

Crisis Briefing: Families with Children Forced to Sleep Rough

Top Lines

- At Crisis we are increasingly seeing families with children and pregnant women approach us for help after they have been turned away from support by their local council. This is a breach of their moral and statutory duties and is forcing children to sleep rough. **This ITV report, [here](#) showed this is happening across the country.**
- These families are just the sharpest end of the homelessness crisis, with record numbers of people experiencing many forms of homelessness over the last year.
- The Westminster Government has taken action in writing to councils in England to remind them of their statutory duties to children and publishing the National Plan to End Homelessness that includes a **new Duty to Collaborate**.
- We would welcome further detail from the Minister on how the government will ensure accountability on this matter, so that no child is forced to sleep rough in any circumstance.
- Alongside this, while the National Plan to End Homelessness is a welcome step forward to tackle the issue,, key drivers of homelessness remain unaddressed. These include the chronic lack of social homes, unaffordable private rents and Home Office policies which are driving homelessness. **We would welcome further detail from the Minister of how the government proposes to address these issues to build a system where fewer families need help and those who do can access the secure home they need to build a life beyond homelessness.**

Latest Homelessness Statistics: England

- Crisis' [Homelessness Monitor: England](#) found that in 2024 **300,000** households experienced homelessness (**up 22%** on 2023). This includes rough sleeping, sofa surfing and people living in temporary accommodation. The latest official statistics show.
 - [4,793 people](#) slept rough on a single night in autumn 2025 (up 56% on 2022) **A record high**
 - [134,760 households](#) homeless and living in temporary accommodation as of September 2025. **A record high**
 - This included 175,990 children. **An 11th successive record high.**

Cases

- In the first six months of 2025 Crisis saw over 100 families with children and pregnant women coming to our services for support having been turned away by their local council. This was mainly in our services in London, Oxford, Croydon and Birmingham. In many cases this is breaking the law and risking children's lives.
- In November 2025 an [Afghan family](#) who had been granted refugee status with children aged 4, 8, 12, 14 and 16 were refused support by two London councils and **forced to sleep rough for 12 nights** before securing emergency accommodation.

- We also [supported Mechelle](#), who was forced to sleep in her car with her three children, including one with a learning disability and epilepsy after she was refused help on the grounds on local connection, despite moving to be closer to family to help care for her children when attending hospital appointments for one of her children. .
- Councils have clear duties to help under section 17 of the Children Act (1989). Families with children have priority need for support under the Housing Act (1996) and should be provided emergency housing while that determination is made. This is non-negotiable.

Government Response

- In response the Homelessness Minister has written to Councils reiterating their duty to prevent children from sleeping rough. Crisis welcomes the government's swift response on this matter. We would welcome further detail from the Minister on how the government will help ensure accountability and that no child is forced to sleep rough, as the law sets out.
- Further, **we must acknowledge that these cases are simply an extreme example of how broken our homelessness system is.** To fix it the Government has published a [National Plan to End Homelessness, which is a welcome step forward.](#)
- The plan introduces positive measures such as an outcomes framework for local government to improve services, underpinned by **£3.5bn in funding** for 2026/37 - 2028/29, including £2.2bn for rough sleeping in a consolidated Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse grant.
- The plan also includes a new Duty to Collaborate that will establish a legal duty for the Ministries of Justice and Defence, the Home Office, Departments for Education, for Health and Social Care and of Work and Pensions to work together to prevent homelessness for those at risk, as well as further specific prevention targets.
- However, there remain significant gaps in the approach which will not only drive further homelessness, but also undermines the ability of local authorities right now to support people who are homeless. As our CEO Matt Downie noted; *“Ministers are taking steps in the right direction — but falling short of what’s desperately needed to end Britain’s homelessness crisis.”*

Further action needed to tackle homelessness

- Action is a legal, practical and moral imperative. Research shows that people being forced to sleep rough [need more help from public services](#) and councils now spend [£2.8bn a year](#) on temporary accommodation. By tackling homelessness, we can unleash the potential of people across Britain to work, succeed and build communities.
- To get Britain back on track to ending homelessness we must tackle the key drivers of homelessness head-on to ensure that everyone in need can swiftly access an affordable and secure home as a foundation for their recovery. To do this we must:
- **Repair our social home safety net.** Crisis have calculated that we need to build [90,000 social homes](#) per year to meet need, while the Social and Affordable Housing

Programme is a good start. We need to reach a position where social homes are always available for people when they are pushed into homelessness. We urge the Government to consider bringing forward grant funding committed under the Social and Affordable Housing Programme to help boost supply of social rent housing now and set a minimum 20% target of social rent homes on major developments, to encourage actors in this space to deliver.

- **Ensure people can afford a home.** To prevent more people being forced into homelessness immediately, Local Housing Allowance, which is currently frozen – a real terms cut, needs to be restored to cover the cheapest 30% of homes for rent in a local area. Currently just [2.7% of homes](#) for rent in Great Britain are affordable on Local Housing Allowance rates, this pushes many people into homelessness, and means it is much harder to secure a home once they are experiencing homeless.
- **Deliver prevention for all.** The National Plan has a welcome focus on prevention but has left clear gaps. Despite homelessness amongst refugees after move-on from asylum accommodation being the fastest rising form of homelessness in Crisis' Homelessness Monitor 2025 ([rising 37%](#)), the Home Office only has a target to inform councils of people in need, not to prevent homelessness.

Questions for the Minister

- *Homelessness organisations, including Crisis, have found that we need to be building 90,000 social homes per year to meet need, what steps will she take to ensure people who are homeless can access a home for social rent?*
- *According to research by Crisis and Zoopla just 2.7% of homes for rent across Great Britain are affordable on Local Housing Allowance, how will she achieve her Government's manifesto pledge to get Britain back on track to ending homelessness if people on low incomes simply cannot afford a local home?*
- *Given that existing statutory duties to protect children are being contravened and children are being forced to sleep rough in some cases, how will she ensure accountability on councils both for existing laws and for the new outcomes framework?*
- *Research by Crisis shows that homelessness after move-on from asylum accommodation is the fastest growing cause of homelessness, will she review the Home Office prevention target if this trend continues?*