

# SHELTER

## Briefing: Disrepair and insecurity in the private rented sector

The private rented sector is broken and in urgent need of reform. The existence of section 21 'no fault' evictions mean that renters can be turfed out of their home with just eight weeks' notice, without a requirement for landlords to provide a reason for the eviction.

Private renters will often put up with disrepair and dangerous conditions because they fear they will be evicted for raising complaints. This fear is not unfounded. New research from Shelter and YouGov found that private renters who complained to their landlord, letting agent or local council in the last three years were **two and a half times more likely to be handed an eviction notice** than those who had not complained.

It has been four years since the government first promised to abolish unfair section 21 'no fault' evictions. Private renters have been waiting too long for reform. **The government must bring forward the long-awaited Renters' Reform Bill as a matter of urgency and end unfair evictions for good.**

### The private rented sector

For decades, legislation has failed to keep pace with the changing private rented sector. Once the tenure of students, young people saving for their first home, and those who required flexibility, the private rented sector has ballooned in size and is now home to households of all ages, backgrounds and sizes. **The number of families renting privately has doubled in the last fifteen years, and today ten million people currently live in a private rented sector characterised by insecurity, poor conditions and high prices.**

The lack of regulation and the existence of section 21 'no fault' evictions mean that private renters often face the impossible choice of putting up with poor conditions, or risk being kicked out for complaining.

New Shelter research, compiled by YouGov, lays bare the impact of 'no fault' evictions and the extent of disrepair that private renters are forced to put up with:

- private renters who complained to their landlord, letting agent or local council in the last three years were **two and a half times more likely to be handed an eviction notice** than those who had not complained.
- A quarter of private renters (25%) **have not asked their landlord for repairs to be carried out or conditions improved for fear of being evicted.**
- In the last year, three in four (76%) private renters in England – equivalent to more than 6.2 million people – have **experienced disrepair** in their home.
- In the last year, over **half of tenants (51%) had issues with damp or mould**; 31% had issues with lack of hot water or heating; and 18% had electrical hazards or issues with essential safety equipment in their homes, like smoke or carbon monoxide alarms.

The alarming findings mirror what Shelter sees through our own services. Since the beginning of the year, Shelter's online advice pages on disrepair have been accessed every 18 seconds. This is a 53% increase compared with the same period last year.



## The Renters' Reform Bill

If enacted properly, the Renters' Reform Bill could transform renting for good and deliver lasting change for private renters. Poor quality and dangerous conditions will continue to plague the private rented sector until private renters can enjoy genuine security in their homes and until landlords that fail to meet their obligations can be held to account.

In last year's "A fairer private rented sector" white paper, the government committed to:

- **End section 21 'no fault' evictions.** The government has promised to end 'no fault' evictions and introduce open-ended periodic tenancies as standard. Abolishing fixed term tenancies will give private tenants more flexibility if their circumstances change, while also giving them security in their homes. It is important to note that the government proposals do not prevent landlords repossessing their properties when they can provide a reason for doing so. Landlords can still evict tenants on the grounds of persistent or severe rent arrears, on the grounds of anti-social behaviour and there will be new grounds for when a landlord needs to sell or move back into the property.
- **Introduce a property portal which private landlords will be required to register to.** The government proposals mean that landlords will be legally required to register themselves and their properties to a new property portal. The portal should include information on whether homes are in a good state of repair and whether landlords have had any action taken against them for failing tenants in the past - allowing renters to make an informed choice before entering a tenancy agreement as well as enabling councils to crackdown on poor housing conditions and illegal practice.
- **Make it illegal for landlords and agents to refuse to rent properties to people who receive benefits or families with children.** The government proposals will make it directly illegal for landlords or agents to have blanket bans on renting to families with children or those in receipt of benefits. Shelter has long campaigned against discriminatory "No DSS" adverts and other informal and affordability barriers that lock renters in receipt of benefits out of renting homes they can afford. The practice is already unlawful, but sadly we know it is still widespread. Renters in receipt of benefits will often end up trapped in poor quality rentals without the security to raise complaints, because they know how difficult it is to find an alternative if they are evicted.

These reforms could be a game changer for private renters, making private renting safer, fairer and more secure. But the government has now promised to bring forward the Renters' Reform Bill in three Queen's Speeches, and first committed to scrap section 21 'no fault' evictions in April 2019 - nearly four years ago. The government must stop delaying and bring forward the Renters' Reform Bill as a matter of urgency, finally giving private renters the security and rights they deserve.

