



Campaigns briefing

Growing up renting: A childhood spent in private rented homes

Shelter

Introduction

Our rental market is having a damaging impact on children's lives. A third of private renters are now families with children and our new research – the largest survey of renters to date¹ – shows that they are the most badly affected by the volatility and uncertainty of the rental market:

- 1 in 10 renting families (10%) have had to change their children's school due to moving, with moves causing stress and upset for some children.
- Renting families are nine times as likely to have moved in the last year than families who own their homes².
- 44% of parents feel their children would have a better childhood if they had more stability in their home. Less than 10% of families value the freedom and flexibility renting gives them.
- Nearly three quarters of families (72%) are struggling or falling behind with their rent (compared to 63% of all renters), with many cutting back on essentials to stay in their homes.
- In the last year 28% of families have not had repairs carried out or poor conditions dealt with by their landlord or letting agent.

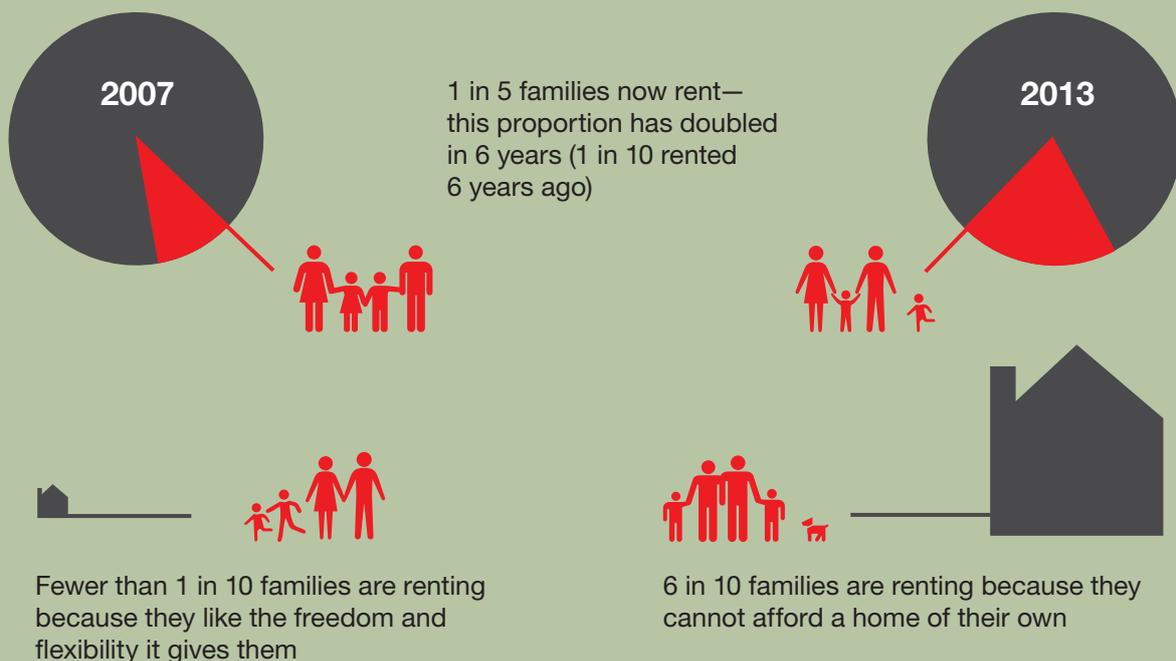
Private renting is no longer a lifestyle choice. 1 in 5 families now rent, of which 72% are in work and 79% have an income of £40,000 or less (compared to 58% of the total population). Nearly two thirds of renting families (64%) would like to own their own home but don't think they will ever be able to afford it. 60% of families are living in the sector because they cannot afford to own their own home. Fewer than 10% like the freedom and flexibility it gives them.

Families will be trapped renting for the foreseeable future. Our research shows that 43% of renting families expect to be living in rented accommodation for the next ten years. Yet more than 2.2 million renters do not or would not feel comfortable bringing their children up in a private rented home.

There is an urgent need for change. A generation of children is growing up in unstable, unaffordable, poor quality homes. The proportion of homes rented privately has rocketed by 72 per cent since 2001³. Yet the rental market was not set up to provide permanent housing. It has expanded unintentionally, largely unchecked and is unsuitable for today's renting families.

Shelter's Stable Rental Contract is designed to meet the needs of both landlords and renters to provide a balance between stability and flexibility.

Renting is not a lifestyle choice and more and more families are trapped renting



Stability and disruption to family life

For today's private renters short term tenancies are the norm. Renting families are nine times as likely to have moved in the last year than families who own their homes⁴. This is a particular problem for families with children. Frequent moves and uncertainty are not only expensive but have negative impacts on children's education and well-being. Our survey found:

- Moving disrupts children's education — 1 in 10 renting families (10%) have had to change their children's school due to moving, with moves causing stress and upset for some children.
- Some children are distressed and upset by moving — 10% of parents who had moved in the past five years said their children would prefer not to move and 13% said the move was stressful or upsetting for their child.
- Parents want stability for their children — 44% of parents feel their children would have a better childhood if they had more stability in their home.
- Poor conditions and landlord behaviour force some families to move — 1 in 10 families (10%) have moved because their landlord asked them to leave or gave them notice and 15% of families had moved because their previous accommodation was in poor condition.
- Some families are sofa surfing between homes — 13% of families have been forced to stay with family and friends whilst living between private rented homes, causing further disruption to children's lives.
- Rent rises are both a worry and reality for families — Nearly half of families (46%) worry about their landlord or letting agent putting their rent up to a level they can't afford. More than a quarter of renting families (26%) have faced a rent rise in the past year. For 1 in 20 households this resulted in them moving out of their home in the last 12 months.
- Moving is expensive and pushes families into debt — 34% of families who have moved in the past five years said the move strained their finances. 22% of families have been forced to borrow money to pay their deposit and/or rent in advance. The average total cost paid out by families for their deposit and rent in advance was £1547. For the 30% that paid fees on top the amount went up to £2316.

Claire's story



Claire and her family had lived in their home for 18 months when their landlord increased the rent from £650 a month to £725 (a rise of 12%): "We thought we were quite settled and had enough rooms for us to live comfortably, but as he put up the rent, we had no choice but to move".

Mike's story



Mike's family were forced out of their rented home after complaining about damp. His son, who was sleeping in a garage conversion, was plagued with coughs and chest infections as a result of damp. Following complaints the council wrote to the landlord asking him to fix the damp. However after months of complaining about defects, the family were forced out by the landlord and had to find somewhere else to live.

Moving disrupts family life and children's education and is expensive

1 in 10 renting families have had to change their children's school due to moving



More than 4 in 10 parents feel their children would have a better childhood if they had more stability in their home



Of those that had moved in past five years:

1 in 8 said the move was upsetting and stressful for their child



1 in 3 said it strained their finances



Julie's story



Julie, a working mum says she is definitely feeling the pinch: "I shop around for groceries, do a weekly food list, I compare prices between Tesco, Asda and Aldi and buy from the cheapest one. If I can save £10 a week on groceries it can go towards the rent".

Helen's story



Constant moving disrupts Helen's children's education

Since her 8 year old daughter was born, Helen and her family have lived in 9 different houses; only one move was out of choice. There are multiple reasons they've had to move – sometimes because of poor conditions; other times because their landlord wants to move back in; or on one occasion, because the house was repossessed. They know that their current landlord has recently stopped paying the mortgage and debt collectors have visited their property so they will have to move again soon.

“We have been given notice from our rented house after 2 years, we have an 8 year old who has now lived in 9 houses.”

Their daughter has already moved school once, and has only just settled into her new school. It took her a long time to make new friends and she felt very left out until recently. They are already looking for a new home, but there are no rental properties near the school so expect to move schools again. This will be even more difficult as they now have 2 other children at school and so the chances of placing all 3 children in the same school are very unlikely.

Families trapped by spiralling housing costs

The cost of rents is a major issue across England. Rising rents are increasingly eating into household finances. Over the last year, rents rose in 83% of the country and average rents are up by £300 on last year⁵. This comes at a time when wages are stagnant⁶. Renting is now more expensive than home ownership yet has none of the benefits⁷. Our research shows that high housing costs are impacting family life:

- Families are struggling to pay the rent – Nearly three quarters of families (72%) are struggling or falling behind with their rent (compared to 63% of all renters)
- High rents mean families cut back on food and heating – In the past 12 months nearly half of families (45%) have reduced the amount they have spent on food to pay their rent and more than 1 in 5 (22%) have reduced the amount they have spent on heating.
- The high cost of housing forces families into debt – Nearly half of families (49%) have borrowed money to pay their rent – 1 in 6 have used their credit card, more than 1 in 4 (30%) have used their overdraft facility, and 1 in 12 have borrowed money from their child's bank account.
- Families have very little left over at the end of each month – More than half of renting families (54%) have £50 or less leftover after paying rent and other essentials. On average families have £179 a month leftover a month.
- The high cost of housing means families are unable to save and plan for their future – 68% of renting families are not able to save anything each month. Only 12% of families said they are able to put money to one side to save for a deposit for a house and 35% of families don't pay into a pension because the cost of their rent is too high. Out of the few that are able to save for a deposit some are making the difficult choice between this and their pension – 16% of families don't pay into pension because they are concentrating on saving up for a deposit.

Families are struggling and have very little left over each month

2/3 of renting families are not able to save anything each month after paying for essentials



Nearly half of families have borrowed money to pay their rent



In the past 12 months more than 4 in 10 families have reduced the amount they have spent on food to pay their rent



Almost 3 in 4 of renting families are struggling or falling behind with their rent



A rip-off rental market

The intense competition to find a place to rent in today's market means some landlords and letting agents can get away with shockingly bad practice. As the sector expands, complaints relating to the condition of properties and the behaviour of landlords are increasing at an alarming rate. Conditions in private rented homes are also worse than any other sector. Around 1.4 million private rented homes (35%) do not meet the basic standard of being a 'decent home'⁸. Our survey has shown that renters, especially families, are forced to put up with unacceptable practices:

- Some landlords and letting agencies neglect their properties – In the last year more than a quarter (28%) of families said their landlord had not carried out repairs or dealt with poor conditions.
- Families reported other poor practice — 1 in 20 families have been threatened by their landlord. 11% of families reported their landlord had entered their home without permission which is illegal without adequate notice.
- Some renters resort to desperate measures to get a property — Over half a million renters have handed over cash to secure a property during a viewing, including 85,000 families.

Lisa's story



Small print in her contract and poor conditions meant that Lisa was trapped in her rental property for 12 months.

Lisa was forced to stay for 12 months in her rented home even after discovering her children's mattresses were riddled with bed bugs. Her landlord refused to change the mattresses. When he eventually agreed to replace them, he took the money for the new ones out of her deposit.

She could not move as her 12 month contract said in the small print that if she decided to move out before the full twelve months, she would still be liable for 25% of the rent even if she found a new tenant to replace her, for the full term of the lease. She could not afford to do this.

"It was a miserable time for all of us. It was horrendous. In the end we managed to find somewhere else, but it was only a year's tenancy so I'm currently searching out something better. It's not good for children to be uprooted every few months. They need a home, with space to play."

Lisa wanted to buy a home but she hasn't been able to find anywhere affordable that is also commutable for her job. She will have to carry on renting – meaning a huge deposit, more agency fees and moving costs. Any deposit for buying she has been able to save is being handed over to the landlord.

Improving private renting for all

Action to improve private renting is urgent. Renters, especially renting families, need a better deal. Shelter proposes a move to the Stable Rental Contract which is designed to better meet the needs of both landlords and renters .

Shelter's Stable Rental Contract would:

- give renters five years in their home during which they could not be evicted without good reason;
- guarantee that rents would rise by no more than CPI during the five years;
- give renters the chance to decorate their home as long as they return it to neutral afterwards;
- allow renters to give two month's notice to end the tenancy at any point; and,
- give landlords the right to end the tenancy if they sell the property.

Renters support this too – 62% of families agree that having the option to stay in their tenancy for (up to) five years with predictable rents and a two month notice period at any time would improve private renting for them.

Politicians and policy-makers need to take decisive action to improve renting for the millions of people who have no choice but to rent for the long term. We urge them to strongly encourage the adoption of the Stable Rental Contract throughout the private rented sector so that families aren't forced to live with constant instability and uncertainty.

To do this we propose making the Stable Rental Contract more attractive by offering tax incentives to landlords and discouraging short term tenancies. For more info see Shelter's report –

[A better deal – towards more stable private renting.](#)

1. In November 2012 Shelter and British Gas commissioned YouGov to survey 4327 adults in England living in the private rented sector. Fieldwork was undertaken between 16th November and 10th December 2012 . The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of the English private rented sector (aged 18+). All figures are taken from this survey unless otherwise stated. The estimates of numbers of people affected have been calculated by Shelter. These estimates are based on 2011–12 figures from Communities and Local Government English Housing Survey which show there are 9.2 million people living in private rented accommodation based on number of households multiplied by mean number of persons per household.

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/88371/Headline_tables_FINAL.xls

All case studies and quotes have been provided through follow up interviews with respondents who agreed to pass their contact details on to Shelter.

2. Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) English Housing Survey 2010–11.
3. DCLG English Housing Survey Headline Report 2011–12.
4. DCLG English Housing Survey 2010–11.
5. Reynolds, L. and deSantos, R. The Rent Trap, Shelter January 2013.
6. Office for National Statistics, 2012. Labour Market Statistics April 2012.
7. Many rents are now more expensive than mortgage repayments and on average, renters pay out almost £75 a month more than homeowners. Private renters typically pay out over twice as much of their income in rent than homeowners spend on a mortgage. [Amongst owner occupier households, weekly mortgage payments were, on average, 19% of their gross weekly income. For private renters, weekly rent payments were on average 43% of their gross weekly income.] DCLG English housing survey 2010–11.
8. DCLG English Housing Survey Headline Report 2011–12.

We help over a million people a year struggling with bad housing or homelessness – and we campaign to prevent it in the first place.

We're here so no-one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

Please support us at shelter.org.uk

Until there's a home for everyone

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