

# The Progress of Homelessness in Brussels over the Last Twelve Years

**Mauro STRIANO**  
**Nicolas HORVAT**

bruss'help.brussels 



European  
Observatory on  
Homelessness

15th European  
Research Conference  
on Homelessness



The background of the slide is a blue-tinted photograph. It shows a close-up of a person's hands holding a pen and pointing at a large sheet of paper, which appears to be an architectural blueprint or a technical drawing. The drawing contains various lines, curves, and some text, though it is not legible. The overall scene suggests a professional or academic setting, such as a design studio or a research office.

# **Methodology**

## Methodology

Each census in Brussels aims to produce a "**snapshot**" of the situation of homelessness and inadequate housing across the Region. The comparison of the results of these surveys, conducted at regular intervals according to the same protocol, allows to study the evolution of the phenomenon.

Census in **Brussels-Capital Region**:

- takes place in early November, historically just before the introduction of the winter plan
- covers the entire Brussels region, all 19 municipalities in the agglomeration
- is repeated every two years, using the same methodology and mostly the same partners



# Methodology

The Brussels census is based on the combination of **three techniques**:

- **Data collection**

a collection of data encoded on the evening of the census by the various accommodation and reception structures

- **Street count**

a one hour point-in-time street count of people spending the night in the public space

- **Pre and post inquiries**

two inquiries conducted respectively two weeks before and one day after the census to consolidate and enrich the results





## Methodology

The Brussels census is based on a **broad collaboration** involving:

- professionals, experts by experience and volunteers in the homeless sector
- a range of partners from related sectors: public transport, Bruxelles environnement agency, public social services centres, hospitals, etc.

These actors are involved throughout the process, from the identification of spots preceding the night count to the committee set up to discuss the results. Each partner therefore contributes, through its expertise, to the quality of the data collected and the analyses produced.



The background image is a low-angle, blue-tinted photograph of a city street. On the left, a tall building is under construction, covered in scaffolding. On the right, there are older, multi-story buildings with ornate architectural details and balconies. In the distance, a construction crane is visible against a clear sky. The word "Context" is centered in the middle of the image in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

# Context

# Brussels Context

The **Brussels-Capital Region** in a few figures:

## ► **Metropolitan area**

the region has 19 municipalities, **1.2 million inhabitants** (10% of the country's population) and covers an area of 161.4 km<sup>2</sup> (7582 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>)

## ► **Multicultural population**

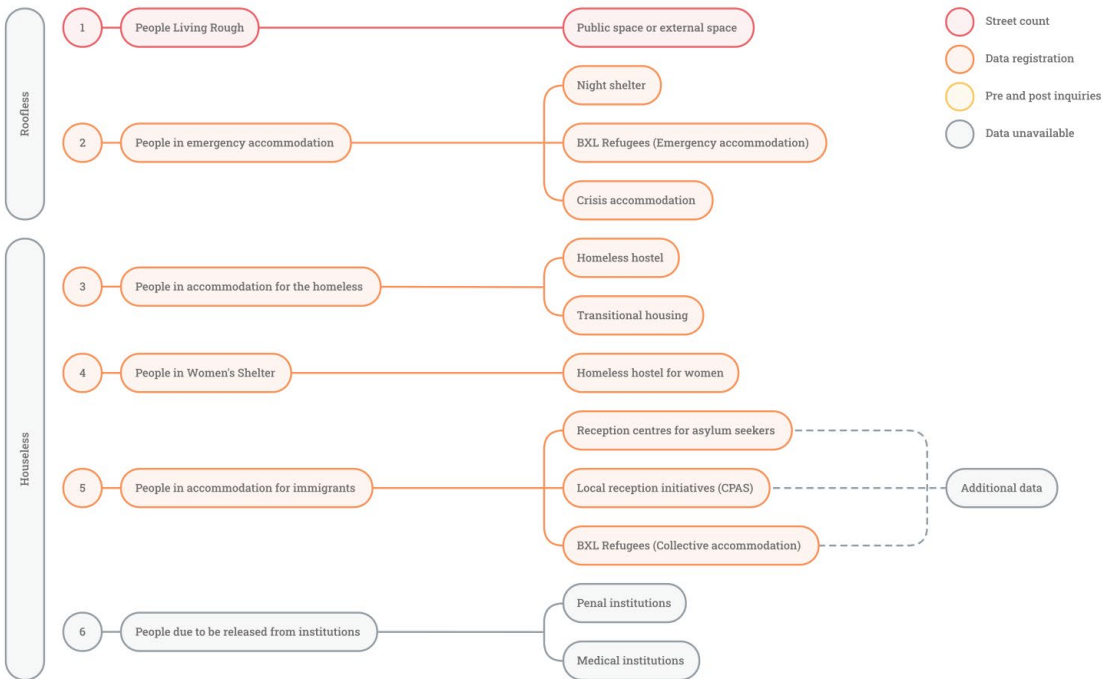
the region includes **two linguistic communities** (French-speaking and Dutch-speaking), 35% of the people residing in the territory do not have Belgian nationality, 58% did not have this nationality at birth – *IBSA & Statbel : 2020*

## ► **Wide socio-economic disparities**

while the Brussels-Capital Region is the **fourth richest region in Europe**, almost two out of five inhabitants (34.3%) live in a household at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROE) – *Statbel / Eurostat : 2020*

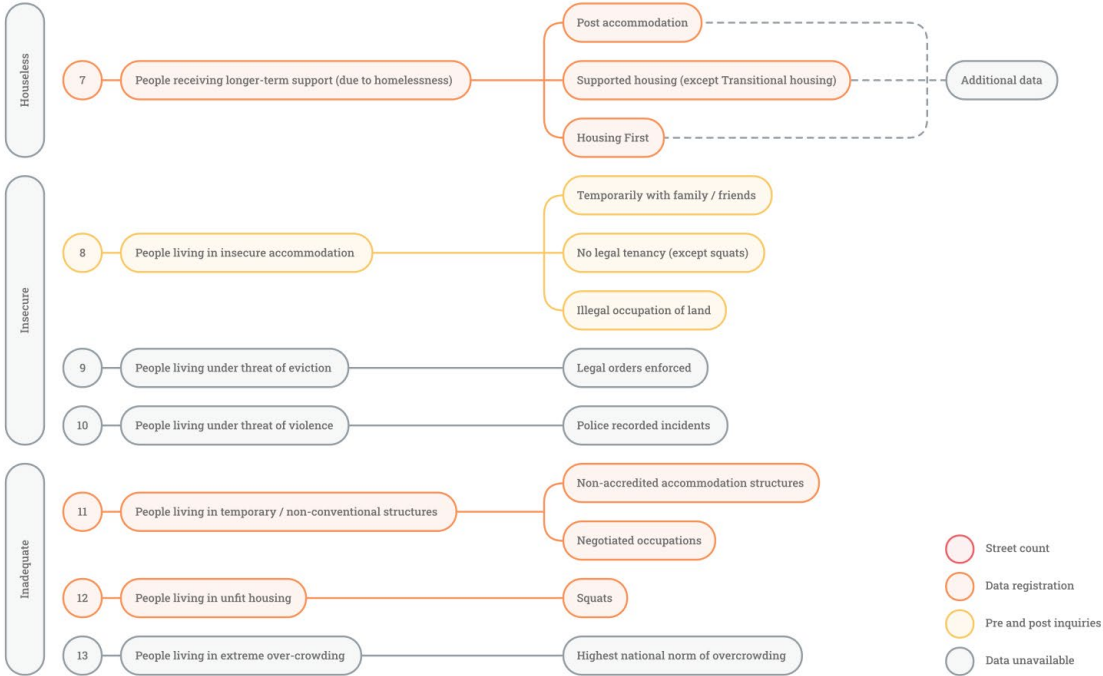


# ETHOS Adapted to the Brussels Context





# ETHOS Adapted to the Brussels Context



# COVID-19 Crisis

The crisis has impacted on the **Brussels homelessness sector** at several levels:

- **Adaptation of services**

reduction in capacity and adaptation of support in reception and accommodation centres to comply with **hygiene and social distancing measures**

- **Additional resources**

**several accommodation facilities** (mainly hotels) have been implemented in order to shelter as many people as possible considering the health and social situation

- **Transformation of support**

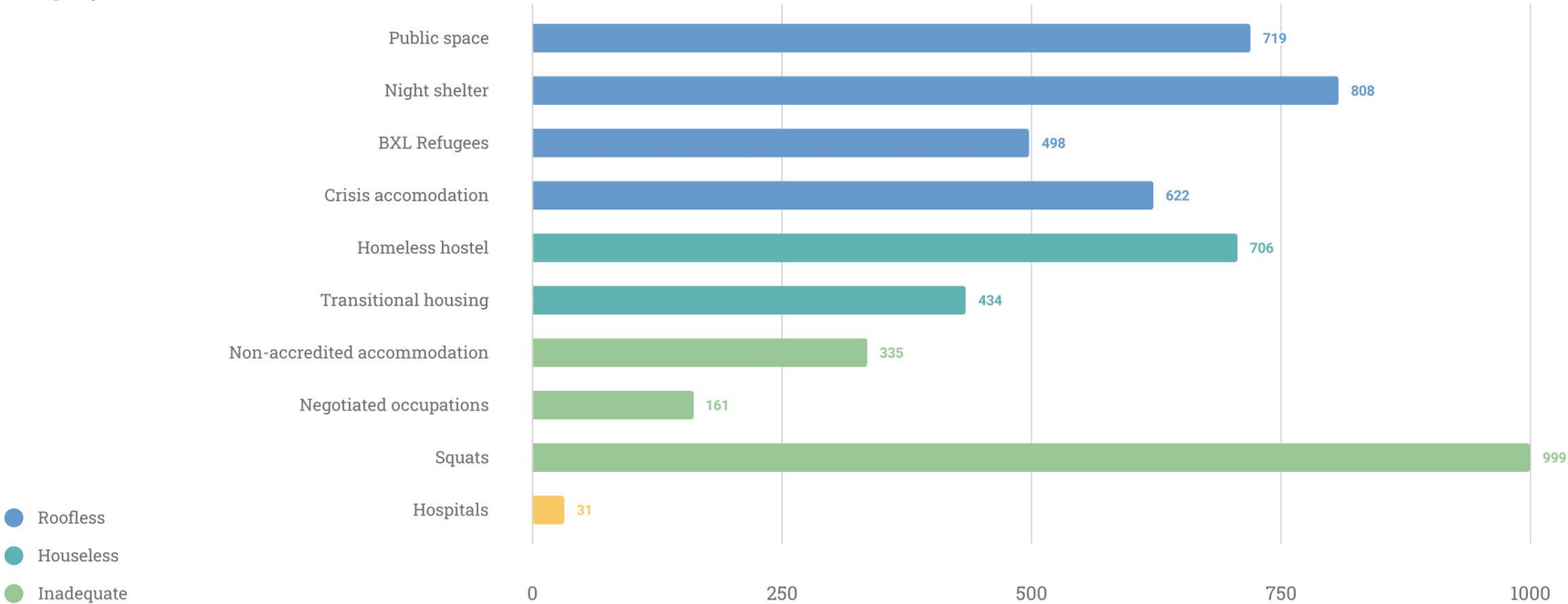
the teams in the emergency accommodation centres provided a **24/7 service**, providing close social and medical support to those sheltered



# Results

# Global view

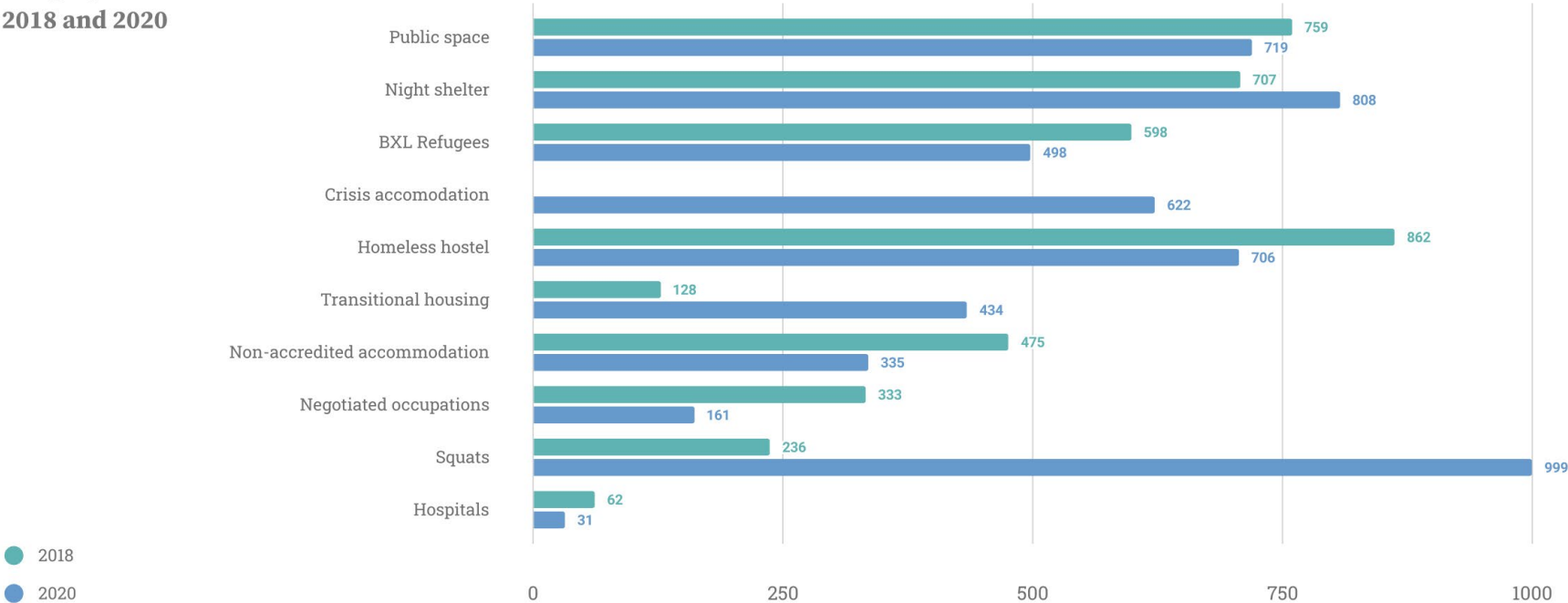
Distribution by category in 2020





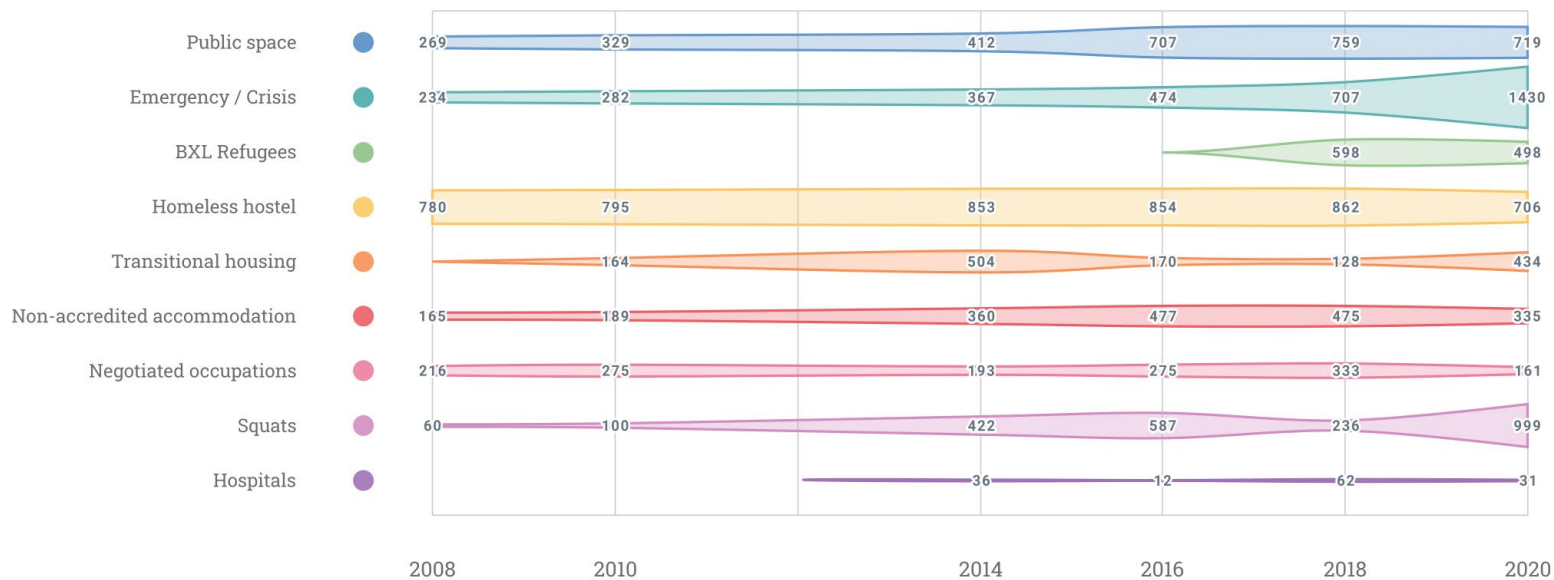
# Global view

Evolution by  
category between  
2018 and 2020



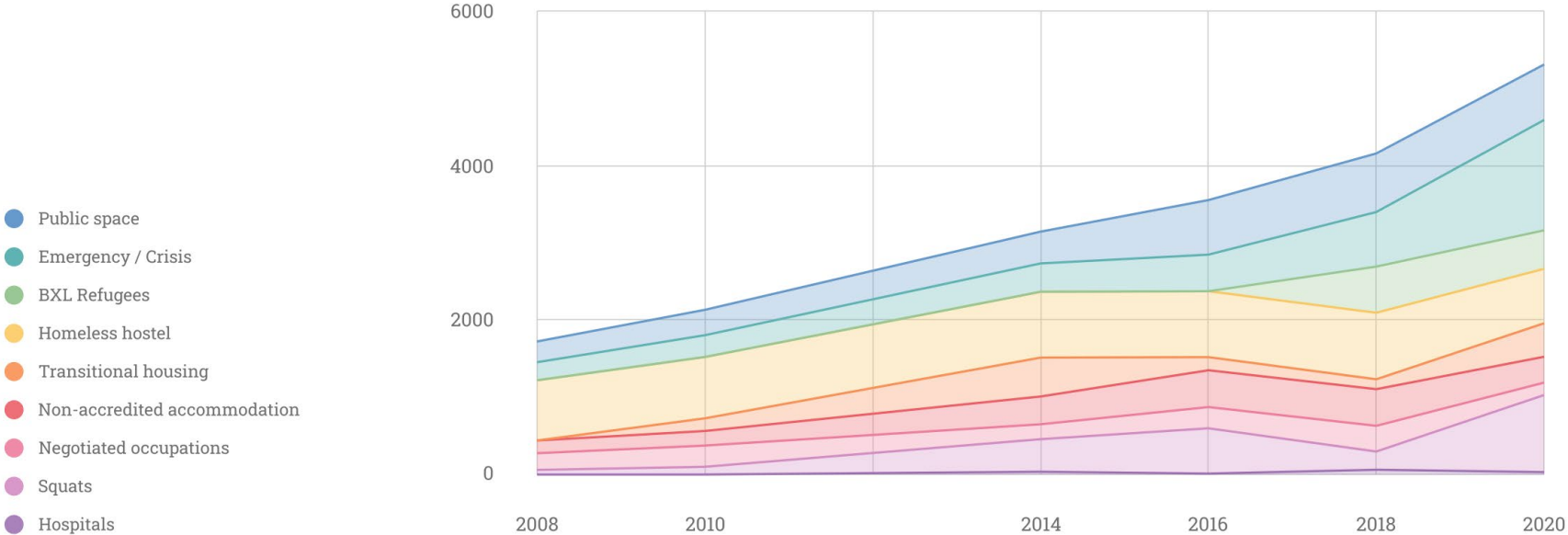
# Global view

Evolution by  
category between  
2008 and 2020



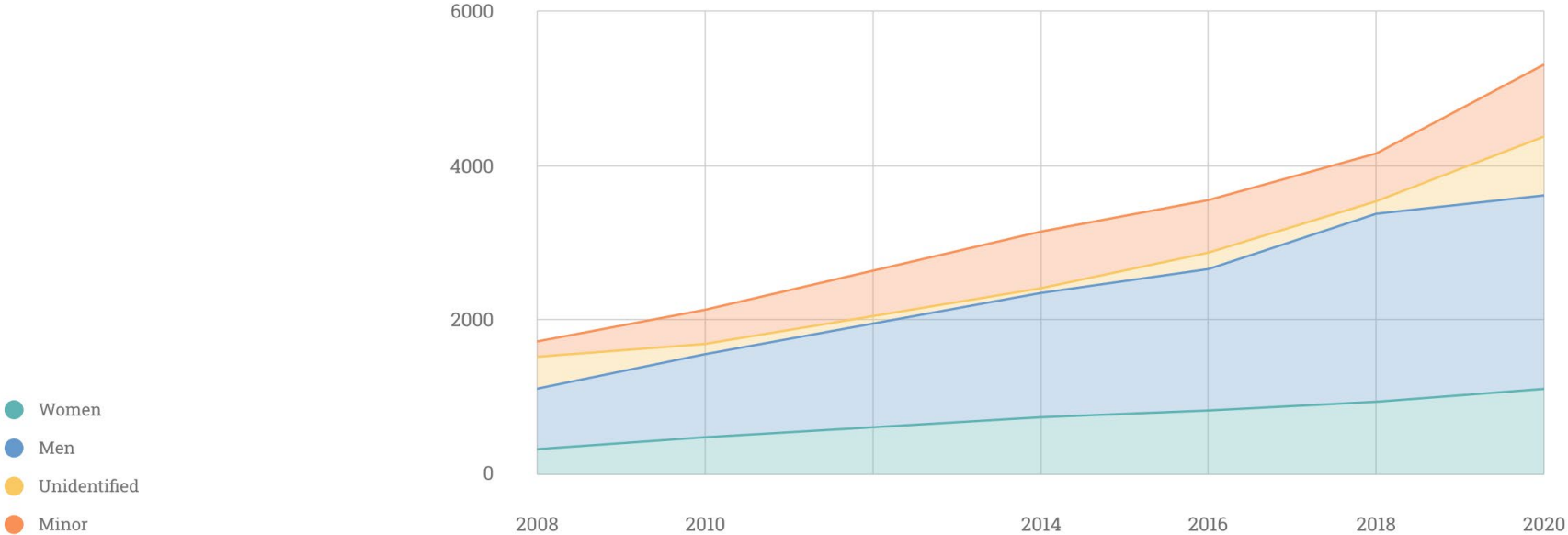
# Global view

Evolution by  
category between  
2008 and 2020



# Global view

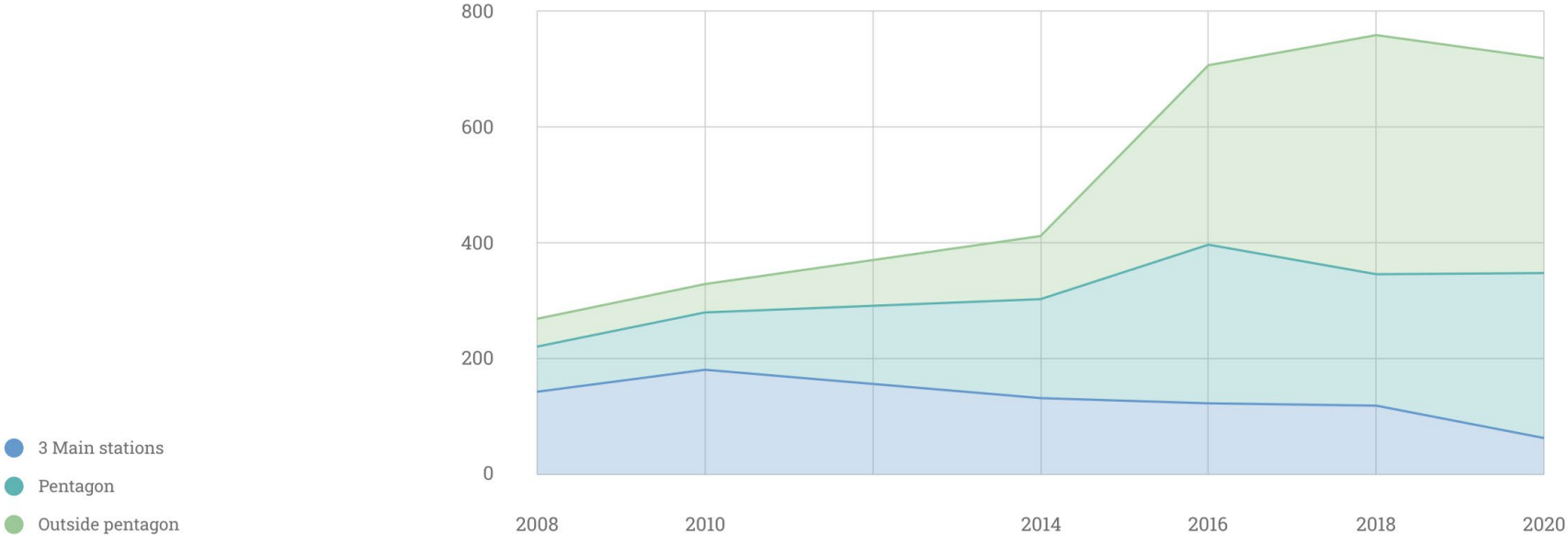
Evolution by age  
and gender between  
2008 and 2020





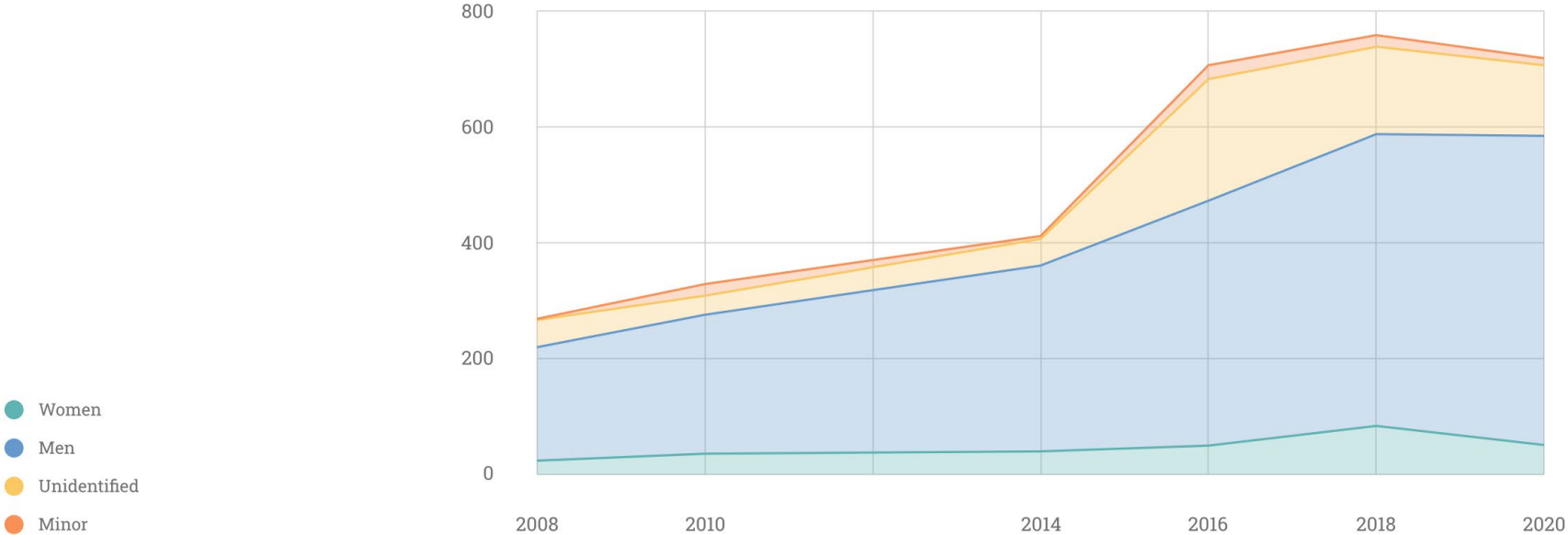
# Public space

Evolution by  
geographical area  
between 2008 and 2020

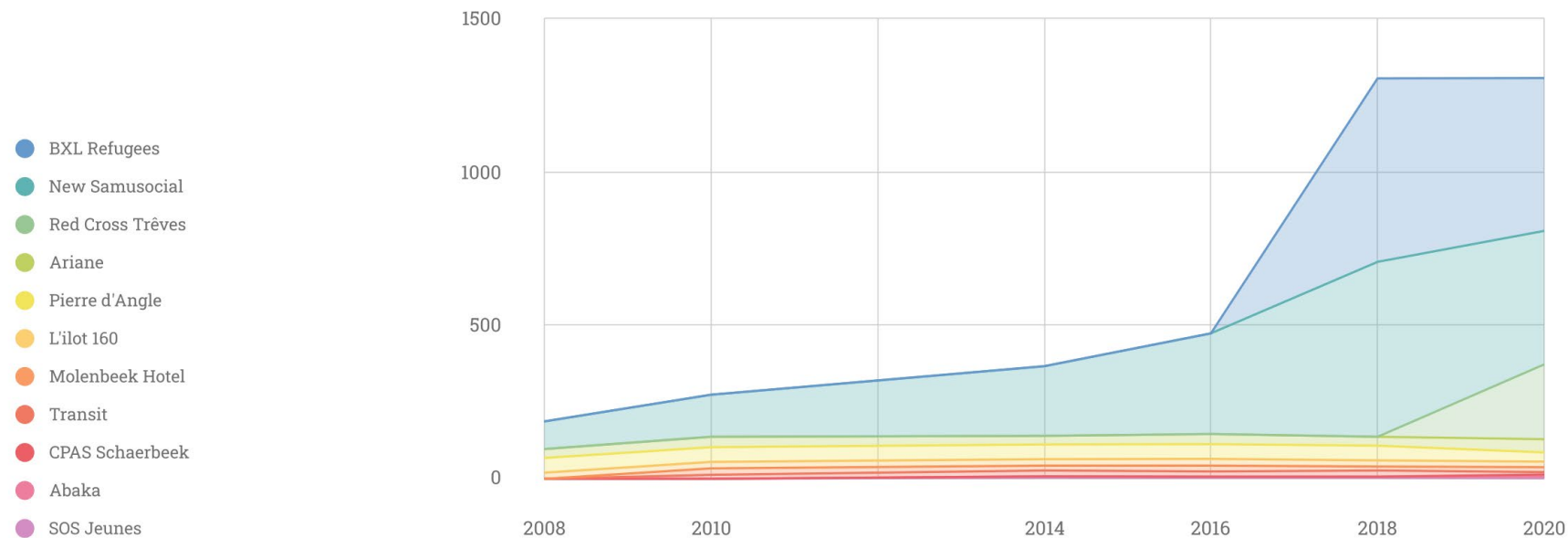


# Public space

Evolution by age  
and gender between  
2008 and 2020

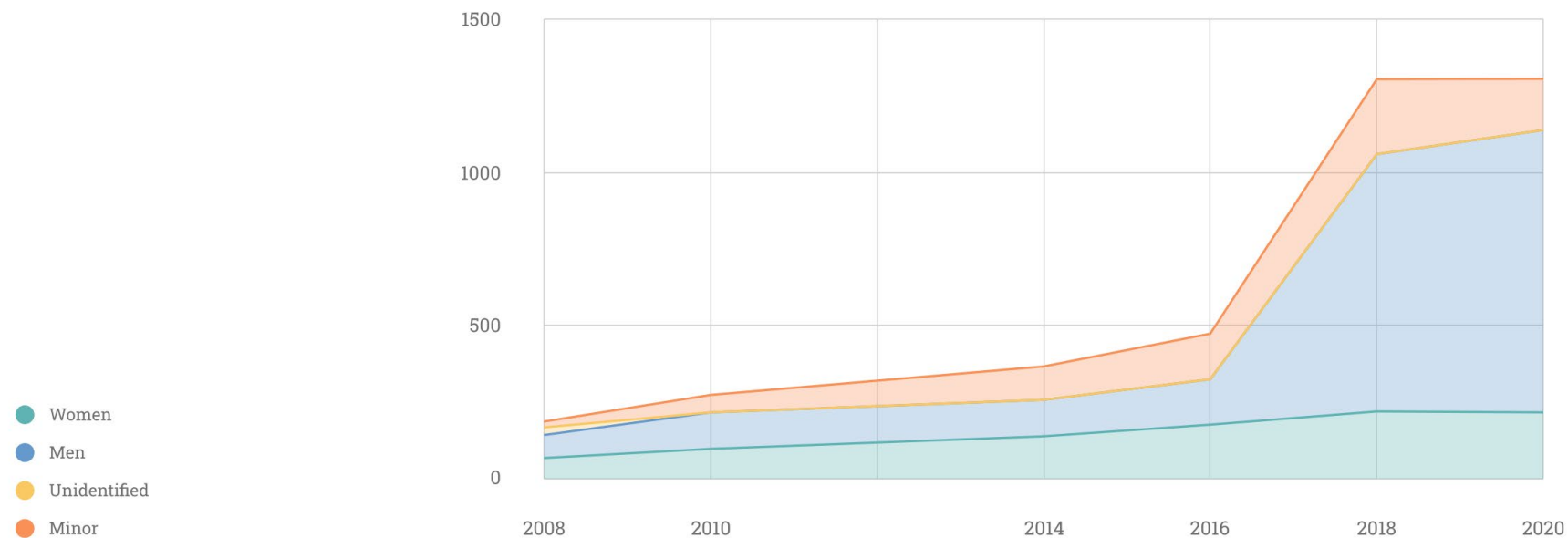


## Emergency accommodation



# Emergency accommodation

Evolution by age  
and gender between  
2008 and 2020







# Conclusion

# Synthesis

Several **major trends** can be identified:

## ► **Steady increase**

the number of people counted has **tripled since the first edition** in 2008 (+208.2%) and the proportion of the most precarious living situations has risen sharply – homeless category represented 29.2% in 2008 and 49.8% in 2020

## ► **Intensification of temporary emergency solutions**

between 2008 and 2018, the number of people in **emergency shelters** increased by 457.7% – the massive mobilization of emergency structures has probably also been at the expense of solutions involving more substantial support

## ► **Relatively stable distribution by age and gender**

**no major changes** were observed in terms of gender and age distribution – overall, the proportion of women and minors is higher in facilities that are likely to accommodate them for a longer period of time.



## Some Explanations

Three **key elements** can be mobilised to shed light on the situation in Brussels:

- **Impoverishment of the population**

the **precariousness** of the working class and the most fragile fractions of the middle class has increased over the last twelve years

- **Access to housing**

a challenging situation due to the **lack of accessible housing** for low-income households, mainly due to the rent increase

- **Management of migration flows**

strict **migration policies** depriving an increasing number of EU and non-EU nationals of their right of residence

