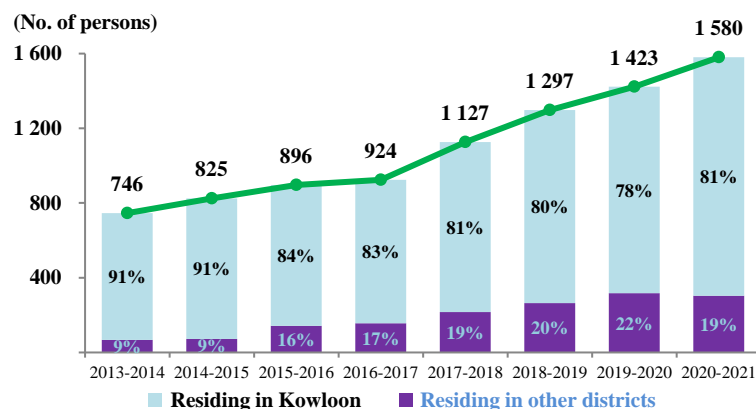
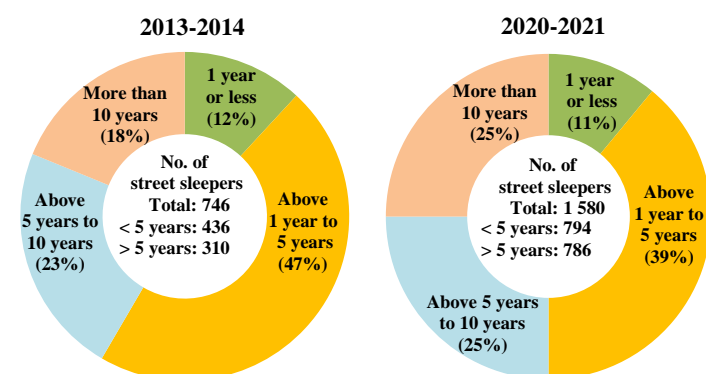


## Street sleepers in Hong Kong

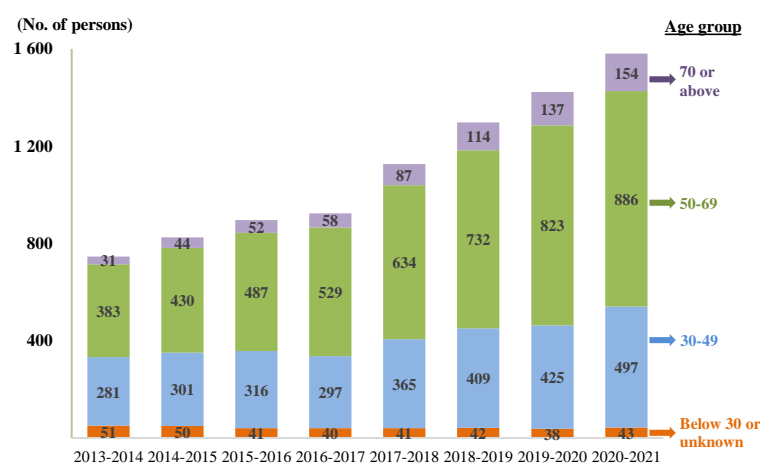
**Figure 1 – Number of registered street sleepers, 2013-2021**



**Figure 2 – Duration of street sleeping among street sleepers**



**Figure 3 – Age distribution of street sleepers, 2013-2021**



### Highlights

- Two years into the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (“COVID-19”) pandemic, Hong Kong is facing the fifth wave of epidemic. Amid the suspension of many public facilities and services to prevent the spread of the virus, the disadvantaged group of homeless people has been made even more vulnerable during the pandemic. For example, the closure of public sporting facilities and public bathhouses inadvertently means the loss of a place for street sleepers to take showers. Furthermore, the Government’s ban on dine-in services after 6 pm has left many homeless people who used to stay overnight in 24-hour fast food restaurants without a place to take “shelter”.
- In Hong Kong, the number of street sleepers has been on the rise in recent years. Between 2013-2014 and 2018-2019, the number of street sleepers registered on the Street Sleeper Registry of the Social Welfare Department (“SWD”) increased by some 75% to 1 297 (**Figure 1**), and most of them resided in Kowloon. Hong Kong is seeing rising number of street sleepers as the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people at risk of becoming homeless. There were 1 580 street sleepers in 2020-2021, representing an increase of 22% since 2018-2019.
- The homeless population is not entirely homogeneous, and three key subgroups are commonly observed, namely long-term chronic homelessness, and short-term episodic and transitional homelessness. In Hong Kong, sleeping on the streets seems to be more than a temporary arrangement for many street sleepers who are suffering from medium- and long-term homelessness. This trend is more evident in recent years in view of the rising share of street sleepers who had been street sleepers for more than five years between 2013-2014 (41%) and 2020-2021 (50%) (**Figure 2**).
- Chronically homeless individuals are usually people of older age with low employability, thus hindering them from becoming self-reliant and giving up street sleeping. Mirroring this, about two-thirds of street sleepers in Hong Kong were 50 or above in 2020-2021, reflecting an ageing homeless population with challenging prospects for securing work and more stable income (**Figure 3**).

## Street sleepers in Hong Kong (cont'd)

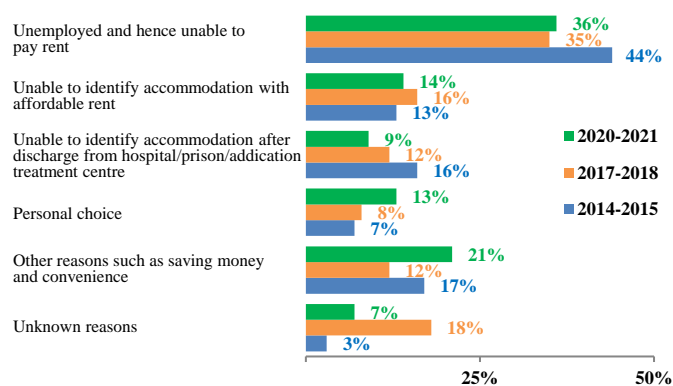
**Figure 4 – Financial sources of street sleepers<sup>(a)</sup>**

Financial sources	2015 (%)	2021 (%)
Government assistances <sup>(b)</sup>	52.3	48.3
Supports from NGOs and friends	16.2	31.2
Salary	29.4	23.9
Saving	7.7	16.0
Borrowing	2.0	5.0
Scavenging	9.7	4.4
Others	10.9	10.2

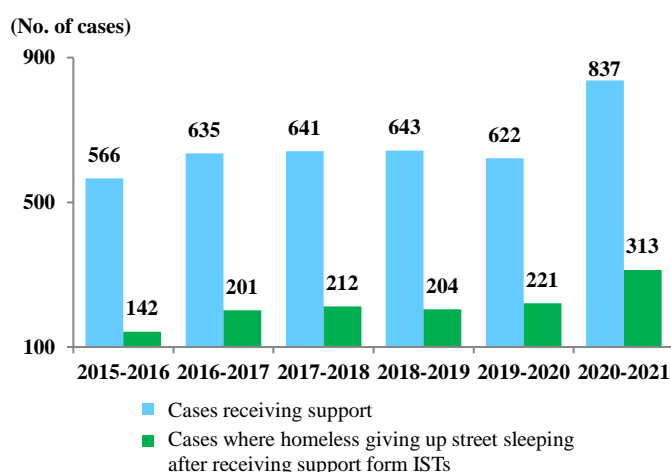
Notes: (a) Respondents were asked to report their financial sources, and multiple answers were accepted. Percentage represents the corresponding share of respondents supported by a specific financial source to the total number of respondents.

(b) Government assistances include CSSA, Old Age Living Allowance (“OALA”) and Old Age Allowance (“OAA”). CSSA provides the major safety net to those who cannot support themselves whereas OALA targets at people aged 65 or above. Both CSSA and OALA are means-tested, with limits on applicants’ income and asset levels. OAA, meanwhile, is non means-tested but is restricted to people aged 70 or above.

**Figure 5 – Main reason for street sleeping**



**Figure 6 – Street sleepers receiving support and giving up street sleeping, 2015-2021**



Research Office  
Information Services Division  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
7 April 2022  
Tel: 3919 3181

## Highlights

- The employment prospects for street sleepers have further deteriorated more recently amid a weakened job market in times of economic downturn. Many street sleepers had reportedly lost their jobs during the pandemic, thus a lower portion of them reported salary as among their key financial source according to an ad-hoc survey conducted jointly by local academics and non-government organizations (“NGOs”) (**Figure 4**). While the survey also suggests that government assistances (particularly, Comprehensive Social Security Assistance scheme, or “CSSA”) remain the most important financial source for street sleepers (as about half of them reported receiving such assistances), it is noted more street sleepers have turned to NGOs or their own network of friends for support, conceivably as formal approval from government assistance schemes may take some time to process.
- According to the interviews conducted by SWD, the most common reason for people becoming street sleepers is their inability to pay rent due to unemployment or failure to identify affordable accommodation (**Figure 5**). It is noteworthy that more street sleepers cited personal choice as the reason for street sleeping in the latest survey (with a share of 13% in 2020-2021). According to the academia-NGO survey mentioned above, failure to get along with families/roommates and poor conditions of previous accommodation had also caused some individuals to become street sleepers, notwithstanding housing rents may not be entirely unaffordable for some of them. In addition, there were more individuals deciding to sleep on streets due to other reasons such as “to save money”.
- To address the emergency and short-term accommodation needs of street sleepers, there are NGOs providing shelters either through subventions from SWD or on a self-financing basis. Yet, according to SWD’s statistics, the overall supply of these accommodation places remained virtually unchanged between 2015-2016 and 2020-2021, dwarfed by some 75% increase in the number of street sleepers over the same period.
- SWD has also been providing subventions to three NGOs to each operate an Integrated Services Team (“IST”) for street sleepers, aiming at addressing street sleepers’ needs and helping them give up street sleeping. ISTs handled an average of some 620 cases per year between 2015-2016 and 2019-2020, while the caseload jumped to 837 in 2020-2021 with more than one-third of the cases resulting in people giving up street sleeping after receiving support from ISTs (**Figure 6**).

Data sources: Latest figures from Labour and Welfare Bureau, Social Welfare Department, Chinese University of Hong Kong, City University of Hong Kong, Christian Concern for the Homeless Association, Society for Community Organization, St. James’ Settlement, The Salvation Army, ImpactHK, and Mercy HK

Statistical Highlights are compiled for Members and Committees of the Legislative Council. They are not legal or other professional advice and shall not be relied on as such. Statistical Highlights are subject to copyright owned by The Legislative Council Commission (The Commission). The Commission permits accurate reproduction of Statistical Highlights for non-commercial use in a manner not adversely affecting the Legislative Council. Please refer to the Disclaimer and Copyright Notice on the Legislative Council website at [www.legco.gov.hk](http://www.legco.gov.hk) for details. The paper number of this issue of Statistical Highlights is ISSH15/2022.