

Article

Homelessness in the UK: 2004 to 2024

A summary of trends in homelessness statistics across the four UK countries and the cross-UK comparability of the data.

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1 . Main points

- Housing and homelessness are devolved matters in the UK; England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales each produce statistics on homelessness according to their own legislative framework, policies, and reporting timeframes.
- Direct comparisons between UK countries in the number of households in statutory homelessness and temporary accommodation cannot be made, though comparisons between overall trends can still be made.
- The number of households assessed as homeless and owed settled accommodation from their local authority are at the highest levels recorded in at least the last six years in England, Scotland, and Wales.
- The number of households in temporary accommodation are at a record high in England, Scotland, and Wales; there were around 117,400 households in England, 16,300 households in Scotland, and 6,400 households in Wales living in temporary accommodation at the end of March 2024.

Homelessness is a devolved matter in the UK, meaning that each country of the UK produces statistics according to its own legislative framework. This results in differences between the countries that limit the comparability of their homelessness data. Please interpret the results below with caution and in the context of the supporting information.

2 . Context

Homelessness affects a wide range of people, including those who are sleeping rough and sofa surfing. It also includes those who will soon be without a permanent home and those in temporary accommodation.

Quality datasets on the levels and nature of homelessness in the UK are essential for developing, supporting, and evaluating new policies to prevent and relieve homelessness.

In the UK, one of the main data sources on homelessness is known as "statutory homelessness data" (see [Section 5: Data on homelessness in the UK](#)). These are administrative data collected by local authorities (or the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in Northern Ireland) as they process applications for housing aid, with the provision of support being a legal (or "statutory") responsibility of the local authorities towards qualifying households. Households that meet the requirements are "owed" a housing duty, which means they are eligible for settled accommodation. Applicants in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland are assessed for "priority need" for accommodation. In Scotland, priority need was abolished in 2012.

Not every homeless person will approach their local authority for support. This means that statutory homelessness data do not capture every person experiencing homelessness. For more information on hidden homelessness, see [Section 7: Data sources and quality](#).

It can be challenging to interpret these data to achieve UK insights. Each country of the UK produces statutory homelessness statistics according to its own legislative framework, which varies because of devolution, as explained in the Legislation subsection of [Section 7: Data sources and quality](#).

This article is an update to our [UK homelessness: 2005 to 2018 article](#), published in 2019. These articles help build a UK-wide picture of homelessness by presenting the latest headline figures from across the four countries, alongside guidance on their comparability.

Additional analysis and commentary are available from the data providers' websites linked in [Section 5: Data on homelessness in the UK](#).

3 . Trends in households seeking help with homelessness

This section looks at the number of households approaching local authorities for help with homelessness, and the different statutory duties owed to those households, in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

These duties include the provision of settled accommodation (sometimes called a "main" or "full" housing duty). They may also include other duties to relieve or prevent homelessness at an earlier stage. The specifics of these duties (including when they are owed and how they are discharged) are outlined in legislation, which varies across the countries of the UK. See the Legislation subsection of [Section 7: Data sources and quality](#) for further information.

There are differences in homelessness legislation, policies, data recording, and reporting, all of which have changed over time. This means that it is not possible to derive whole-UK estimates for the number of households seeking help with homelessness.

However, trends for individual countries can provide insights into what might be happening at the UK level.

The number of homeless households owed settled accommodation has reached the highest level recorded in at least the last six years in England, Scotland, and Wales. The number of households owed a full housing duty increased in Northern Ireland in year ending (YE) March 2024, but was higher in YE March 2019.

England

Local authorities in England report activities related to their statutory duties to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on a quarterly basis. This is done by completing the [Homelessness Case Level Collection \(H-CLIC\) return](#), which was introduced in April 2018 alongside the [Homelessness Reduction Act \(HRA\) 2017](#).

The main duty and its definition were unchanged by the HRA. However, the act introduced new relief duties that were unrelated to priority need, as well as new prevention duties. This decreased the numbers of main duties owed and created a break in the time series, because main duties are only owed when these earlier prevention and/or relief efforts are unsuccessful.

Around 65,000 households were assessed as owed a main duty in England in YE March 2024. This is the highest number recorded since YE March 2007. It also exceeds the final pre-HRA figure from YE March 2017.

There was also a decrease in main duties owed from YE March 2004 to YE March 2009 after the introduction of the [Homelessness Act 2002](#), which placed extra prevention duties on local authorities.

Figure 1: The number of households owed a main housing duty in England is at its highest level since the year ending March 2007

Households owed homelessness prevention, relief, and main duties, England, year ending March 2004 to year ending March 2024

Notes

1. The [Homelessness Reduction Act \(2017\)](#) came into effect on 3 April 2018.
2. Data do not include all applicants for homelessness support. Applicants who were deemed not eligible or no longer eligible (i.e., based on their immigration status) or neither homeless nor threatened with homelessness do not qualify for these duties and are therefore not counted. Additionally, applications that were withdrawn before a decision was reached, or where contact with the applicant was lost before a decision was reached, are also not counted.
3. This chart includes only the relief duties owed upon initial assessment. Relief duties owed to households that were homeless at the end of a prevention duty are excluded. This way, the combined sizes of the prevention and relief bars represent the total numbers of households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness upon initial assessment.
4. Figures are presented rounded to the nearest ten households.
5. Data are accurate as at the time of publication.

Scotland

There have been legislative changes over time which have had an impact on the ability of homeless households to secure settled accommodation in Scotland.

The Scottish Government abolished the priority need test at the end of 2012, as outlined in [The Homelessness \(Abolition of Priority Need Test\) Order 2012](#). This means that any household that is unintentionally homeless (or threatened with homelessness) is legally owed settled accommodation by their local authority.

In 2019, the decision to test for intentionality of homelessness was moved to the discretion of the local authority, rather than it being a legal requirement.

These changes have meant that the number of households assessed as homeless, and the number of households judged as owed settled accommodation, have come together over time (Figure 2).

Around 40,700 homelessness applications were opened in Scotland in YE March 2024, with around 32,200 households assessed as homeless and 31,500 households owed settled accommodation.

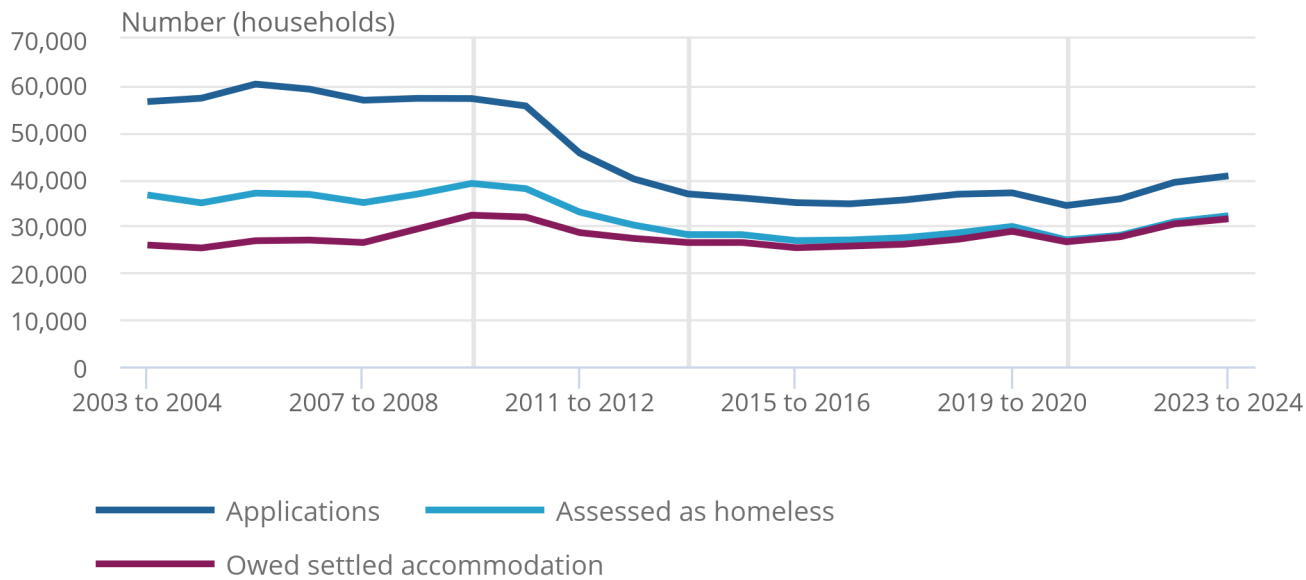
These figures are the highest in Scotland in over a decade, after a large decrease in the number of homelessness applications between YE March 2010 and YE March 2014. This reduction followed the introduction of Housing Options in Scotland. Housing Options is a process by which many local authorities in Scotland offer information and advice to vulnerable households. It aims to prevent homelessness in the first place, for example, by addressing the underlying cause of their housing stress, such as debt or family breakup.

Figure 2: The number of homeless households owed settled accommodation in Scotland is at its highest level since the year ending March 2011

Homelessness applications, households assessed as homeless, and households owed settled accommodation, Scotland, year ending March 2004 to year ending March 2024

Figure 2: The number of homeless households owed settled accommodation in Scotland is at its highest level since the year ending March 2011

Homelessness applications, households assessed as homeless, and households owed settled accommodation, Scotland, year ending March 2004 to year ending March 2024



Source: Scottish Government

Notes:

1. The priority need test was abolished on 31 December 2012.
2. Legislative changes in November 2019 gave local authorities the power to choose to assess for intentionality, rather than it being a legal duty to do so.
3. Unlike the other UK countries, Scotland does not use the term "main duty" or "full duty" to refer to the responsibility of a local authority to provide settled accommodation. However, the responsibility is similar across all countries.
4. The Scottish Government does not use the term "owed settled accommodation" in their official [Homelessness in Scotland bulletins](#). Figure 2 equates "owed settled accommodation" with Scottish Government's reported assessment outcomes "unintentionally homelessness and in priority need" and "unintentionally homeless", which are terms used before and after the abolition of the priority need test, respectively. This keeps terminology consistent between UK countries.
5. Data are accurate at the time of publication.

Wales

New prevention duties and new relief duties that were unrelated to priority need were introduced in Wales with the [Housing \(Wales\) Act 2014](#), which came into effect from September 2014. Under this new legislation, local authorities make up to three assessments per application as the applications flow through this framework. The three assessments are:

- a household is assessed as owed a prevention duty
- prevention efforts are unsuccessful, so the household is assessed as owed a relief duty
- relief efforts are unsuccessful, so the household is assessed for a main duty

Local authorities are required to record all assessment outcomes, which are collected and reported on by Welsh Government.

Because each household can have more than one outcome, it is not possible to get a single figure for the number of households seeking homelessness support in Wales from the outcomes-based data.

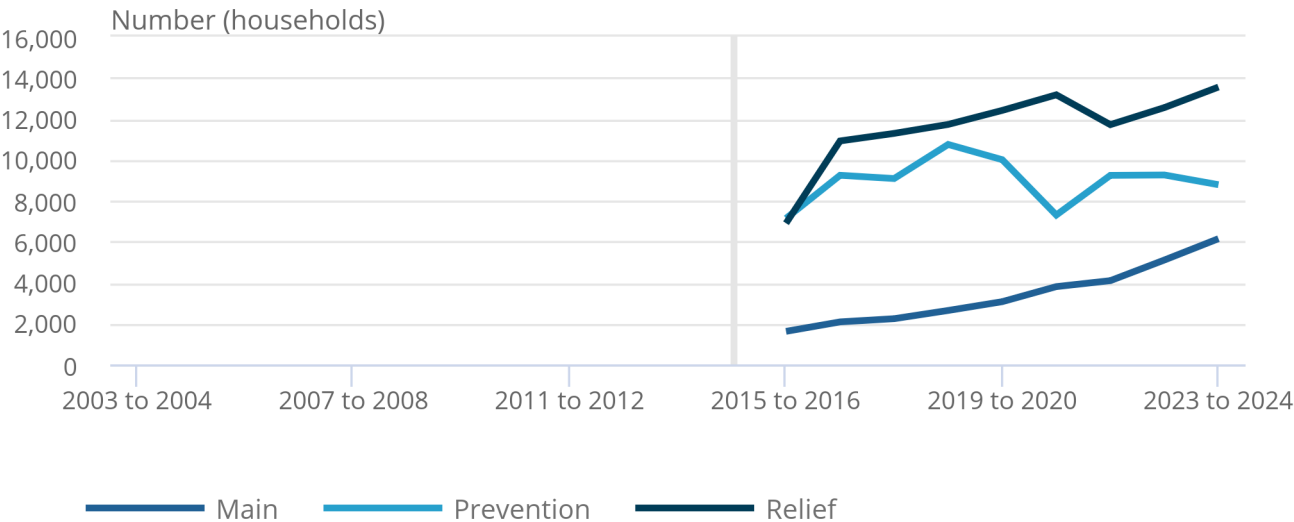
The number of main duties owed has risen year-on-year since this change in legislation. It reached around 6,100 households in YE March 2024, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The number of households owed a main housing duty in Wales is at the highest level since new legislation in 2014 introduced additional prevention and relief duties

Households owed homelessness prevention, relief, and main duties, Wales, year ending (YE) March 2016 to YE March 2024

Figure 3: The number of households owed a main housing duty in Wales is at the highest level since new legislation in 2014 introduced additional prevention and relief duties

Households owed homelessness prevention, relief, and main duties, Wales, year ending (YE) March 2016 to YE March 2024



Source: Welsh Government

Notes:

1. The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 came into effect on 17 September 2014.
2. Duties are not representative of unique households. This is because each household may have up to three outcomes (owed a prevention duty, owed a relief duty, and owed a main duty) in these data.
3. Statistics on households owed a main housing duty before YE 2016 are available on StatsWales's [Statutory Homelessness reports](#). They are not presented in this chart.
4. The x axis is presented from YE March 2004 so that trend comparisons can be made with the other UK countries.
5. Data are accurate at the time of publication.

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) fulfils the role of the local authority in terms of statutory homelessness duties in Northern Ireland. Each of the 11 local authorities align with a Housing Executive area office. Data are inputted into the Housing Management System by frontline staff, processed by NIHE, and then submitted to the Department for Communities (DfC) as aggregated data.

The data published are on homeless "presenters", which are households that have made a homelessness application to the NIHE, and homeless "acceptances", which are homeless presenters that have been accepted as a Full Duty Applicant following assessment.

Official statistics report on the number of homeless presenters whose homelessness has been prevented by an action or intervention of the NIHE, another agency, or the applicant themselves. However, these numbers are small and do not reflect the true scale of prevention activities taking place in Northern Ireland. There is no statutory duty on homelessness prevention in Northern Ireland. However, the NIHE and DfC fund a range of external agencies to deliver homelessness-prevention activities. Much of this work takes place upstream before a homelessness application is made.

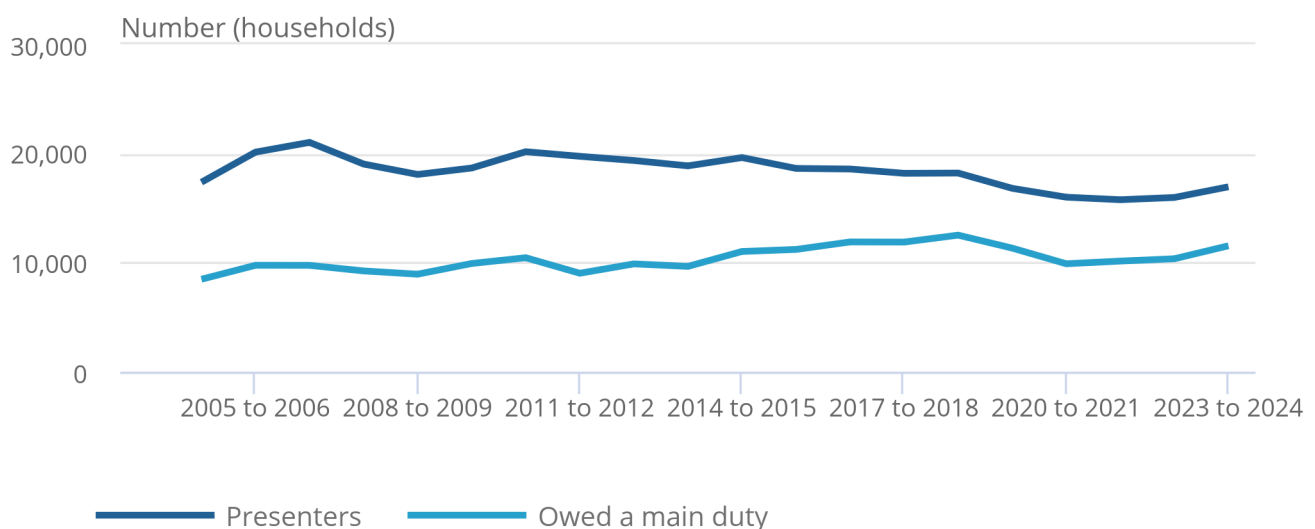
There were around 16,900 households presenting as homeless in Northern Ireland in YE March 2024 and there were around 11,500 households owed a full housing duty, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: The number of households owed a full housing duty in Northern Ireland has increased in the year ending March 2024

Households presenting as homeless and those owed a full housing duty, Northern Ireland, year ending (YE) March 2005 to YE March 2024

Figure 4: The number of households owed a full housing duty in Northern Ireland has increased in the year ending March 2024

Households presenting as homeless and those owed a full housing duty, Northern Ireland, year ending (YE) March 2005 to YE March 2024



Source: Department for Communities, Northern Ireland

Notes:

1. Data are accurate at the time of publication.

4 . Trends in households in temporary accommodation

Temporary accommodation is an interim housing solution offered by local authorities to applicants of statutory homelessness support.

In all four countries of the UK, temporary accommodation must be made available to any applicant waiting for settled accommodation to become available (following a decision that they are owed settled accommodation).

In England, Scotland, and Wales, temporary accommodation must also be made available while applicants are awaiting the outcome of an appeal against, or review of, a decision. In Northern Ireland, there is no legislative requirement to do this, but it is nearly always done in practice.

In England, there are also cases where temporary accommodation is owed during the relief duty. This is where the local authority suspects that the household may meet the main duty criteria, but it has not finished making inquiries to formally determine this.

In Scotland, temporary accommodation must also be made available (if needed) to any household:

- waiting on a homelessness assessment
- assessed as intentionally homeless, until alternative accommodation can be found

The analysis in this section looks at the number of households, number of households with children, and number of children, living in temporary accommodation. It also looks at how this has changed over time in each of the four UK countries.

The definition of a household in temporary accommodation is broadly consistent at a high level across all four countries. In addition, England, Wales, and Scotland report on a consistent time period, making it possible to aggregate the data for these countries to arrive at a single number for Great Britain. However, the relative contributions of individual countries to this total should not be compared. This is because of the differences in legislation and in how temporary accommodation is used. For example, priority need assessment in England means that the proportion of households in temporary accommodation that include children may be higher than in Scotland where no priority need assessment takes place.

Numbers of households in temporary accommodation

The number of households living in temporary accommodation in Great Britain was around 140,000 households at the end of March 2024. Record highs are observed in all four countries of the UK.

Cross-UK analysis of the number of households in temporary accommodation is complicated for several reasons. There are differences in the types of data produced between countries, such as:

- England and Scotland provide snapshots of households in temporary accommodation at the end of every quarter; in Wales and Northern Ireland, snapshots are generally taken every six months
- Wales also provides monthly information on individuals placed into temporary accommodation, but this is not based on the same definitions as the statutory data
- Scotland also provides information on the total number of placements in each financial year
- Northern Ireland also provides the total numbers of placements into temporary accommodation during six-month periods

Differences in policies have led to differences in each country's time series. For example, both England and Wales introduced emergency accommodation measures in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This helped to ensure that all rough sleepers were accommodated, to mitigate the risks of them contracting or spreading the virus. No new measures were necessary in Scotland, since all rough sleepers were already entitled to temporary accommodation, though the demand for temporary accommodation still increased.

Although all UK countries provide temporary accommodation to households awaiting a main duty discharge, the criteria to be owed a main duty varies. Two households applying for support in identical circumstances, but in different countries, may have different outcomes in terms of whether they are placed into temporary accommodation. For example, a household in Scotland (where priority need was abolished at the end of 2012) may live in temporary accommodation while waiting for settled accommodation. However, a comparable household in England, Wales, or Northern Ireland may not be owed settled accommodation (based on priority need) and therefore will not stay in temporary accommodation.

Households in Scotland and England may reside in temporary accommodation in circumstances other than awaiting a main duty discharge, for example, while waiting for their homelessness application to be assessed.

England

The number of households in temporary accommodation in England more than halved from around 101,100 households in 2005 to around 48,200 households in 2011. This coincided with new prevention duties introduced by the [Homelessness Act 2002](#). The number of households in temporary accommodation then rose steadily between 2011 and 2020.

Prevention duties were strengthened further by the introduction of the [Homelessness Reduction Act \(2017\)](#), which came into effect in April 2018. The act ensured that households were eligible for assistance if they were at risk of homelessness within 56 days, rather than the previous 28 days. However, there was no decrease in households in temporary accommodation after its implementation.

Measures introduced during the coronavirus pandemic have also affected the data. At the start of the first national lockdown in March 2020, the government wrote a [Letter to all local authorities regarding plans to protect rough sleepers](#). The letter asked that all rough sleepers, or those at risk of rough sleeping, be accommodated to protect their health and stop the wider transmission of the virus. This "Everyone In" scheme was responsible for housing more than 37,000 people by January 2021, contributing to the numbers of households in temporary accommodation during this time as reported by the House of Commons Library's [Coronavirus: Support for rough sleepers \(England\) research briefing](#).

Temporary measures to protect tenants were also put in place during the pandemic. This included a ban on evictions between November 2020 and May 2021, and a requirement for landlords to give extended noticed periods between March 2020 and September 2021.

Temporary accommodation use began to rise sharply again from 2022, especially for households with children. It was at a record high in 2024. This could be partly because of the end of the temporary ban on evictions, as well as cost of living increases and other pressures in the housing market.

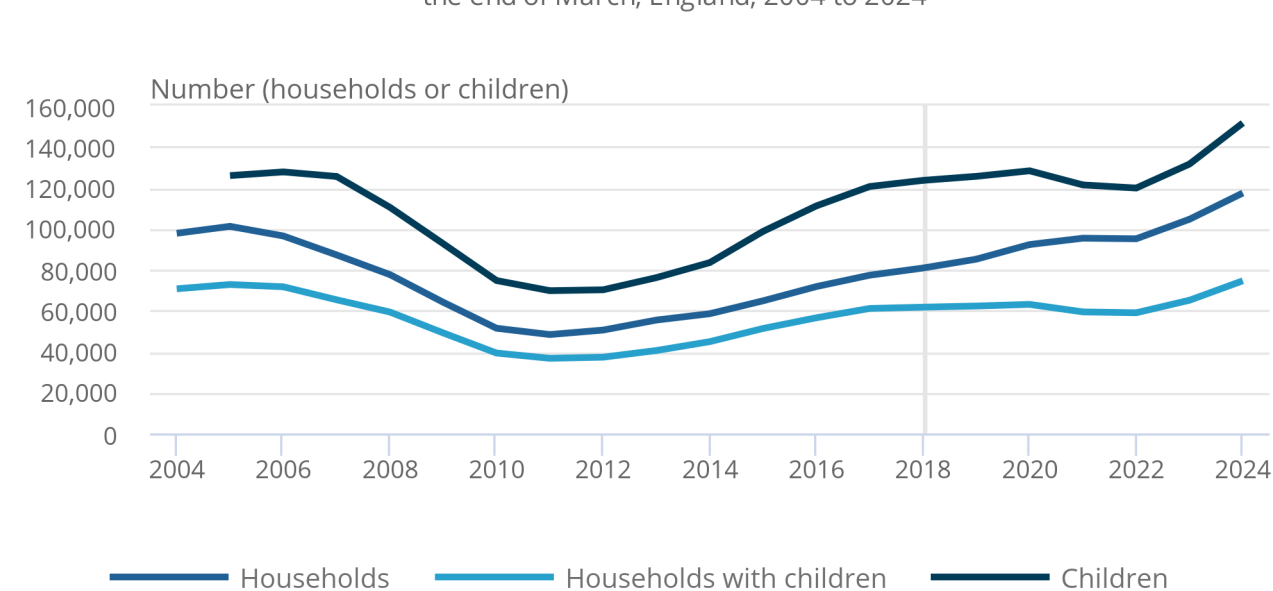
The total number of children in temporary accommodation rose by around 27%, from around 119,800 children at the end of March 2022 to around 151,500 children at the end of March 2024 (Figure 5).

Figure 5: The number of households, and households with children, in temporary accommodation in England are at record highs

Households, households with children, and number of children in temporary accommodation, at the end of March, England, 2004 to 2024

Figure 5: The number of households, and households with children, in temporary accommodation in England are at record highs

Households, households with children, and number of children in temporary accommodation, at the end of March, England, 2004 to 2024



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Notes:

1. The [Homelessness Reduction Act \(2017\)](#) came into effect on 3 April 2018.
2. Figures are presented rounded to the nearest 10.
3. Data are accurate at the time of publication.

Scotland

The total number of households in temporary accommodation in Scotland increased year-on-year from the end of March 2004 to the end of March 2011. This was followed by a more stable period from the end of March 2012 until the end of March 2019, where the number of homeless households remained between 10,000 and 11,000.

The number of households in temporary accommodation increased sharply between the end of March 2020 and the end of March 2021, at the time of the coronavirus pandemic. Homeless households who had previously not taken up their temporary accommodation entitlement were now doing so. There was also a shortage of settled accommodation to move homeless households into, because many services that facilitated this were not operational. The number of households in temporary accommodation has continued to increase since the end of March 2021.

From June 2023 onwards, 13 of the 32 local authorities in Scotland declared a housing emergency. The Scottish Government formally declared a national housing emergency in May 2024.

The Scottish Government announced additional funding to ease pressures on temporary accommodation in September 2024, as described in their [Easing pressure on temporary accommodation news brief](#). Local authorities in Scotland, especially those with sustained temporary accommodation pressures, received a share of £40 million to increase the supply of social and affordable homes.

The number of children in temporary accommodation in Scotland has been steadily increasing since March 2014 and is now at a record high of around 10,100 children.

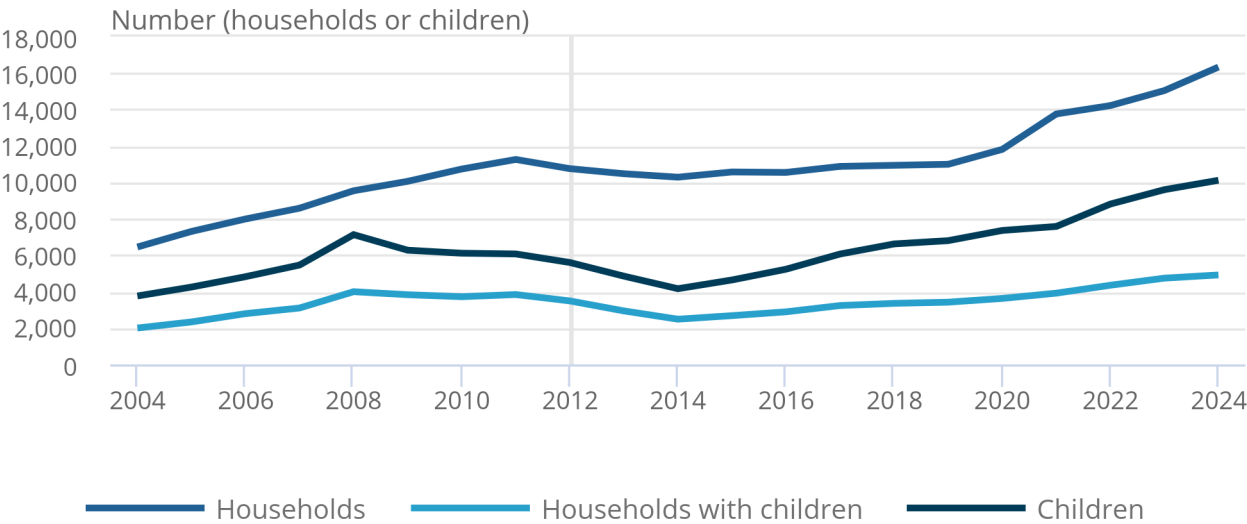
Following the abolition of the priority need test at the end of 2012, households that would previously not qualify for temporary accommodation based on the test were now eligible. This is likely the reason for an increase in the proportion of households without children in temporary accommodation.

Figure 6: The number of households, and households with children, in temporary accommodation in Scotland are at record highs

Households, households with children, and total number of children in temporary accommodation at the end of March, Scotland, 2004 to 2024

Figure 6: The number of households, and households with children, in temporary accommodation in Scotland are at record highs

Households, households with children, and total number of children in temporary accommodation at the end of March, Scotland, 2004 to 2024



Source: Scottish Government

Notes:

1. The priority need test was abolished on 31 December 2012.
2. Data are accurate at the time of publication.

Wales

Wales began the "no-one left out" approach in 2020. The numbers of households in temporary accommodation have increased steeply year-on-year since then, reaching around 6,400 households at the end of March 2024.

The "no-one left out" approach was originally introduced by the Welsh Government as an emergency response to the coronavirus pandemic. It ensured that rough sleepers would be offered accommodation that they may not have had access to before the pandemic.

The Welsh Government pledged to continue this approach in its [high-level, five-year \(2021 to 2026\) action plan for ending homelessness in Wales](#). Legislation in October 2022 added a new priority need category for those who are "street homeless". This ensures that all rough sleepers (who are unintentionally homeless and eligible based on their immigration status, following the pre-existing statutory conditions) would qualify for a main duty.

The number of households in temporary accommodation in Wales generally fell between 2005 and 2016. It fell from 3,400 households at the end of March 2005 to 1,900 households at the end of March 2016, with small increases until 2020.

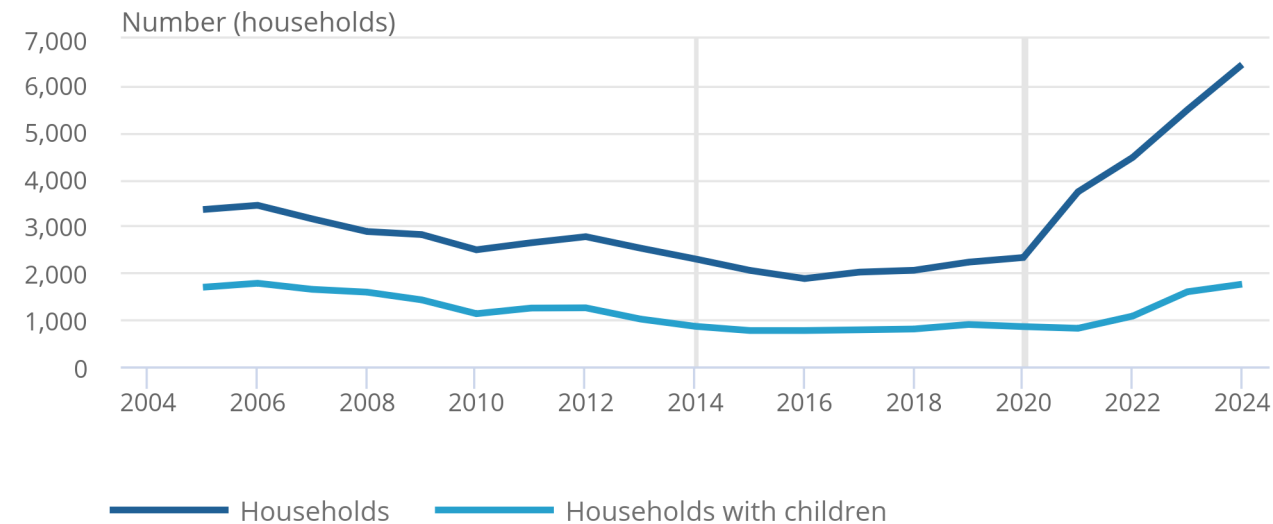
The number of households with children in temporary accommodation has increased year-on-year since 2021, but at a slower rate than total households. This means that the steep increases seen in total households are caused by households without children.

Figure 7: The number of households in temporary accommodation in Wales increased sharply from 2020, when the “no one left out” approach was introduced

Households and households with children in temporary accommodation at the end of March, Wales, 2005 to 2024

Figure 7: The number of households in temporary accommodation in Wales increased sharply from 2020, when the “no one left out” approach was introduced

Households and households with children in temporary accommodation at the end of March, Wales, 2005 to 2024



Source: Welsh Government

Notes:

1. The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 came into effect on 17 September 2014.
2. The “no one left out” approach was adopted in March 2020 at the start of the first national coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic lockdown. Households in street homelessness were recognised as a priority need group from 18 October 2022 onwards, following a change in legislation.
3. Data are accurate at the time of publication.

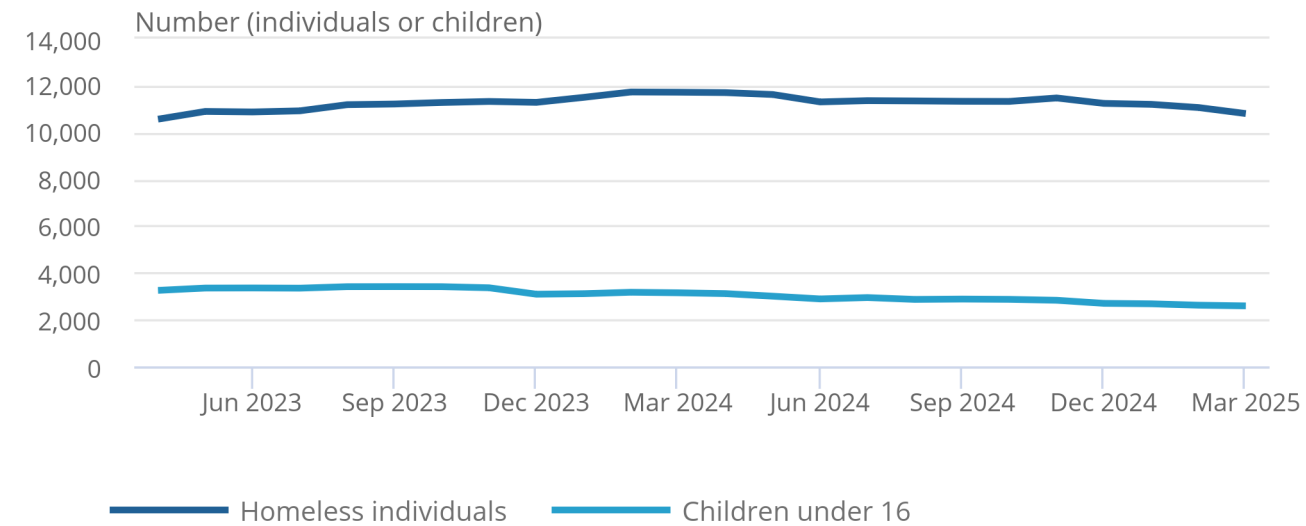
The Welsh Government also introduced a new monthly data collection, reporting on rough sleepers and the provision of both temporary and long-term accommodation to homeless people during the pandemic. Unlike the statutory data, this information relates to numbers of individuals, rather than numbers of households. It also covers placements during and at the end of the period.

Figure 8: The number of homeless individuals in temporary accommodation in Wales has declined slightly over the past year.

Homeless individuals and children in temporary accommodation, at the end of the month, Wales, April 2023 to March 2025

Figure 8: The number of homeless individuals in temporary accommodation in Wales has declined slightly over the past year.

Homeless individuals and children in temporary accommodation, at the end of the month, Wales, April 2023 to March 2025



Source: Welsh Government

Notes:

1. Welsh Government and Welsh local authorities collaborated to improve data collection quality and guidance in April 2023. Data from before April 2023 (not shown in this chart) and after April 2023 should not be compared because of these improvements.
2. Data are accurate at the time of publication.

Northern Ireland

Data for Northern Ireland are provided biannually. This includes the total number of placements into temporary accommodation during six-month periods (Figure 9) and snapshot data of households in temporary accommodation (Figure 10).

These biannual reporting periods have changed over the course of the time series. They were aligned to calendar years between 2019 and 2023, and financial years both before and afterwards.

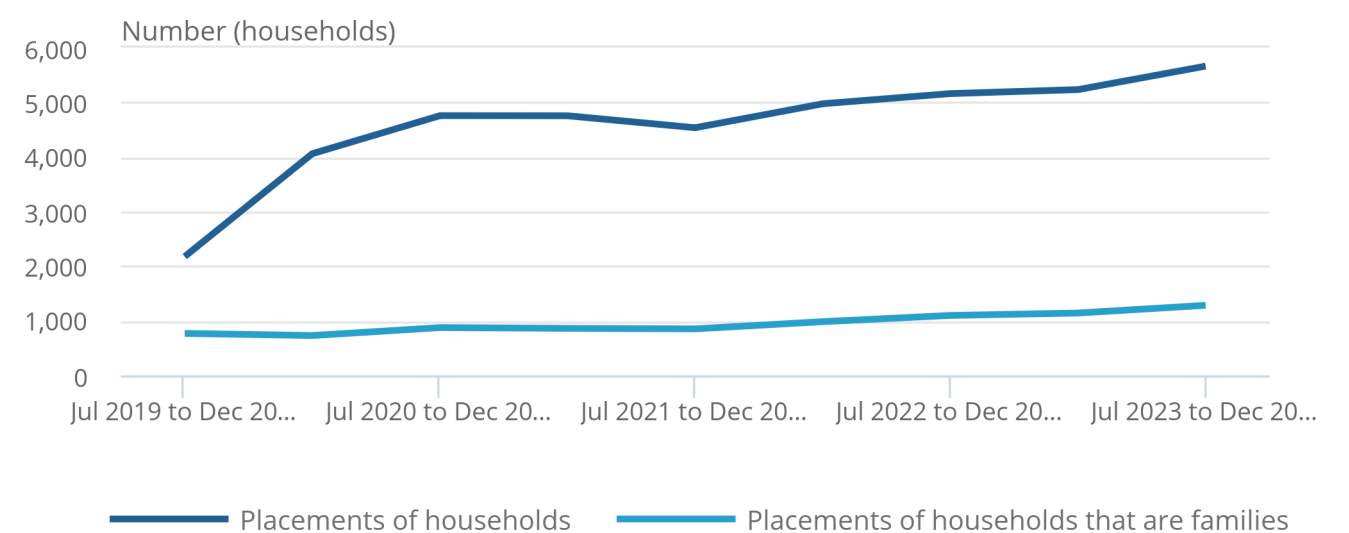
In Figure 9, a “family” does not necessarily include children under the age of 18. For example, it may be parents and children who are over the age of 18 or adult siblings/other relatives living together. These data on families cannot be compared with the “households with children” temporary accommodation data published by the other countries.

Figure 9: Temporary accommodation placements in Northern Ireland reached a record high of around 5,700 placements in the second half of 2023

Placements of households and families into temporary accommodation, Northern Ireland, six-month periods from July 2019 to December 2023

Figure 9: Temporary accommodation placements in Northern Ireland reached a record high of around 5,700 placements in the second half of 2023

Placements of households and families into temporary accommodation, Northern Ireland, six-month periods from July 2019 to December 2023



Source: Department for Communities, Northern Ireland

Notes:

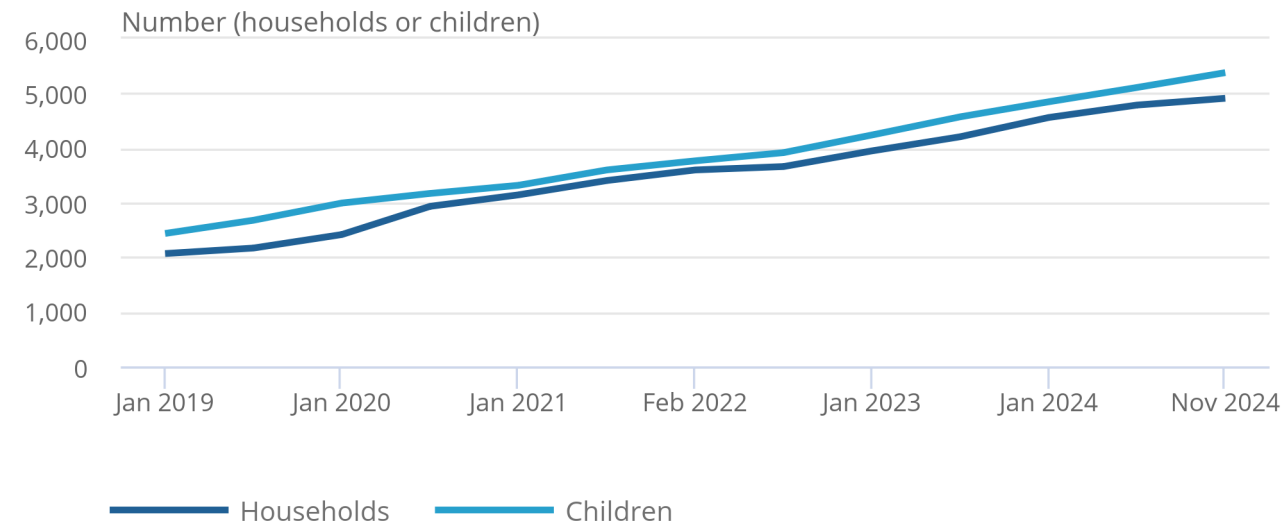
1. This chart shows the overall number of placements in the given time periods. Data do not represent distinct households, as a household may have several placements.
2. Families include parents and children (both under and over the age of 18) living together or adult siblings living together.
3. Before July 2019 and after December 2023, the six-month reporting periods are based on the financial year rather than the calendar year. These data are not presented on this chart. The Northern Ireland Department for Communities decided to revert to this approach from 2024 onwards to best implement a revisions policy and improve the timeliness of the data.
4. Data are accurate at the time of publication.

Figure 10: The number of households and children in temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland has reached record highs of around 5,400 households and around 4,900 children in November 2024

Households and children in temporary accommodation, by month, Northern Ireland, January 2019 to November 2024

Figure 10: The number of households and children in temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland has reached record highs of around 5,400 households and around 4,900 children in November 2024

Households and children in temporary accommodation, by month, Northern Ireland, January 2019 to November 2024



Source: Department for Communities, Northern Ireland

Notes:

1. Data are accurate at the time of publication.

Types and lengths of stay in temporary accommodation

The types of temporary accommodation used and the lengths of stay in temporary accommodation are important statistics, in addition to the numbers of households in temporary accommodation. This helps us to understand the household experience of temporary accommodation and the changing capacity of local authorities to respond to homelessness.

We do not present data on the types of temporary accommodation used or on the lengths of stay in temporary accommodation in this article. These data are available from the data providers' websites. See [Section 5: Data on homelessness in the UK](#) for more information. However, users should note that categories and definitions of temporary accommodation types are not the same between countries, and the time frames and cohorts of applicants also vary between countries.

5 . Data on homelessness in the UK

This section summarises the homelessness data available across the [Government Statistical Service](#) (GSS) for each country of the UK. This includes sources beyond statutory homelessness data, like rough sleeping statistics, that have not been presented in this article. Data from non-government sources, such as third-sector organisations, are not covered.

The statutory homelessness datasets contain additional and more detailed analysis beyond what is presented in this article.

England

[Statutory homelessness statistics](#)

Statistical release | Last updated 30 April 2025

Quarterly and annual accredited official statistics from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) about local authorities' various duties under homelessness legislation in England. This data collection is a case-level collection called [H-CLIC](#).

[Rough sleeping snapshot statistics](#)

Statistical release | Last updated 27 February 2025

Official statistics from MHCLG based on people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn every year.

[Rough Sleeping Data Framework statistics](#)

Report | Released 28 November 2024

Quarterly management information from MHCLG aligned to a definition of what it would mean to end rough sleeping for good. The Rough Sleeping Data Framework was developed in collaboration with the Centre for Homelessness Impact (CHI).

[Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales: 2021 registrations](#)

Dataset | Released 23 November 2022

The number of deaths of homeless people in England and Wales registered between 2013 to 2021. These are official statistics in development.

Wales

Official homelessness statistics in Wales are mainly produced by Welsh Government.

[Homelessness statistics](#)

Statistical release | Last updated 6 March 2025

Data from the Welsh Government on the number of households applying to local authorities for housing assistance and the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation.

[Homelessness accommodation provision and rough sleeping](#)

Statistical release | Last updated 29 May 2025

A monthly publication from the Welsh Government, started during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The Welsh Government [stopped collecting the national annual rough sleeper count](#) in August 2024.

Scotland

[Homelessness statistics](#)

Statistical release | Last updated 5 February 2025

Scottish Government homelessness statistics from local authority data, collected as they assist households applying for homelessness support (HL1), provide households with temporary accommodation (HL2 and HL3), or carry out Housing Options work (PREVENT1). Additional tables on youth homelessness, veteran homelessness, and prison homelessness are also provided.

[Homeless Deaths 2023](#)

Statistical release | Published 26 November 2024

Official statistics in development on deaths of people experiencing homelessness in Scotland from the National Records of Scotland.

Northern Ireland

[Northern Ireland Housing Statistics](#)

Statistical release | Last updated 23 October 2024

An annual compendium of statistics containing information on a range of areas relating to housing from the Northern Ireland Department for Communities (DfC).

[Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin](#)

Bulletin | Published 29 May 2025

Quarterly bulletin from the DfC, containing information on Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) housing starts and completions, social housing demand, homelessness, and new house sales and prices from the National House Building Council (NHBC).

6 . Glossary

Priority need

Legislation states that certain categories of applicants for statutory homelessness support have a "priority need" for accommodation in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. This includes, for example, households with a pregnant woman or dependent children, or households that are homeless because of domestic abuse or a natural disaster.

These categories were broadly consistent across all countries of the UK until 2022, when the Welsh Government extended the coverage in Wales to include all rough sleepers. These categories are described in the Government Statistical Service (GSS) [Harmonisation of Definitions of Homelessness for UK Official Statistical report \(PDF, 605KB\)](#).

Local authorities assess whether an applicant falls into a priority need category based on evidence and individual circumstances.

In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, households will be owed a main duty if they are assessed as eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless or at risk of becoming unintentionally homeless, and in priority need.

In Scotland, local authorities do not assess priority need, following the Scottish Government's [abolition of the priority need on 31 December 2012](#).

Rough sleeping

Rough sleeping is a specific type of homelessness where the homeless person sleeps outside (on the streets, in tents, parks, doorways, or at bus shelters) or in another place not designed for human habitation (stairwells, barns, cars, or sheds).

Statutory homelessness

Several statutes require local authorities in the UK to provide support to eligible households that present to them as unintentionally homeless or at risk of becoming unintentionally homeless. The different types of support, and if and when they are owed to the applicant, vary between countries of the UK, as outlined in the Legislation subsection of [Section 7: Data sources and quality](#).

A household may be one person or multiple people.

Once a household approaches a local authority (or, in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)) for support, information is collected on that household as their application is processed. This leads to the creation of an administrative data record.

Local authorities regularly submit these data to either the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for England, the Welsh Government for Wales, or the Scottish Government for Scotland. In Northern Ireland, NIHE aggregates and passes the data on to the Department for Communities.

The returned data are collectively referred to as "statutory homelessness data". These data are used to produce official statistics.

Temporary accommodation

Temporary accommodation is an interim housing solution provided by a local authority under various circumstances while an applicant waits for their housing needs to be assessed and more permanently provisioned.

Types of temporary accommodation include properties rented from private landlords, short-term tenancies in council properties, bed and breakfast hotels, hostels, refuges, and rooms in a shared house.

7 . Data sources and quality

Hidden homelessness

Collecting data on people experiencing homelessness is challenging. There are no official statistics on the topic that capture every individual.

Those missing from official statistics are often referred to as the "hidden homeless".

There is evidence, both domestically (for example, in our ["Hidden" homelessness in the UK: evidence review article](#)) and internationally (for example, in the Scottish Government's [Hidden homelessness: international evidence review report](#)) that certain groups are more likely to experience hidden homelessness than others.

The statutory homelessness data presented in this article include only the homeless households that have approached their local authorities for support. However, there are various reasons why a homeless person may not seek help from their local authority and are therefore unrepresented in the data:

- homeless people may have limited awareness of what help is available and how to access it
- homeless people may believe that they can resolve their homelessness other ways, for example, people with roofs over their heads, living on friends' sofas, or in overcrowded accommodation
- homeless people might not even realise that they are legally homeless and are potentially owed support
- homeless people may be reluctant to engage with services because of pride, distrust, past trauma, or fatigue
- form filling and other necessary interactions with the local authority may be difficult because of language barriers (especially common among migrants experiencing homelessness), or limited literacy or numeracy skills
- some homeless people are not eligible for support

Statutory homelessness statistics are the flagship statistics on homelessness in the UK. However, users should be aware that they do not have complete coverage of the homeless population in any country.

Legislation

In all four countries of the UK, a household can apply to their local authority (or, in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)) for support. This creates a new administrative data record, and more data will be added to this record as the application is processed by the local authority.

Various laws and amendments to these laws detail exactly how an application should proceed. These processes are different for each country of the UK because of devolution. This creates differences to be aware of when comparing the administrative data across the UK.

All applications in all countries are subject to a flow chart of assessments and decisions that determine what support the applicant is legally entitled to (what duties their local authority legally owes them).

Assessed criteria

All countries make an initial assessment of:

- the household's eligibility for support, in terms of their right to reside in the UK based on immigration status
- whether the household is homeless, or threatened with homelessness, in line with their country's legal definitions of those terms

Being "threatened with homelessness" means that it is likely that the assessed household will become homeless within the next 56 days (in England, Scotland, and Wales) or 28 days (in Northern Ireland).

Depending on the country and/or the stage of the application, the following criteria may also be assessed:

- whether the household's homelessness is intentional
- whether the household has a "priority need"
- whether the household has a local connection to the local authority area they have applied to

Being "intentionally homeless" means that the applicant intentionally did something, or failed to do something, that resulted in their homelessness. This definition is consistent across countries of the UK. However, intentionality testing occurs at a different stage in England, Scotland, and Wales, compared with Northern Ireland where it is part of the initial assessment. It is not mandatory in Scotland or Wales.

A household has a "priority need" if they belong to one of several priority need categories specified by law. These categories are designed to identify the most vulnerable or urgent cases (for example, households with dependent children, pregnant women, those who are at risk of domestic abuse, or who are homeless because of a natural disaster).

These categories are broadly consistent across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, though the legal phrasing may vary. Rough sleeping is a priority need category unique to Wales. There is no assessment of priority need in Scotland.

Statutory duties

In all four countries of the UK, local authorities must provide free information and advice about preventing homelessness, securing accommodation, and the rights of homeless people to any household approaching them for support. All four countries then have further legal responsibilities related to the assessment, prevention, and relief of homelessness. The criteria, trigger points, and other specifics of these responsibilities vary.

These responsibilities are broadly similar in England and Wales. However, the legal wordings vary and there are differences.

Local authorities must take reasonable steps to help eligible households threatened with homelessness to secure suitable accommodation (either through staying in their own home or through alternative arrangements); this is commonly referred to as a "prevention duty".

Local authorities must take reasonable steps to help secure suitable accommodation that will be available for at least six months for all eligible households presenting as homeless (either on initial assessment or at the end of an unsuccessful prevention duty). This is commonly referred to as a "relief duty".

If a household has been assisted under a relief duty for 56 days but is still homeless (or, in Wales, for fewer than 56 days but where the local authority is satisfied that all reasonable steps were exhausted), the local authority must now assess priority need and (in England) intentionality of the homelessness. In Wales, this intentionality testing is at the discretion of the local authority. They can choose to disregard it for any number of priority need categories, as long as they give advance notice on their website.

All households that have a priority need and pass any intentionality testing will be owed a "main" duty. A main duty requires local authorities to secure settled accommodation for the household that is suitable for the household's needs. Until this settled accommodation has been offered, the local authorities have a separate duty to provide interim (temporary) accommodation to these households.

In Scotland, there is a small difference in the prevention duty and bigger differences in relief-related duties. Unlike the other countries of the UK, Scotland has ended priority need testing when it comes to relief-related duties. This means that all eligible, unintentionally homeless households are entitled to temporary accommodation until their local authority can make them an offer of settled housing. The testing for intentionality is optional.

In Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) has a statutory duty to formulate and publish strategies on homelessness, though it has no formal legal duty to prevent homelessness. They prioritise prevention in their [five-year homelessness strategy \(2022 to 2027\) \(PDF, 3.1MB\)](#). The NIHE must ensure that settled accommodation is made available to any eligible household that is unintentionally homeless and in priority need. Until the settled accommodation becomes available, the NIHE has an interim duty to accommodate these households.

Further resources

Links to the relevant legislation, discussed in this section are:

- [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#) for England
- [Housing \(Scotland\) Act 1987](#) for Scotland
- [Housing \(Scotland\) Act 2001](#) for Scotland
- [Homelessness etc. \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#) for Scotland
- [The Homelessness \(Abolition of Priority Need Test\) \(Scotland\) Order 2012](#) for Scotland
- [The Homeless Persons \(Unsuitable Accommodation\); \(Scotland\) Order 2014](#) for Scotland
- [Housing Wales Act \(2014\)](#) for Wales
- [The Housing \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1988](#) for Northern Ireland

For additional information, see:

- Section 6: Other information in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG's) [Statutory homelessness in England: quarterly technical note](#) for England
- the quality and methodology information section of the Welsh Government's [Homelessness: April 2023 to March 2024 release](#) for Wales
- the Summary of current legislation section of the Scottish Government's [Homelessness in Scotland: 2023 to 2024 bulletin](#) for Scotland

8 . Future development

This section discusses future development plans across the four UK countries, focusing on noteworthy forthcoming changes and long-term ambitions for official homelessness data collections and related legislation and policy.

Producers of official statistics are always looking to improve the quality, coverage, inclusivity, accessibility, and coherence of their statistics. This is important for the design, delivery, implementation, and evaluation of homelessness policy, to better prevent and relieve homelessness.

The latest initiatives to improve official homelessness statistics can be found in the [cross-government housing and planning statistics work programme](#).

England

The National Audit Office published their [The effectiveness of government in tackling homelessness report](#) in July 2014. Following this, a new Inter-Ministerial Group was launched to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister.

Wales

The Welsh Government is currently in the process of developing its first case-level homelessness data collection for Wales. The information currently collected and submitted by local authorities for the main data collection is aggregated.

The Welsh Government launched their [White Paper on ending homelessness in Wales](#) in October 2023. This set out a range of proposals for changes to policy and the law, including abolition of the tests for priority need and intentionality. The Senedd considered [The Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation \(Wales\) Bill](#) on 19 May 2025. This bill builds on white paper proposals and is informed by extensive stakeholder engagement.

England and Wales

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) published its [Health and social care statistical outputs consultation: response report](#) in November 2024.

Following this, we have confirmed that we will continue producing our [Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales bulletin](#). We are currently working to improve the robustness of these statistics to better meet user needs.

Scotland

The Scottish Government is currently undertaking a review of its statutory homelessness data collection. This project seeks to overhaul the content of the data collection to ensure it can provide high-quality data that is relevant, fit for purpose, and best able to meet user needs.

Currently, a household is deemed "threatened with homelessness" if they are likely to become homeless within two months. An in-progress [Housing \(Scotland\) Bill](#) aims to lengthen this definition to six months. This means that interventions into potential homelessness can happen earlier, preventing more homelessness and improving the experience of vulnerable households.

The same bill also contains new "Ask and Act" duties, which would make preventing homelessness a shared responsibility across the public sector. Public bodies such as health boards, police services, and social landlords would be required to ask a person about their housing situation and to take action to prevent homelessness.

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) has published their latest [Homelessness strategy](#). This includes several objectives for 2022 to 2027, including to:

- prioritise homelessness prevention
- address homelessness by providing settled, appropriate accommodation and support
- support customers to transition from homelessness into settled accommodation

Each NIHE homelessness strategy includes an associated action plan, reporting on progress made in the previous financial year, and declaring actions to be delivered in the year ahead. The latest [NIHE action plan \(PDF, 210KB\)](#) covers April 2024 to March 2025.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) is developing the first official statistics publication on homeless deaths in Northern Ireland. This will be based on death registrations data, like the homeless deaths releases for the other countries of the UK.

9 . Related links

["Hidden" homelessness in the UK: evidence review](#)

Article | Released 29 March 2023

An evidence review summarising data on different types of homelessness across the UK, especially in relation to "hidden" homelessness, highlighting the challenges, complexities, and main data gaps.

[Housing, planning, homelessness, and rough sleeping statistics work plan](#)

Work plan | Updated 11 June 2025

Government Statistical Service (GSS) work plan on housing, planning, homelessness, and rough sleeping statistics. An updated work plan is published annually, detailing progress updates and plans for future work, for each listed initiative.

[UK official statistics on homelessness: comparisons, definitions, and processes](#)

Interactive tool | Updated 13 October 2022

A GSS interactive tool to help users to understand homelessness and rough sleeping statistics, including the cross-UK comparability of related statistics, and the different processes that a household may go through when seeking housing support from their local authority, in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

10 . Cite this article

Office for National Statistics, released 11 June 2025, ONS website, article, [Homelessness in the UK: 2004 to 2024](#)