

## Media Resource: Trends in Homelessness

Is homelessness in the U.S. increasing or decreasing? Are there more homeless children today than this day last year; this year than in past years? Questions such as these can be answered by the two primary collectors of data on homelessness in the U.S.: the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Education (Education).

### Measures of Homelessness

HUD releases two annual reports on homelessness: the Annual Homeless Assessment Reports (AHAR) to Congress – Volumes 1 and 2. **Volume 1 of the AHAR** presents point-in-time counts, which detail the numbers of sheltered and unsheltered people on a night.<sup>1</sup> **Volume 2 of the AHAR** presents an estimate of the number of people who enter homeless shelters or transitional housing throughout the year. The National Center for Homeless Education reports publically on the data collected by **Education**. This report includes the number of students enrolled in local and state school districts who are identified by personnel as living unsheltered, in shelters, in hotels or motels, or doubled up with family and friends over the course of the school year. See Table 1.

Table 1. Measures of Homelessness in Official Reports of Federal Agencies

Report	Time Period			Living Situations				Populations		
	Point-in-Time	Full Year	School Year	Unsheltered <sup>2</sup>	Sheltered <sup>3</sup>	Motels <sup>4</sup>	Doubled Up <sup>5</sup>	All Persons	All Children	Only Students
<b>HUD: AHAR – Volume 1</b>	✓			✓	✓	✓ *		✓	✓	
<b>HUD: AHAR – Volume 2</b>		✓			✓	✓ *		✓	✓	
<b>Education</b>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓

\*The HUD AHAR Volumes 1 and 2 include people staying in motels only if paid for by a homeless assistance program

### Trends in Homelessness

Despite the variations in populations enumerated, data sources and methodology, these reports show some consistent trends if the data is sorted to examine similar time periods, living situations, and populations:

- The number of people sleeping on the streets has declined. See Figure 1.
- The number of poor people living doubled up, has grown substantially over the last several years. These are people who are housed, but not living independently in their own homes. This is a symptom of the affordable housing crisis in this country, as is homelessness. Doubling up for reasons of economic hardship is considered homeless by some Federal agencies but not by others. See Figure 2.
- There is one trend that is less clear: the number of sheltered people—those sheltered by homeless assistance organizations. The number of people sleeping in emergency shelters and transitional housing is increasing slightly in some measures and decreasing slightly in others. This is likely due to the differences in data collection methods. See Figure 3.

<sup>1</sup> A one-night, unduplicated count of people experiencing homelessness in a Continuum of Care (CoC). HUD requires that CoCs count their sheltered homeless population every year. They require that CoCs count their unsheltered homeless population every other year, on odd numbered calendar years. There are populations eligible for homeless assistance who are not included in the point-in-time count totals, including those in unsafe housing situations and those who are unable to stay in their housing situation for more than 14 days.

<sup>2</sup> People counted as living unsheltered are those living on the street and in places not meant for human habitations such as cars and abandoned buildings.

<sup>3</sup> People counted as living in sheltered locations are those staying in emergency shelters and transitional housing programs.

<sup>4</sup> People counted as living in motels are those living in hotels and motels, these are sometimes paid for on their own or by a homeless assistance program.

<sup>5</sup> People counted as living in doubled up situations are those that are not lease holders or home owners living with family and friends or other non-relatives.

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Figure 1. Unsheltered Homelessness

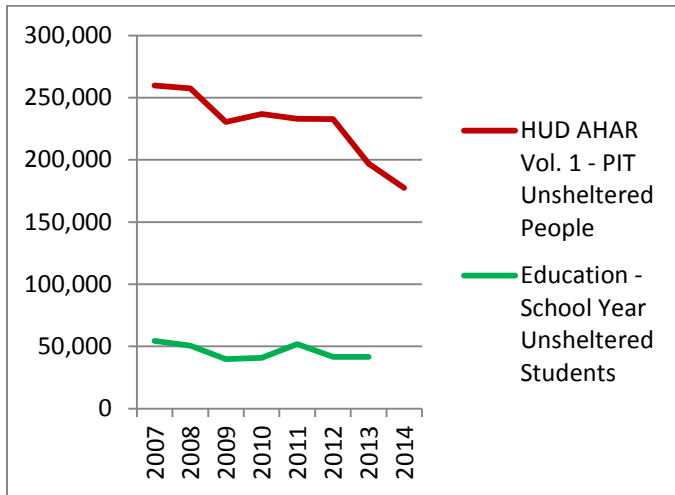


Figure 2. Doubled Up Households<sup>6</sup>

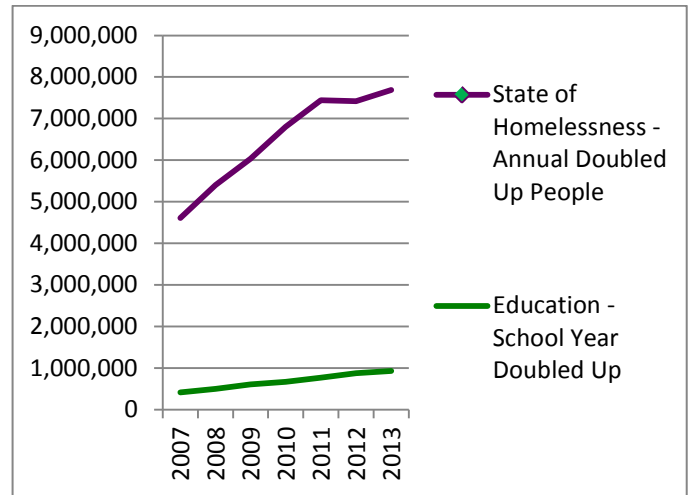
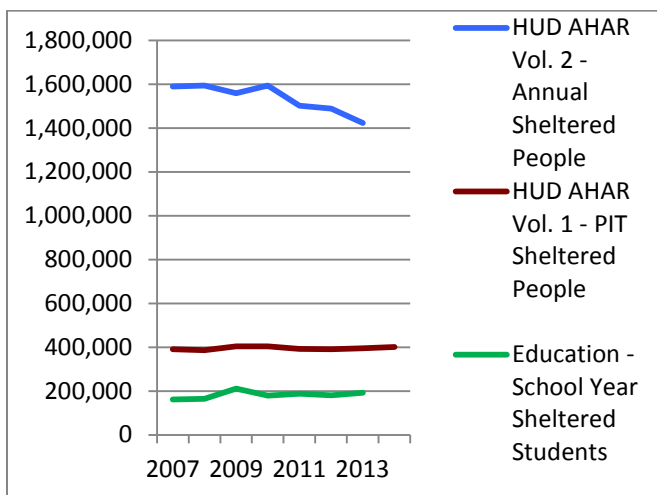


Figure 3. Sheltered Homelessness



## Limitations of Data on Homelessness

All of the available data on homelessness is limited by the scope of what is measured and the capacity a community has to execute the enumeration. Point-in-time counts (**HUD AHAR Volume 1**) are limited to those people who are able to be identified as homeless on a given night and does not include everyone who may be eligible for assistance. Annual sheltered counts (**HUD AHAR Volume 2**) are calculated using a sample of communities from across the country and may be limited by the number of programs that participate in a community's Homeless Management Information System. **Education** data only captures enrolled students who are identified by school personnel. Many school districts do not have dedicated staff to identify students so it is likely there are students who go unidentified.

<sup>6</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness' The State of Homelessness in America is an annual report that examines national and state trends in homelessness. The Alliance reports on the point-in-time counts covered in HUD's AHAR Volume 1, using U.S. Census Bureau data to calculate rates of homelessness. This report also uses U.S. Census Bureau data to determine the number of poor people living in doubled up situations. This report considers people living doubled up to be at-risk of homelessness, along with those with severe housing cost burden, those living in poverty, and those who are unemployed.

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All of these reports may also count people or students multiple times. Low-income and homeless populations are highly mobile and may move from state to state, city to city, or school district to school district. As the [HUD AHAR Volume 2](#) and the [Education](#) data are collected over longer periods of time, they are more susceptible to this type of duplication.