

Frequently Asked Questions

When talking about homelessness people often have questions about the lives of those affected by homelessness, our services, and how the structural causes of homelessness can be changed. Below are examples of some of the most common questions and information to help you answer them.

If you are asked a question you do not know the answer to or are uncomfortable answering, it is OK to let the person know you do not know the answer and will find out. You can contact community.advocate@crisis.org.uk who will help respond to uncommon or challenging questions or you can bring them to the quarterly advocate sessions.

Contents

Popular questions	2
What can you do if you see someone rough sleeping and want to help?.....	2
How does Crisis spend its money?	2
Why are service users called members?.....	2
Does Crisis provide housing for people experiencing homelessness?	2
Is someone who lives in a hostel or temporary accommodation really homeless? ...	3
Why are people homeless?	3
Why have so many people who are homeless got dogs? Should they be keeping them?	3
Do people choose to be homeless?	3
Should I give money to people who are homeless?	3
How many people are homeless?	4
Are there particular groups of people most at risk of/affected by homelessness?	4
How does Crisis support people at Christmas?.....	5
Questions about Government and Local Authority support.....	5
Why are charities providing this support? Why isn't the government helping?	5
Questions about funding	5
How much of my donation will go to help people experiencing homelessness?	5
Where does your money come from?	5
Why doesn't Crisis hold 'sleep-outs' to raise money?.....	6
Questions about immigration.....	6
Why are people seeking asylum provided with accommodation?.....	6
What rights to housing / housing support do migrants have in England?.....	6
What does Crisis see as the link between homelessness and immigration?	7
Is immigration driving the housing crisis?	8

Dealing with challenging questions.....	8
Aren't they all druggies/alcoholics?	8
How do I know if the homeless person I see on the street is really homeless?	8
How are you regulated?	8
How is Crisis different to Shelter?.....	8
Questions from children and young people.....	9

Popular questions

What can you do if you see someone rough sleeping and want to help?

- Report them to [Street link](#) which is a charity that can help put homeless people into temporary accommodation.
- Or in Scotland [StreetWork](#) which is 0808 178 2323
- Buy them a hot drink or meal.
- Have a chat to them, a lot of people experiencing homelessness feel invisible when they are on the streets.
- Call 999 if someone is in a life-threatening situation.

How does Crisis spend its money?

Crisis offers housing, health, education, and employment services. We work with thousands of people experiencing homelessness across the UK every year. We are also determined campaigners working to prevent people from becoming homeless through changing the way society and governments think and act towards people experiencing homelessness. We spend our income primarily on delivering these services.

Why are service users called members?

Our members are the people who use our services and get help from Crisis. They are called members because they are part of Crisis and at the centre of everything we do. They are the people we work with every single day and who inform, inspire, and motivate us in our mission.

Does Crisis provide housing for people experiencing homelessness?

Crisis is not able to provide housing for people experiencing homelessness, as we don't own property, however we are here to help more people to navigate the path towards a new home. We have Housing Lead Workers in all of Crisis services across the UK. Supported by Crisis's Renting Ready training our Lead Workers help members prepare themselves for the day-to-day responsibilities of renting and support them to find and sustain a tenancy.

In London, with the support of Lloyds Banking Group funding, we have recently set up a new social enterprise [Good Place Lettings](#) – It is a joint venture from Crisis and [Homes for Good](#) (based on their social lettings agency model in Glasgow).

Good Place Lettings provide a comprehensive private rented sector property management service to landlords. Leading by example to provide good quality, affordable and sustainable long term housing options for tenants, and particularly those

in housing need. We will take an ethical approach to lettings and management and provide ongoing advice and support services to both tenants and landlords.

Is someone who lives in a hostel or temporary accommodation really homeless?

Yes, both are temporary and insecure, even if someone ends up living there for quite a long time. It is impossible to settle and make a life for yourself, as you could be moved on at short notice, and this could also be to a different area.

A 'home' is so much more than a roof over your head, it has a legal and social dimension and is somewhere people can feel safe and secure. Being in temporary accommodation often provides a roof over people's heads but it is not the same as having a home.

Why are people homeless?

People can be homeless for a variety of reasons. Crisis research looking at people's turning points into homelessness in the UK, found that reasons most often cited by male participants were relationship breakdown, substance misuse, and leaving an institution (prison, care, hospital etc). For women who are homeless, the most common causes were physical or mental health problems and escaping a violent relationship. There are also problems in wider society that can contribute towards homelessness. These structural causes might include a lack of affordable housing; high levels of poverty, unemployment or worklessness; the way in which the benefits system operates; or the way social housing is rationed.

Why have so many people who are homeless got dogs? Should they be keeping them?

Many people experiencing homelessness are lonely and isolated and enjoy the companionship of dogs. Research suggests that from the dog's perspective, this is quite a good way of life. They spend all day with their owner, a lot of time outdoors, most owners would feed their dog before themselves, and there are charities to help people experiencing homelessness care for their dogs (such as All4paws). In addition, for some people they have the dog when they lose their home, and they are already a valued part of their family.

Do people choose to be homeless?

Rarely does anybody choose to be homeless. Often people who are homeless are pushed into making difficult choices and have few options available to them. They might choose to sleep on the streets rather than make use of the available services and this can be for a whole variety of reasons, from feeling safer on the streets, to being unable to access shelters due to having pets, or the shelter only being available during the night-time. But it is not the same as choosing to be homeless. Homelessness is not an individual choice, but caused by societal and political factors that push them into homelessness.

Should I give money to people who are homeless?

This is up to you to decide what you think is best in the individual circumstances. There are often other things you can do, such as offer a coffee, hot chocolate or sandwich, or a bottle of water during warmer weather.

How many people are homeless?

There is no national figure for how many people are homeless across the UK. This is because homelessness is recorded differently in each nation, and because many people experiencing homelessness do not show up in official statistics at all.

Crisis carries out an annual study in response to concerns that many people experiencing homelessness are not being accurately recorded in official statistics. Known as core homelessness, it includes rough sleeping, people living in sheds, garages and other unconventional buildings, sofa surfing, hostels, and unsuitable temporary accommodation such as B&Bs.

On any given night, tens of thousands of families and individuals are experiencing the worst forms of homelessness across Great Britain, this includes over 242,000 households in England alone (2024). For the last five years' core homelessness has been rising year on year in England.

Are there particular groups of people most at risk of/affected by homelessness?

Some groups are more at risk than others: Young people, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, and people leaving care, prison or the armed forces are all at higher risk. If you are a refugee, a person experiencing domestic abuse, or receiving benefits, you are also at greater risk. We create the policies that exacerbate homelessness – so we can change them

Below are links and reports that highlight intersectionality, and the disparities regarding the levels of homelessness among LGBTQ+ communities.

- This article has recently been published by [Inside Housing](#) – you may have to register to access it, but it is free to register with them.

https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/comment/trans-youth-face-homelessness-at-shocking-rates-but-we-can-help-92298?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=IH%20%2D%20HOMELESSNESS%20NEWSLETTER%20CAMPAIGN

- Crisis has a web page too <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/about-homelessness/about-lgbtqplus-homelessness/> - there are some additional links to organisations and reports on our webpage
- Homeless Link also have information, stats and reports on their Website - <https://homeless.org.uk/news/what-how-and-why-we-need-to-address-lgbtq-youth-homelessness/>
- Hidden homelessness article - <https://housingdigital.co.uk/lgbtq-people-face-greater-risk-of-hidden-homelessness/#:~:text=More%20than%20one%20in%20three,discrimination%2C%20bullying%20and%20hate%20crime.>
- Last year the English Government produced a report on [LGBT experiences of homelessness](#)
- Other organisations that will have stats and information on their websites are the [Albert Kennedy Trust](#), [LGBT Foundation](#) has some stats on health inequalities, and [Stonewall](#).
- [Consortium](#) is an umbrella organisation supporting many LGBTQ+ communities and organisations across the UK.

How does Crisis support people at Christmas?

We support people experiencing homelessness at services across London, Edinburgh, South Wales, Newcastle, Oxford, Merseyside, and Birmingham. Our Skylight Centres provide warmth, comfort, safety, and hope for the future through activities, health services, food and advice and support.

In London, we have day centres and hotels where guests can access health appointments, temporary accommodation, activities, advice, befriending, and practical items such as toiletries etc. It is a holistic offering of emotional and wellbeing support, offering everything from Christmas games and advice to volunteer befrienders.

At Crisis we make sure people in our society are not homeless and alone at Christmas and for those in London accessing our services at Christmas can be the first step to ending their homelessness and accessing year-round services. We extend our hotel accommodation offer into January to give us more time to work with individuals to address their situation and stop them returning to the streets.

Questions about Government and Local Authority support

Why are charities providing this support? Why isn't the government helping?

A lot of charities do it on behalf of government and are funded by government, charities may also offer additional services on top of the support provided by the government. Charities like Crisis are often founded because people are moved by a problem and see a need and want to get involved in finding the solutions and changing things for the better.

Questions about funding

How much of my donation will go to help people experiencing homelessness?

61% of our expenditure was spent on [charitable activities](#) last year. Crisis receives the majority of its funding from individuals, companies and trusts and has little reliance on statutory income. Our shops are also a valuable part of our income portfolio.

This enables us to have some financial resilience and to speak for people experiencing homelessness from a position of independence, but it also requires us to invest significant resources in fundraising. In addition, the planned growth of Crisis's services means that we have had to invest more in fundraising.

Where does your money come from?

Crisis relies on the generosity of the general public, companies and charitable trusts to fund its work. Without the kindness of these people, the support that we provide the hundreds of people experiencing homelessness would not be possible.

For every £1 we spend on fundraising, we raise another £3.14 to fund our charitable services.

Why doesn't Crisis hold 'sleep-outs' to raise money?

Whilst 'sleep-outs' can be a good way of raising money, Crisis does not encourage using 'sleep-outs' as a way of fundraising. Sleeping on the street is incredibly dangerous and potentially fatal. Research shows individuals sleeping rough are 13 times more likely to be a victim of violence, and bad weather can have a serious effect on health and wellbeing. The average age of death for someone experiencing homelessness is just 47.

In addition, Crisis does not feel that it is appropriate for individuals or groups to fundraise or raise awareness by undertaking an activity which mimics the real experiences of people who are homeless. Whilst we appreciate all support, there are many [other ways to fundraise to end homelessness](#).

Questions about immigration

Why are people seeking asylum provided with accommodation?

An asylum seeker is someone coming to the UK to seek asylum – they will be under the jurisdiction of the government whilst their claim is being processed. A refugee is someone who has been successful in their asylum claim and has therefore been granted refugee status by the government to stay in the UK.

People seek refuge due to fear, persecution and inability to seek protection in their own country, including due to situations of war and conflict. The UK has a legal duty under the 1951 Refugee Convention to play its role in processing asylum claims for people coming to the UK to seek refuge. As part of this responsibility, the government has to accommodate asylum seekers while their claims are ongoing because they are forbidden to work while their claim is being processed. The government also pays for their subsistence, with asylum seekers currently receiving £7.03 per person per day to pay for food and other essentials.

While in the past people seeking asylum were more likely to be placed in hostels or in local communities, since 2020 the Government has had to use hotels as an emergency measure due to a lack of alternative accommodation. The current Government has now pledged to clear the asylum backlog and end the use of hotels to house asylum seekers by the end of this parliament.

What rights to housing / housing support do migrants have in England?

People migrate to the UK for many different reasons, including to work, to reunite with family, to study and in some cases, people are seeking safety fleeing war and persecution.

The vast majority of people who migrate to the UK do not need access to support with housing and homelessness, but some may end up in situations where this is the case. However, often immigration laws put restrictions on what support people can access.

For example, some people may have a visa to come to the UK to work, and a condition of their visa will be that they cannot access public funds. This then means that if they lose

work and do not have adequate funds to pay rent while they look for a new job, even if they become homeless, they are not entitled to any financial support. For some people, this leaves them with no option but to sleep rough. Women who come to the UK on a spousal visa and face relationship breakdown, can also be left with no access to public funds and at risk of homelessness as a result.

For people seeking asylum, they are provided with accommodation while their claims are being processed due to the UK's legal duties. Once they receive either a positive or negative decision, they are no longer entitled to asylum accommodation, unless they appeal the process. In that case, they would be allowed to continue to be housed until that appeal is determined. Whilst they are claiming asylum and being housed, they are unable to work, claim mainstream benefits or get extra support for their needs. Once they have received a decision, they have either 28 or 56 days to leave the accommodation and find somewhere else to live – depending on whether they're a single person, family, pregnant, over 65 or disabled. This leaves many people at risk of homelessness and destitution as it is often not enough time to receive all the right documentation and support needed for someone to start a new life.

If someone has been granted refugee status then they would be eligible for social housing in principle, however in reality there are many barriers to someone securing social housing. It is almost impossible for non-UK nationals to access social housing as there are a number of rules and laws that make it difficult to – for example, many refugees are only given leave to remain for five years at a time which prevents them from accessing social homes. Part of this is also due to the huge demand – with more than 1.3 million people already on a waiting list for a social home.

The government's own figures show that an overwhelming majority of tenants in social housing are UK citizens (90% of lead tenants). To access a social home, you must meet a strict set of criteria which councils use to decide who gets a home. This is often based on need, such as if you have children or a connection to the local area. It's simply not the case that people can just come to this country and be given a home.

This means that many refugees end up trying to privately rent, facing the same barriers as the wider population which include high rents and a shortage of affordable private rent homes.

What does Crisis see as the link between homelessness and immigration?

Crisis believes that ultimately, we shouldn't have a link between immigration and homelessness. It is a symptom of something going wrong in our immigration system that there is a link between the two, and too often there are policies in place that increase the risk of homelessness amongst non-UK nationals as they restrict access to help that could help prevent or resolve homelessness, or the right type of help is not available.

Homelessness is also an issue for migrants in the UK because they're more likely to be renting and in precarious or low paid work. This means that they're often at the sharp end of the housing crisis. They may also experience racial discrimination which can make it more challenging to find good quality housing.

A shortage of housing has been a problem for decades, regardless of immigration. The Government's own statistics show we are losing more genuinely affordable homes than

we are building. This just isn't sustainable. We need the Government to start building genuinely affordable and social rent homes so that everyone can access a safe and secure home.

Crisis believes that everyone at risk of homelessness, irrespective of their immigration status, should be supported to avoid homelessness.

Is immigration driving the housing crisis?

The current housing crisis is a result of decades of underinvestment in social rent homes from consecutive Governments and an increasingly pressured private rental market as a result, which has left people struggling to afford renting privately and unable to access a social rent home. Currently, the gap between the housing available and what's needed is so big anyway that even if net migration was at zero, we would still have a housing crisis.

That's why we're working with Lloyds to together call for one million more social homes in the next decade from Government, to help reverse the housing crisis and end homelessness, together.

Dealing with challenging questions

Aren't they all druggies/alcoholics?

People can become homeless for all sorts of reasons, sometimes drugs and alcohol can be both a cause and a symptom of homelessness (for example people turn to drugs and alcohol because of their homelessness) but not all people who are homeless have drug or alcohol problems. This is a stereotype that we need to challenge and use of the term druggie itself is stigmatising and inappropriate and should be challenged – an appropriate alternative phrase is a person first approach such as "person with a problem with drugs".

How do I know if the homeless person I see on the street is really homeless?

Not all people who are begging on the streets may be homeless, and equally not all people who are homeless will beg on the streets. However often when people are begging on the streets, even if they are not homeless, they may be vulnerable and facing difficult circumstances.

How are you regulated?

Crisis is regulated by the Charity Commission, the Scottish Charity Regulator, the Fundraising Standards Board, and where appropriate our services may be externally validated, for example the qualifications we offer are all validated by an external agency in Scotland it is the SQA.

How is Crisis different to Shelter?

Crisis and Shelter are both homeless charities offering services for people experiencing homelessness and campaigning for change. Crisis focus solely on people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, whereas Shelter Scotland have a broader remit and also offer support to people who are in housing difficulty or staying in poor quality accommodation. Shelter offer help and advice to people in housing difficulty, they have a national helpline, as well as offering a number of services where people can go for advice. Crisis works with people experiencing homelessness to support them with education,

health and well-being, employment and housing supporting them on their journey out of homelessness.

Questions from children and young people

Children ask all sorts of difficult questions all the time and while we don't want to upset them it's important to answer their questions directly while still using age-appropriate language. Children often ask very big/broad questions based on people or things they have seen; sometimes it helps to break down a big question to figure out where the question has come from. However, we don't know everyone's story so it's best to talk in broad terms.

Here are some examples:

'Why do homeless people take drugs?'

First, it's important to tell them that not all people experiencing homelessness take drugs or drink a lot of alcohol. We actually did some research that said only 1 in 4 people experiencing homelessness use drugs a lot. (source: [Crisis Skylight Final Report of the University of York evaluation](#)) But being homeless is really really hard so some people do to help them cope. This is why we want to get people into homes as quick as possible.

'Why do homeless people have dogs if they can't afford a home?'

You can talk about how dogs offer company and friendship. Dogs love being outside, going on walks. Maybe ask if they have a dog, the best bits about having a dog and when the dog is most happy (with their family and when they get to go outside and on walks). Mention that there are other charities that help people who are experiencing homelessness dogs with food, grooming etc such as All4Paws in Edinburgh and Street Paws and Street Vets.

'Why can't the government just give everyone a home?'

This is a really big question, it's important not to get too political when answering it. Simply put, the government could give everyone a home, but it's really complicated because anyone can become homeless and so it's hard to keep track of everyone that is entering homelessness. However, we are trying to help the government make it less complicated and put the systems in place so that everyone is looked after, and no one gets missed out.