boroughs, while a larger share was found eligible because of overcrowding. Approximately 21 percent of the families that previously lived in Manhattan were eligible for shelter due to eviction over the study period compared with 30 percent from Brooklyn, 32 percent from the Bronx, 31 percent from Queens, and 32 percent from Staten Island.

Most Entries to Family Shelter from Bronx, Brooklyn



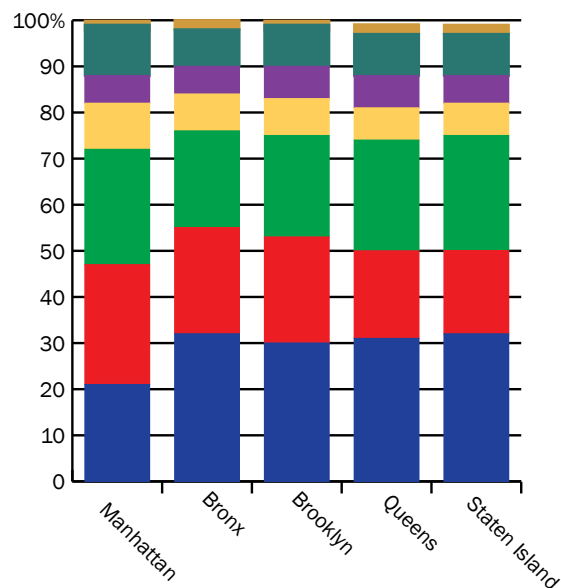
SOURCE: IBO analysis of data provided by the Department of Homeless Services, New York State Division of Homes and Community Renewal, Department of Finance, and New York City Housing Authority

NOTES: IBO was able to geocode and match prior address data with city building data for 79 percent of the 95,906 entries to shelter during the study period. See Data and Methodology for more information.

New York City Independent Budget Office

Smaller Share of Entries to Family Shelter From Manhattan Due to Eviction

■ Eviction ■ Overcrowding ■ Domestic Violence
 ■ Discard, Not Domestic Violence ■ Unlivable Conditions
 ■ Other ■ Missing



SOURCE: IBO analysis of data provided by the Department of Homeless Services
 New York City Independent Budget Office

Some 26 percent of families coming from Manhattan were found eligible because of overcrowding during the study period compared with 23 percent of families coming from Brooklyn and 23 percent from the Bronx, 19 percent from Queens, and 18 percent from Staten Island.

Entries by Census Tract. In order to provide more specific details about where families lived before shelter, IBO examined the census tracts of families' prior addresses. We excluded entries coming from specialized residences, such as rehabilitation centers, because the location of these residences is not necessarily related to where the family would have lived otherwise and because concentration of those facilities in certain census tracts affected the results.

Nearly 10 percent of the entries to family shelter came from 30 census tracts, which were home to 2 percent of the city's total population, according to the 2010 census. The overwhelming majority of these tracts, 25 of the 30, are located in the Bronx. Two are located in Manhattan, one in Queens and two in Brooklyn. Census tract 393, located in the Belmont section of the Bronx, had the most entries into family shelter during the study period, with a total of 344. The majority of these entries (52 percent) came from regulated, mid-sized buildings with an average of 33

units. An additional 19 percent of entries from the census tract came from two larger Mitchell Lama developments, each with more than 150 units. The remaining 28 percent were from unregulated buildings of various sizes. Bronx census tract 239, located in the Fordham South section of the borough, was home to the second highest number of families prior to entering shelter during the study period, with 334 entries. Nearly all of these entries (88 percent) were from mid-sized, rent-regulated buildings averaging 44 units. The remaining share came from unregulated housing, mostly two-family homes.

While there was a fair amount of consistency in the census tracts with the most entries over the study period, there were some shifts. For example, some census tracts in neighborhoods such as Central Harlem and in Washington Heights contributed a higher share of families earlier in the study period than in the later years. This includes census tract 230 in Central Harlem, which accounted for 0.41 percent of entries in the first four years of the study period, but fell to 0.31 percent of entries in the last four years. Conversely, other census tracts increased their shares of entries to shelter over the study period, including census tract 69 in the Melrose South-Mott Haven section of the Bronx. In the first four years of the study period 0.18 percent of entries came from census tract 69, in the last four years this increased to 0.34 percent.

Entries by Neighborhood. Despite more homeless families coming from the Bronx than any other borough, the top three neighborhoods where families lived prior to shelter were all located in Brooklyn. IBO matched families' addresses prior to shelter with Neighborhood Tabulation Areas, which were created by the New York City Department of City Planning to summarize populations at a geographic level smaller than community districts but larger than census tracts.¹⁸ (Again, IBO excluded entries coming from specialized residences.) More than 2,000 families entered shelter from each of the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Crown Heights North, East New York, and Stuyvesant Heights during the 2002-2012 study period. Other neighborhoods where a significant share of families lived prior to shelter include East Concourse-Concourse Village and Mount Hope in the Bronx and Brownsville in Brooklyn. Overall, 26 neighborhoods—home to 18 percent of the city's total population according to the 2010 census—accounted for 50 percent of the entries to family shelter.

Similar to census tracts, the neighborhoods that housed the most families preshelter remained fairly consistent over the study period, although, there were some shifts.

30 Census Tracts With Most Entries to Family Shelter, 2002-2012				
Borough	Census Tract	Neighborhood Name	Entries	Share of Matched Entries
Bronx	393	Belmont	344	0.47%
Bronx	239	Fordham South	334	0.45%
Bronx	175	East Concourse-Concourse Village	287	0.39%
Manhattan	230	Central Harlem North-Polo Grounds	265	0.36%
Bronx	62	West Farms-Bronx River	265	0.36%
Bronx	383.02	Fordham South	264	0.36%
Bronx	185	Morrisania-Melrose	263	0.36%
Bronx	373	East Tremont	253	0.34%
Bronx	93	Hunts Point	242	0.33%
Bronx	115.02	Hunts Point	235	0.32%
Bronx	405.02	Bedford Park-Fordham North	234	0.32%
Bronx	145	Claremont-Bathgate	232	0.31%
Bronx	177.02	East Concourse-Concourse Village	232	0.31%
Bronx	20	Soundview-Castle Hill-Clason Point-Harding Park	230	0.31%
Bronx	50.01	Soundview-Bruckner	230	0.31%
Bronx	79	Melrose South-Mott Haven North	230	0.31%
Queens	254	South Jamaica	228	0.31%
Bronx	67	Melrose South-Mott Haven North	227	0.31%
Bronx	151	Morrisania-Melrose	225	0.30%
Bronx	51	Mott Haven-Port Morris	224	0.30%
Bronx	53	University Heights-Morris Heights	224	0.30%
Bronx	225	East Concourse-Concourse Village	223	0.30%
Bronx	69	Melrose South-Mott Haven North	217	0.29%
Bronx	133	Morrisania-Melrose	217	0.29%
Bronx	217	University Heights-Morris Heights	214	0.29%
Bronx	379	Mount Hope	214	0.29%
Brooklyn	369	Ocean Hill	213	0.29%
Bronx	195	West Concourse	207	0.28%
Brooklyn	912	Brownsville	207	0.28%
Manhattan	232	Central Harlem North-Polo Grounds	206	0.28%
SOURCES: IBO analysis of data provided by the Department of Homeless Services and the Department of City Planning New York City Independent Budget Office				

30 Neighborhoods With Most Entries to Family Shelter, 2002-2012

Borough	Neighborhood Name	Entries	Share of Matched Entries
Brooklyn	Crown Heights North	2,483	3%
Brooklyn	East New York	2,356	3%
Brooklyn	Stuyvesant Heights	2,025	3%
Bronx	East Concourse-Concourse Village	1,824	2%
Brooklyn	Brownsville	1,692	2%
Manhattan	Central Harlem North-Polo Grounds	1,678	2%
Bronx	Mott Haven-Port Morris	1,666	2%
Brooklyn	Bushwick South	1,618	2%
Bronx	University Heights-Morris Heights	1,579	2%
Bronx	Mount Hope	1,568	2%
Bronx	East Tremont	1,550	2%
Brooklyn	Bedford	1,496	2%
Bronx	Morrisania-Melrose	1,312	2%
Brooklyn	Ocean Hill	1,267	2%
Bronx	Williamsbridge-Olinville	1,265	2%
Bronx	Bedford Park-Fordham North	1,241	2%
Bronx	Melrose South-Mott Haven North	1,150	2%
Bronx	Claremont-Bathgate	1,122	2%
Manhattan	East Harlem North	1,107	1%
Bronx	Fordham South	1,096	1%
Brooklyn	East New York (Pennsylvania Ave)	1,087	1%
Bronx	Highbridge	1,040	1%
Bronx	Hunts Point	1,031	1%
Manhattan	Washington Heights South	1,014	1%
Bronx	West Farms-Bronx River	1,004	1%
Brooklyn	Flatbush	980	1%
Bronx	West Concourse	975	1%
Bronx	Soundview-Bruckner	953	1%
Brooklyn	Bushwick North	931	1%
Manhattan	East Harlem South	919	1%

SOURCES: IBO analysis of data provided by the Department of Homeless Services and the Department of City Planning

New York City Independent Budget Office

For example, the neighborhood with the greatest increase in share of entries into family shelter is Williamsbridge-Olinville. During the first four years of the study period, 1.2 percent of entries came from this neighborhood located in the northeast Bronx. During the last four years of the study period, 2.0 percent of entries had housing in Williamsbridge-Olinville listed as their last address. The majority came from unregulated buildings with an average of three units. Other neighborhoods where the share of entries increased over time include East New York, Melrose-Mott Haven, and Brownsville.

The neighborhood with the greatest decline in share of families entering shelter was Bushwick North in Brooklyn. During the first four years of the study period, 1.5 percent of entries came from Bushwick North compared with 1.1 percent of entries during the last four years of the study period. East Harlem North and Washington Heights South were two other neighborhoods where the share of entries decreased over time.

Conclusion

The number of families entering and remaining in the city's shelter system has grown dramatically from 2002 through 2012. This increase occurred despite the city finding a smaller share of shelter applicants eligible for emergency housing during the study period. While the types of housing and neighborhoods families lived in prior to shelter has remained relatively steady over time, the reasons families have been found eligible for shelter have changed with increasing shares found eligible due to eviction and domestic violence and a decline in the share found eligible due to overcrowding. It is important to consider families' living situations prior to shelter, both to understand why some families may require emergency housing and how some of these needs could be met through less costly alternatives than shelter.

Report prepared by Elizabeth Brown

Endnotes

¹18 N.Y.C.R.R. § 352.35(b)(4) and 94-ADM-20

²Adult families apply at the Adult Family Intake Center in Manhattan. Married couples, couples in a domestic partnership, adults with children over 21, or adults that have a medical dependence on each other (such as an adult and a caretaker) are considered adult families. While processed separately, adult families follow an eligibility process that is similar to the process for families with children.

³Families who have been found ineligible for shelter within the last 90 days and apply for shelter again are not given provisional shelter during the subsequent eligibility investigation.

⁴The number of applicants and families found eligible include families with children and families without children. This is because DHS aggregated the data for these two populations until fiscal year 2009. In order to be consistent over the study period IBO also aggregated the more recent years of data.

⁵For fiscal years 2002 through 2011 data is from [DHS Critical Activities Report](#). For fiscal year 2012, data is from the department's Local Law 37 report. Only eight months of data are available for fiscal year 2012.

⁶According to New York State law, emergency domestic violence shelter is limited to 90 consecutive days with the possibility of two 45 day extensions for clients with a continued need for emergency shelter.

⁷The recession, as measured by declines in local employment, began in New York City in January 2001 and continued until August 2003, two months into fiscal year 2004.

⁸The so-called Great Recession, measured by declines in local employment, began in New York City in September 2008, two months into fiscal year 2009 and continued until November 2009 about halfway through fiscal year 2010

⁹In 2002, 46 percent of the heads of household did not provide information on their race or ethnicity. That share dropped to 39 percent in 2003, 13 percent in 2004, and averaged 3 percent a year over the remainder of the study period.

¹⁰This includes pregnant women with or without other children.

¹¹The change in the relative shares of eligibility reasons over the study period raises the question: Have the characteristics of the families eligible for shelter changed over time or have other factors, such as changes in city policies and procedures or other outside circumstances, been responsible

for the shift in the reasons families were determined eligible for shelter? Using the demographic data on the families entering shelter available in our dataset (age, race, and gender of head of household and family size); IBO employed a variety of statistical methods to explore this question. However, because we lacked other important data that could be associated with a family's reason for their shelter eligibility (including data on income level, employment status, past housing assistance, etc.), the models we ran were modest in their ability to predict eligibility reason. While our models suggest that the changes in the relative shares of eligibility determinations were primarily accounted for by factors other than the families' demographic characteristics we studied, because of the aforementioned data constraints these results should be interpreted with caution.

¹²Housing Vacancy Survey data is for calendar years, not fiscal years.

¹³The Housing Vacancy Survey is a sample survey drawn from the decennial census. The 2011 HVS sample was drawn from the 2010 census, while the 2002, 2005, and 2008 samples were based on the 2000 census.

Findings are subject to sampling and nonsampling errors and are estimates of actual values. Because the surveys show very slight changes over time, and given the nature of the data, it does not appear overcrowding changed substantially during the study period.

¹⁴Although data on evictions is available for calendar year 2012, it was not included because the second half of the year falls outside the study period.

¹⁵Data on reported incidents of domestic violence is available in calendar year 2012. It is not included here, however, because six months of the annual data are outside of the study period.

¹⁶During 2002 through 2007 an average of 26 percent of entries lacked prior address data each year. During the latter portion of the study period data were missing for an average of 5 percent.

¹⁷Again, the Housing Vacancy Survey is a sample survey drawn from the decennial census. The 2011 HVS sample was drawn from the 2010 census, while the 2002, 2005, and 2008 samples were based on the 2000 census. Findings are subject to sampling and nonsampling errors and are estimates of actual values.

¹⁸According to the Department of City Planning, neighborhood tabulation areas must have at least 15,000 residents to minimize error in population projections. This results in combinations of neighborhoods that may not have occurred if boundaries were just based on historical neighborhoods.

Share on



Receive notification of IBO's free reports by
[E-mail](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [RSS](#)