
INTRODUCTION

Shelter Scotland helps over half a million people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help. We're here so that no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

Increasing cost of living, cruel welfare state policies and rising poverty levels are causing suffering for thousands of vulnerable households in Scotland. Here at Shelter Scotland, we see the effects of that: last year 21,290 people came to us for help with housing and homelessness issues: it is clear that our work is needed more than ever to help tackle the housing emergency.

Housing is a human right, as defined by the UN in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But despite this official recognition of the importance of a home, thousands of people in Scotland don't have the stable home they need. Many live in damp, overcrowded, expensive accommodation that forces them to choose between heating and eating, pushes them into homelessness and onto friends' sofas, into unsettling temporary accommodation, and, in the worst case scenarios, onto the streets.

In 2017, the Scottish Government established the Housing and Rough Sleeping Action Group. The group's 70 recommendations were pulled together into the Scottish Government's Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan, released in Autumn 2018. Various parts of the action plan are being delivered, including a move towards rapid rehousing through Housing First pilots. However, latest data sources¹ show that the number of Housing First tenancies sits at 132: it is clear that this approach is not the standard route for the vast majority of people who apply as homeless. Other parts of the Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan currently being implemented, such as introducing standards for temporary accommodation, are positive but similarly, yet to impact positively on people experiencing homelessness today.

While policies that specifically target issues within the homelessness system itself are welcome, homelessness can only be meaningfully tackled with sustained investment in affordable and particularly social housing. It is vital that we have a long-term investment and commitment to the delivery of good quality social homes in the places they are needed.

This report provides a presentation and analysis of the Government's homelessness statistics, with a view to giving the reader a better understanding of the homelessness system in Scotland, and how we measure homelessness in Scotland. Unless referenced otherwise, statistics in this paper have been drawn directly from the Scottish Government's 2018-19 homelessness statistics.² Using these statistics, this report will also consider what the available statistics

¹ As at time of writing.

² Scottish Government (2019), [Homelessness in Scotland: 2018 to 2019](#)

can tell us about the challenges facing homelessness policy, and give recommendations as to how current political will for tackling homelessness can best be targeted to produce material, long-term improvements for those facing homelessness across the country.

KEY POINTS



After years of decrease, homeless applications are on the rise again: In 2018-19, **36,465 households applied as homeless, an increase of 3%** on the year before. This is the second year running that there has been an increase in homeless applications.

29,163 adults and 14,043 children were assessed as homeless last year.



The pattern of homelessness is different amongst men and women depending on their age; more young women up to the age of 25 apply than young men, but at 35 this trend reverses and more men than women apply as homeless.

Prison leavers, care experienced people, and former members of the armed forces are persistently overrepresented in homelessness statistics.



The number of **children in temporary accommodation has increased for the fifth year running**, to 6,795. This is particularly concerning given the length of time households – particularly households with children – are spending in temporary accommodation is also increasing: On average, households spend 6 months in temporary accommodation; households with children spend over 7 months.

49% of households assessed as homeless in 2018-19 identified a support need, over half of which were mental health conditions. In terms of reasons for making a homeless application, 25% of households failed to maintain their previous home because of a mental health reason.



6% of all households assessed as homeless had been assessed already as homeless within 2018-19.

There is an increasing number of instances in **which local authorities are failing in their duties**, either through breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order or through failure to accommodate households with a legal right to temporary accommodation.





Contact is lost with 14% of households assessed as homeless.

71% of households assessed as unintentionally homeless go on to secure settled accommodation, compared to just 25% of households assessed as intentionally homeless. The recent government work consulting on **the future of intentionality** therefore has the potential to materially change housing outcomes for many vulnerable people.



Whilst the Scottish Government homelessness data analysed in this paper gives us useful information into the demographics of people who apply as homeless, there is also an unknown number of people who do not engage with statutory homelessness services, and therefore do not appear in the statistics. We refer to these individuals as experiencing **hidden homelessness**.