



About Homelessness

Homelessness is a crisis. It is devastating and should not happen to anyone. Homelessness is an isolating and frightening experience. Homeless people are invisible, ignored and forgotten. At worst, homelessness can mean sleeping rough on the streets. However the problem of homelessness is **much bigger than that of rough sleeping**.

After years of declining trends, **all forms of homelessness have risen** due to the shortage of housing and ongoing effects of the economic recession combined with government policies - particularly reforms and cuts to housing benefit. Independent research carried out for Crisis and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that **homelessness is likely to increase further still**.¹ Almost **one in ten people say they have been homeless at some point**, with a fifth of these people saying it happened in the last five years.²

How many people are homeless?

Rough sleeping

- Rough sleeping has risen. Government street counts and estimates give a snapshot of the national situation. In 2014 they estimated around **2,744** people sleep rough on any one night across England³, a rise of **55 per cent on 2010**. But this is only a snapshot, the actual figures are likely to be much higher.
- **7,581 people slept rough** at some point in London during 2014/15, a 16 per cent rise on the previous year, and more than double the figure of 3,673 in 2009/10⁴

Statutory homelessness

- Local authorities have a duty to house some homeless people who meet a strict set of criteria and, every year, tens of thousands of people apply to their local authority for homelessness assistance. The majority of single people who approach their local authority will not be eligible for housing.
- Last year **112,330** people in England made a homelessness application, **a 26 per cent rise since 2009/10**.⁵
- The latest report from the Homelessness Monitor research has shown that the problem is much bigger than this. **A total of 280,000 people** approached their local authority in the last year alone for homelessness assistance- a trend not reflected in the headline statistics⁶.

Hostels and hidden homelessness

- People who do not qualify for local authority housing assistance and may be staying in a hostel, with friends or family or some other form of insecure accommodation are **hidden homeless**
- There are just over 35,000 bed spaces in hostels for single homeless people in England⁷. This has **reduced by 4000** over the last 4 years and **over half of homelessness services have seen their funding cut**.

¹ Heriot Watt University and the University of York (2012) *The Homelessness Monitor*, Crisis and JRF

² Heriot Watt University and the University of York (2012) *The Homelessness Monitor*, Crisis and JRF

³ DCLG (2014) *Total Streetcounts and Estimates Autumn 2013*

⁴ CHAIN (2015) *Street to Home annual report*

⁵ DCLG (2015) *Table 770 Statutory homelessness*

⁶ Heriot Watt University and the University of York (2015) *The Homelessness Monitor*, Crisis and JRF

⁷ Homeless Link (2015) *Support for single homeless people in England: Annual Review 2015*

Why do people become homeless?

- People become and stay homeless for a whole range of complex and overlapping reasons and solving homelessness is about much more than putting a roof over people's heads.
- Anyone can become homeless but there are certain individual factors which make it more likely, including relationship breakdown, leaving an institution such as care, and physical and mental health problems.

Structural factors affecting homelessness

- Housing supply has not kept pace with demand for many decades. **In total, just over 140,000 new houses were supplied in 2013-14⁸**, well below the estimated 250,000 required to keep up with demand.
- The welfare and housing systems have traditionally acted as a buffer between unemployment, poverty and homelessness. Government reforms, particularly cuts to Housing Benefit, are eroding this safety net. Housing Benefit has been **cut by around £7bn**.
- **Homelessness has risen already** and the housing shortage combined with welfare changes mean that all forms of homelessness are likely to increase further despite signs of a recovering economy.

Young people

- Younger adults are at particular risk of homelessness. In five years the number of young people sleeping rough in London has **more than doubled⁹** and **8% of 16-24 year olds report recently being homeless.¹⁰**
- Housing benefit for many young people is so low it often won't cover the cost of even a room in a cheap shared house, leaving people to sleep where they can – on the floors of friends or family or, at worst, the streets.

Unemployment & skills

- Homelessness is an isolating and deskilling experience. Many homeless people have no formal qualifications at all.
- Only **2%** of homeless people are in **full-time employment** but we know that the **overwhelming majority** want to work.¹¹

Health and wellbeing

- Homeless people experience very poor health outcomes, both physical and mental. Up to **80%** of homeless people have **mental health problems¹²** and the average age of death for a homeless person is just **47.¹³**
- There is a real lack of health services for homeless people, particularly those specialising in mental health or addiction problems.
- Homeless people are **13 times** more likely to be a **victim of violence** – much of it perpetrated by the general public.¹⁴

Women and homelessness

- It is very common for homeless women to have experienced violence. **20%** have become homeless to **escape violence** from someone they know.¹⁵
- Homelessness can be particularly dangerous for women. **28%** have formed an unwanted sexual partnership and **20%** have engaged in sex work to get a roof over their heads¹⁶.

⁸ DCLG (2015) *Table 209 permanent dwellings completed by tenure and country*

⁹ CHAIN (2014) *Street to Home annual report*

¹⁰ Heriot Watt University and the University of York (2013) *The Homelessness Monitor, Crisis*

¹¹ OSW (2005) *No Home, No Job*.

¹² Homeless Links (2014) *The unhealthy state of homelessness*

¹³ The University of Sheffield (2012), *Homelessness Kills, Crisis*

¹⁴ LSE (2004) *Living in Fear, Crisis*

¹⁵ CRESR (2006) *Homeless Women: Still being failed but striving to survive, Crisis*

¹⁶ Reeve, K. (2011) *The hidden truth about homelessness: experiences of single homelessness in England*, Crisis UK