

300,000 households across Britain could be homeless next year if government does not urgently change course

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Credit: Crisis/Heriot-Watt University

Over 300,000 individuals and families across Britain could be forced into homelessness next year if there is no change to current U.K. government policy, with thousands suffering the worst forms of homelessness including sleeping on the streets, sofa surfing, and living in

temporary accommodation such as hostels and B&Bs.

[The Homelessness Monitor: Great Britain](#), new research from homelessness charity Crisis led by Heriot-Watt University, shows the estimate is up from 227,000 in 2020, an increase of 32%.

The projection is based on current government policies continuing without change, such as the U.K. Government's freeze on housing benefit, which is based on outdated 2018–19 rent levels, and is not keeping up with the soaring cost of rents and wider cost of living pressures.

The research shows how the cost-of-living crisis, rising rents and the withdrawal of emergency measures in place during the pandemic will force thousands more households into insecure situations. More than half of the estimated 300,000 individuals and families will be sofa surfing, a form of homelessness that is largely hidden yet remains pervasive.

The Homelessness Monitor highlights marked differences between the three nations. England has much higher rates of the worst forms of homelessness compared to Scotland and Wales, as well as fewer social rented homes relative to its population. Researchers also looked at the amount of taxpayer's money being spent on different measures to combat homelessness.

The researchers forecast that the number of households in temporary accommodation will almost double in England over the next 20 years if there is no change to current policy, reaching seven households for every 1000 by 2041, while remaining relatively stable in Scotland and Wales.

The Scottish Government's plan to end homelessness—the first in the U.K.—has led to a move towards quickly rehousing people experiencing homelessness into safe, settled accommodation.

The Welsh Government has pledged to "fundamentally reform" homelessness services and build 20,000 new social homes. It has also created an ambitious action plan to build on progress made during the pandemic, when rough sleeping was dramatically reduced across Wales, and to eventually end all forms of homelessness in Wales within five years.

Meanwhile, the Westminster government has a narrower focus. It has committed to end rough sleeping by the end of the current parliament but has no broader strategy to address other forms of homelessness.

Matt Downie, Chief Executive of Crisis, said, "We're heading towards a catastrophic situation, where hundreds of thousands of families and individuals in extreme financial distress are facing being forced from their homes and into a system already strained to breaking point.

"Through our services we see the immense pressure people are under as rocketing costs for essentials like food and heating eat away at their limited budgets. Though government action to raise benefits, and the benefit cap, in line with inflation will put more money in people's pockets, this will not help them cover their rent. The failure to invest in housing benefit during a recession and painful cost of living crisis is frankly irresponsible and must be reversed.

"In the long term, the Westminster Government must put a clear plan in place to deliver genuinely affordable homes to combat the woeful shortage and limit the overreliance on unsuitable temporary accommodation. These steps will give people stronger protection from sudden financial pressures and help keep a roof over their heads. We know that homelessness is solvable, and we know what policy changes are required to bring these numbers down—what's needed is the political will to drive this agenda forward."

Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick, from Heriot-Watt University, said, "The Homelessness Monitor highlights how different government policies, the wider housing market and access to social housing have a huge impact on people experiencing homelessness. Our comparative analysis of the worst forms of homelessness across Great Britain shines a light on the stark differences between England, Scotland and Wales that statutory homelessness statistics miss.

"The divergent approaches of three governments have led to very different outcomes for people across the three nations, with England lagging behind. Our analysis shows it's important to focus not just on how much money is spent on tackling homelessness, but what it's spent on—as the Westminster [government](#) spends well over half its budget on servicing the escalating cost of temporary accommodation which is only set to get worse, whilst the Welsh and Scottish governments focus comparatively more on support and prevention."

Provided by Heriot-Watt University

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