

Policy report

Ending Youth Homelessness Together

Youth Homelessness in the UK
2022 - A short review



centre
point

give homeless
young people
a future



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About Centrepont

Centrepont is the leading national charity working with homeless young people aged 16 to 25. We are a registered social housing provider, a charity enterprise and a company limited by guarantee. Established 50 years ago, we provide accommodation and support to help homeless young people get their lives back on track.

Every year, alongside our partner organisations, we work with over 14,000 young people, providing tailored support to help them address their support needs, with a particular focus on health, learning, and move on to independent accommodation in both the social and private rented sectors. We also run a national helpline for young people at risk of homelessness.

Centrepont's aim to end youth homelessness can only be achieved if we work not just to give a young person a roof over their head, but to help them develop the skills and confidence they need to succeed. Centrepont's in-house health team provides specialist multi-disciplinary support to help young people address their mental health problems, and help prepare them for a brighter future.



Centrepont's Strategy to End Youth Homelessness

Centrepont's 2021-26 strategy "Change the Story: Ending Youth Homelessness All Together" sets out our vision to end youth homelessness by 2037 - because any young person born in 2021 will turn 16 in 2037, the year in which they may need help from Centrepont. We therefore aspire to end homelessness for the next generation.

The threat of homelessness for young people can never be entirely removed due to the multiplicity of factors that cause it. However, we believe it is eminently possible to significantly reduce the number of young people facing homelessness, so that there is a clear, accessible, and effective pathway for each of those young people at the point of crisis. Therefore ending youth homelessness requires three things:



i. Firstly undertaking preventative action, so that the number of young people being made homeless is as minimal as possible.



ii. Secondly, that there is a quick solution to provide a safe and stable place to live in for every young person when it happens.



iii. And thirdly, ensuring that each young person for whom a temporary safe place to live has been provided is supported and settled into a permanent home as soon as they are ready to live independently.

Systemic change is required to meet these challenges. Centrepont cannot end youth homelessness alone – this can only be achieved by organisations and individuals across society working together. Centrepont will spearhead the endeavour to end youth homelessness by 2037 by delivering exemplar services for young people, and using the insight from these to campaign, influence, and orchestrate systemic change.

Executive Summary

This scoping review sets out the case for why ending youth homelessness needs to be a public and political priority. It pulls together key information on the scale, causes and impacts of youth homelessness on young people themselves and wider society.

Between March and June 2022, Centrepont will be building on this review to explore, identify and develop the solutions needed to tackle youth homelessness. We are calling on the government, political parties, charities, campaign groups and the wider public across society to back our campaign and commit to breaking the cycle of youth homelessness.

Some key points from this review:

- **Youth homelessness continues to be a major issue in the UK, and severely affects the health, wellbeing and development of vulnerable young people at a critical time in their transition to independence.**
- **There are strong links between experiences of youth homelessness and ongoing homelessness and exclusion in later life, as well as evidence of significant impacts and costs to wider public services associated with youth homelessness.**
- **While rates of youth homelessness have remained stable over several decades, there is some evidence that the number of young people experiencing homelessness has seen a slight increase in recent years, including the numbers of young people seeking help from their local authority.**
- **Developments in housing and homelessness policy and case law over the last two decades have improved services and options for young people facing homelessness. However, there is evidence that welfare reforms and wider austerity measures over the same period have negatively impacted on efforts to prevent, reduce and tackle youth homelessness.**
- **Government investment and action to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping for all age groups in recent years, and particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, has had a significant impact on reducing rough sleeping and getting people off the streets. However, there is some evidence that these measures have been less effective in supporting young people.**
- **There is evidence that the pandemic has exacerbated some of the key drivers of youth homelessness, such as family breakdown and domestic abuse, while the wider economic and labour market impacts have hit young people especially hard.**



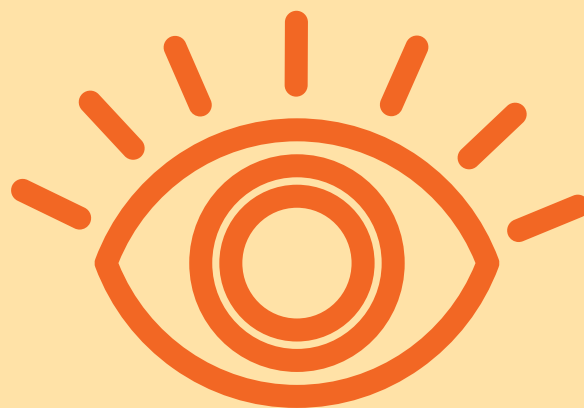
From March 2022, Centrepont will be consulting with key stakeholders and young people with lived experience to explore the interventions and policy solutions that are required to end youth homelessness.

We want as many organisations and individuals as possible to get involved with this debate, and to tell us whether you agree or disagree with what we set out. We are especially keen to hear about any further evidence or insights which will help us make the case as to why ending youth homelessness needs to be an urgent political priority. You can find out how to contribute to this work, and Centrepont's wider campaign, at the end of this review.

Introduction

In the financial year 2020 to 2021, almost 122,000 young people aged between 16 and 25 across the United Kingdom sought help from a local council as they were homeless or at risk of homelessness. This represents another year-on-year increase, a pattern seen in each of the last five years. Each and every young person's story and journey through homelessness is unique – but at Centrepont we believe that every one of these numbers represents a failure by our society to ensure every young person has access to safe and stable accommodation.

That is why, in 2021, Centrepont launched our 16 year vision to End Youth Homelessness by 2037; so that children born in 2021 will not face the same drivers and causes of youth homelessness that currently exist. To do this will require action, investment, and political and public support. It will also require us to identify the key factors which cause so many young people to experience homelessness and housing insecurity today, and to identify those solutions and interventions which are proven to work.



This document is a rapid evidence review looking at the picture of youth homelessness in the UK. It seeks to provide a broad overview of some of the key drivers of youth homelessness today, the impacts that homelessness has on young people, communities and wider society, and some of the key barriers to ending youth homelessness in the long term. It draws upon previous 'landmark' reviews of youth homelessness and policy by Susanne Fitzpatrick, Deborah Quilgars, Nicholas Pleace and others, as well as more recently published academic and grey literature and official data.

Defining Youth Homelessness

Homelessness

Homelessness for any person is an affront to their human dignity. To have a safe and stable place to call home is a fundamental human need, and essential to a person's sense of security and their ability to engage in society and build relationships with others. The experience of homelessness goes beyond simply not having physical shelter, and represents a profound impact on all aspects of someone's life.¹

The statutory definition of homelessness in the UK is outlined in the Housing Act 1996, and broadly covers any situation where a person has no accommodation in the UK or abroad they can reasonably access and occupy.² This includes both situations where a person has no access to a home, but also where they cannot be expected to remain in a property, for example due to the threat of violence or an uninhabitable state of disrepair.

The European homelessness coalition FEANTSA has also developed a working understanding of homelessness through the ETHOS typology³, which splits different

living situations and instances of homelessness into four categories: Roofless, in which someone is sleeping rough or staying in nightly emergency accommodation such as a communal shelter; Houseless, such as where someone is staying in short-term hostel accommodation or due to be released from a state institution without accommodation secured; Insecure, in which someone may be staying in longer-term but insecure temporary accommodation, living without any tenancy or legal right to stay, such as 'sofa surfing', or living under the threat of violence; and Inadequate, where people may be living in accommodation which is not fit for habitation, for example due to severe overcrowding or disrepair.

Using both the UK statutory definition of homelessness and the ETHOS typology, it is clear that there are young people across the UK continuing to face homelessness and housing insecurity of all kinds – from sleeping rough and sofa surfing, to extended stays in temporary accommodation and being forced to live in unsafe and inadequate housing.

Young People

Young people, defined here as those between the ages of 16 and 25, are a distinct sub group of people experiencing and at risk of homelessness, and require tailored and specific support.

The period from late adolescence into early adulthood is recognised as a distinct and critical period in a young person's psychological and social development.⁴ A young person moves away from dependency on parental and family networks and into financial independence, forming their own households. However, economic and labour market factors such as increasing housing costs and low wage growth, have delayed many young adult's moves to independence.⁵

The immediate triggers of homelessness, which are explored later in this report, are also often different for young people than they are for older adults. For example, 45 per cent of 16-24 year olds who were assessed as being homeless or at risk under English homelessness legislation in 2020/21 had lost their last settled base due to family or friends not being willing or able to accommodate, compared to 32 per per cent for all age groups.⁶

Due to these reasons, young people experiencing homelessness require distinct and tailored forms of support from statutory and voluntary services.^{7,8} For example, supporting young people to access work and education opportunities or to develop key independent living skills such as budgeting and tenancy management are critical in successfully preventing and relieving homelessness for young people.⁹

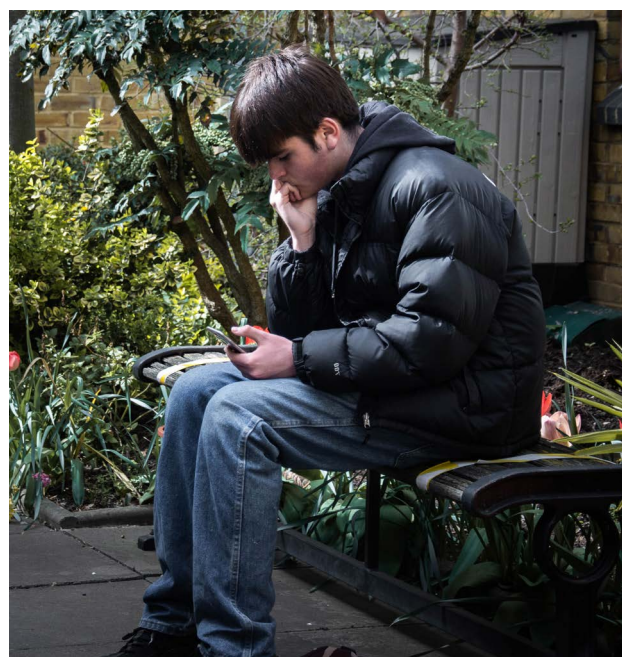
Young people facing homelessness are also recognised as having specific vulnerabilities and risks, associated with a lack of experience in managing a home, a lack of support networks and risk of exposure to exploitation and abuse due to lack of financial resources.¹⁰

Youth homelessness may also be seen as a distinct issue because the policy and practice responses to preventing, relieving and ending homelessness for young people may be different from that for families and older adults. Young people face different statutory responses from public authorities, receive lower minimum wage rates, and are entitled to lower rates of financial support through the social security system depending on their age and where they are in the UK. For example, those aged under 18 will normally be in automatic priority need under homelessness legislation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, while the standard allowance of Universal Credit is around £16 a week lower for under 25s across the UK.¹¹

This impacts both the immediate service response young people can expect,¹² and young peoples' ability to access accommodation, particularly with regard to entitlements to support for housing costs.¹³ Barriers thrown up by different wage and benefit entitlements are explored later in this report.

The focus on young adults is not to downplay the experience of children and younger people facing homelessness as part of a wider household: official figures show that over 124,000 children were living in temporary accommodation across England in mid-2021, an increase of over 70 per cent since 2010.¹⁴ These are children and young people who are similarly experiencing the impacts of homelessness and housing insecurity, such as damage to health and wellbeing,¹⁵ disruption to their education and development, and what Human Rights Watch argued was a violation of their human rights.¹⁶

However, the focus on this document is on the older teenagers and young adults who face homelessness as their own 'households', i.e. those who are not homeless as part of a family unit. While some of these young people may have their own children or be living as couples, the majority are single and have to face the challenges of homelessness and navigate systems of support on their own. Most of these young people will also not be in 'priority need' for accommodation under English homelessness legislation, limiting their access to some aspects of statutory support even in light of recent policy changes intended to improve official assistance.



Defining Ending Youth Homelessness

Homelessness for every person is different and can be seen as a combination of personal, household and structural factors. In 2011, Quilgars, Fitzpatrick and Pearce attempted to set out what it means to 'end' youth homelessness, through engaging with service providers, sector professionals and young people with lived experience of homelessness.¹⁷

They found that while completely eradicating youth homelessness was seen as an aspirational state rather than a concrete goal – in that the various individual and family-level factors that led to a young person being homeless were so varied as to be infeasible to ever fully reduce to zero – there was consensus among stakeholders that the goal of reducing youth homelessness to minimal levels was an achievable and important ambition. Their working definition of what it meant to end youth homelessness included the following:

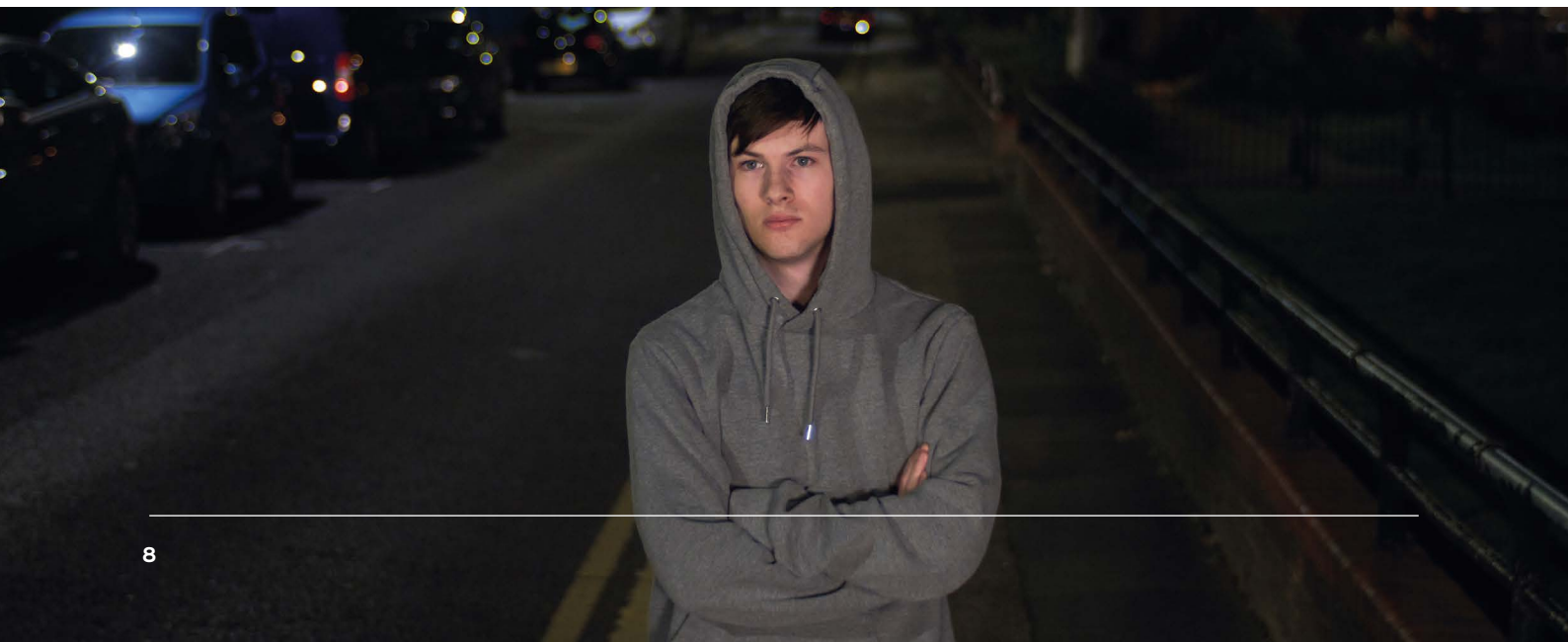
- **No young person should sleep rough for more than one night once in contact with an appropriate statutory or voluntary sector agency.**
- **Young people should not have to stay in emergency accommodation for longer than an agreed specified period (for example, three months).**
- **Young people should not remain in transitional accommodation when it is appropriate for them to move onto more independent accommodation.**
- **All young people leaving an institutional setting (care, hospital, prison) should have a suitable housing destination, with relevant support, before discharge.**
- **All young people who cannot remain in the parental home should be offered suitable accommodation and support within a defined pathway plan to independence.**

A working understanding of 'ending' youth homelessness, in this case, means addressing and resolving the wider structural factors impacting on young people such as a shortage of affordable housing or lack of access to services, in order to minimise as far as possible the number of those finding themselves without a place to live.

It also means that homelessness for any young person is resolved as soon as possible, and ensuring that services are optimised to support those experiencing homelessness to access safe and sustainable long-term accommodation.

Centrepoin't's strategy to end youth homelessness takes a similar approach:

- i. **Firstly undertaking preventative action, so that the number of young people being made homeless is negligible.**
- ii. **Secondly, that there is a quick solution to provide a safe and stable place to live in for every young person when it happens.**
- iii. **And thirdly, ensuring that each young person for whom a temporary safe place to live has been provided is supported and settled into a permanent home as soon as they are ready to live independently.**



The Scale of Youth Homelessness

Developing an accurate picture of the number of young people experiencing homelessness across the UK is a challenge, due in part to the limitations of statutory data collection and the fact that many homeless young people may not interact with statutory services or formal support.¹⁸ Homelessness policy is also devolved across the different nations in the UK and each country collects and presents different data on homelessness and rough sleeping.¹⁹

However, understanding how many young people may be facing homelessness and may need help is critical to be able to identify trends across the country, and to developing and targeting the necessary support.²⁰

Statutory Homelessness Figures

Owing to different legislation and definitions across devolved authorities in the UK, there are several measures of how many young people face homelessness in each nation.

The main way in which statutory homelessness is recorded in England is by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). This is based on local authorities reporting the number of people assessed as being homeless or at risk, those accepted and the duties and outcomes they received as a result of this application. Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018, local authorities have also recorded the number of households receiving a prevention or relief duty, as well as those accommodated under the 'main' housing duty.

The latest figures using this measure in England show that 61,960 16-24s were assessed as requiring a prevention duty from a council as they were at risk of homelessness, or required a relief duty as they were currently homeless.²¹ This was the third year that homelessness data was recorded under the HRA and under new data collection systems, and showed the second year on year increase in young people receiving support from their councils since 2018.

The Wales (Housing) Act 2014 was the first legislation in the UK to shift the emphasis towards prevention and relief work before the full housing duty. All young people in Wales who present to their council should be assessed and provided with prevention and/or relief support, based on their circumstances. In Wales, 6,777 young people were recorded as seeking assistance under Welsh housing legislation.



With the abolition of priority need on 31 December 2012, Scotland's policy has been aimed towards providing a full housing duty meaning that all eligible and unintentionally homeless people are owed a housing duty from their council. In Scotland all those who present are assessed. The most recent data for Scotland shows that 8,525 young people approached a local authority in 2020/21 due to being homeless or at risk, down from 8,774 in 2019/20 and just over half the 15,668 seen in 2011/12.²²

In Northern Ireland, young people who are eligible, unintentionally homeless, and in priority need are owed a duty to help them secure accommodation. This responsibility lies with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) rather than to individual local authorities.²³ In addition, eligibility criteria are more complex in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the UK as prior behaviour is also considered. For anyone who is not owed a housing duty, the NIHE only has a duty to provide advice, though often additional prevention and relief work is carried out. Between July 2020 and June 2021, 2,781 single 16-24s were recorded as presenting as homeless in Northern Ireland.

Taking these figures together, over 80,000 young people were officially recorded as seeking homelessness support between April 2020 and 2021. However, by only recording the young people who were assessed by a local authority as being homeless or at risk, the thousands more who do not receive an official assessment and support are overlooked.

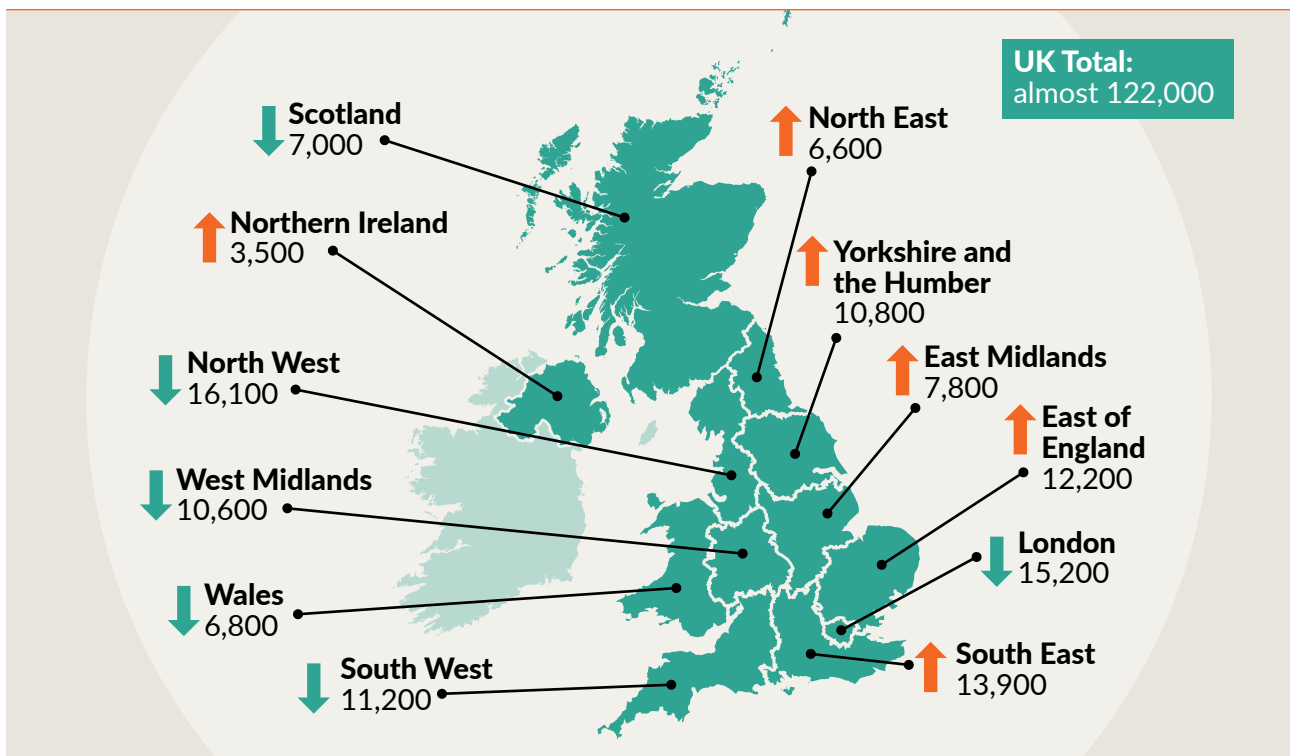
The Youth Homelessness Databank

Centrepoin’s Youth Homelessness Databank seeks to address this gap by capturing the number of young people across the UK who approached their local authority for homelessness support, regardless of whether or not they were assessed or received any assistance under homelessness legislation. The Databank annually records the number of presentations, assessments and outcomes recorded from local and devolved authorities across the UK to develop a fuller picture of the level of young peoples’ housing needs.

The most recent Youth Homelessness Databank found that across the UK, up to 122,000 young people

approached their local authority for support in 2020/21, with 104,400 in England alone. Of these young people, only 66 per cent received an initial assessment, and fewer than four in ten (37 per cent) had a recorded positive outcome, meaning that their homelessness was successfully prevented or relieved or that they were placed into accommodation.

The Databank has also shown a year-on-year increase in the number of young people approaching their local authorities over the last five years, despite government actions and investment to tackle homelessness.²⁴



The Youth Homelessness Databank suggests that there is a significant mismatch between recorded figures and the real numbers of young people seeking help – and

also highlights that for too many young people, statutory assistance from local authorities is not providing them with the support they need.

Statutory Homelessness in England during Covid-19

In the financial year 2020 to 2021, a period which included the initial restrictions and policy responses to the global Covid-19 pandemic, the number of households across England recorded as being owed a prevention, relief or main housing duty due to being homeless or at risk of homelessness saw a decrease, from 289,800 in 2019-2020 to 270,710 in 2020-2021. This was likely due in part to the wide-ranging policy interventions put in place to support people during the pandemic, such as

the suspension of most evictions, the temporary increase in Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit rates, and the furlough scheme. However, despite this, the number of young people in England aged 18-24 assessed as being homeless or at risk saw an increase over this period; the only age group to do so. This has been in part attributed to a large increase in the number of young people without children presenting as homeless, which increased by 15 per cent on the previous year.²⁵

This increase in recorded levels of youth homelessness during the pandemic has been linked to several factors.²⁶ The pandemic disproportionately affected the incomes of younger people, particularly those with less experience and fewer qualifications, while lockdown measures meant that sofa-surfing and informal housing arrangements which young people may have relied on were effectively made illegal. Centrepoin analysis also identified the challenges faced by young people in accessing statutory and voluntary support, as physical offices moved to remote working and many day centres and outreach services closed completely.²⁷

The fact that official rates of youth homelessness rose during the pandemic, in spite of the significant interventions put in place by government and in spite of statutory homelessness for all other age groups seeing a decrease, suggests that measures to tackle homelessness in general may be less effective at supporting and responding to young people's needs and situations.²⁸ This is why Centrepoin is campaigning for a youth specific strategy - to prevent, relieve and ultimately end youth homelessness.

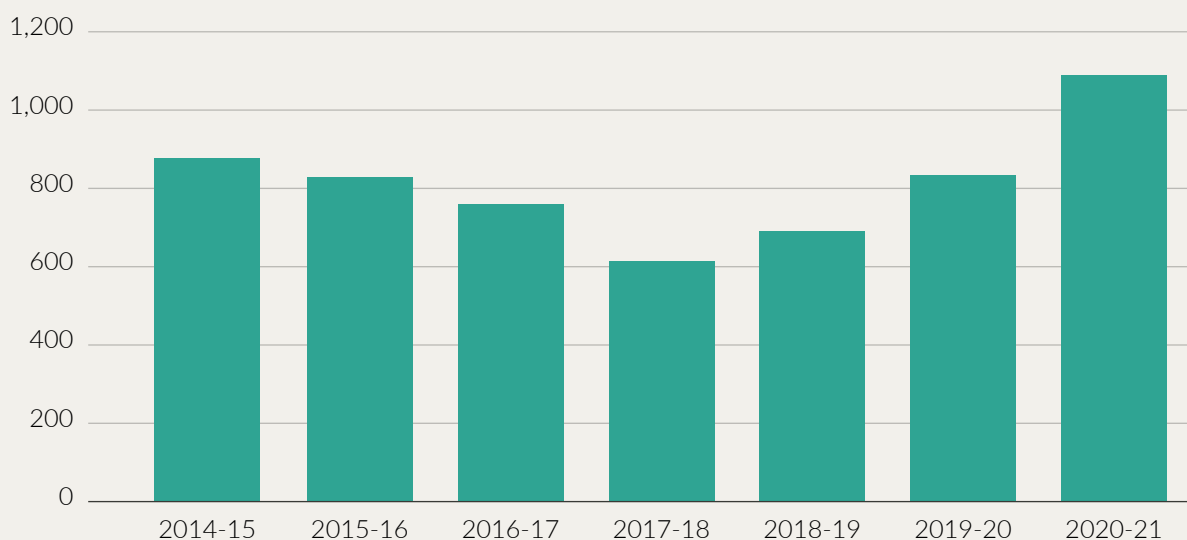
Rough Sleeping

Official government figures suggest that a relatively small number of young people are sleeping rough on a given night in the UK. For example, in England, the most recent snapshot estimate suggests that 110 under-25s were seen sleeping rough across the country on one night in Autumn 2021.²⁹ This represented a decrease of 21 per cent on the previous year, and was likely in part due to the ongoing efforts undertaken in the 'Everyone In' scheme, in which local authorities were instructed to accommodate rough sleepers in self-contained accommodation such as hotels regardless of local connection, eligibility or priority need.

In London, the Greater London Authority oversees the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN), which provides regular monitoring and

reporting on the numbers of people seen sleeping rough. While the two measures are not directly comparable – the CHAIN figures being recorded throughout the year while the national rough sleeping figures being representative of a single night – they suggest a mismatch. Similarly to the statutory homeless figures (measured by those assessed as being owed a prevention or relief duty) showing a slight increase, the most recent annual CHAIN figures in London suggest a year on year increase in young people seen sleeping rough in 2020-21, in spite of the significant investment and support put in place over the pandemic. And while the most recent quarterly figures suggest the numbers of young people seen sleeping rough in the capital are now going down, they still suggest an increase compared to those seen prior to the pandemic.

Under-25s seen sleeping rough in London, CHAIN



Sofa surfing and hidden homelessness

While statutory and rough sleeping data can begin to give an understanding of the numbers of young people who approach or are identified by local authorities or homelessness organisations, evidence suggests that there are far greater numbers of young people who never come into contact with services and are not picked up in official data.

These include young people sleeping rough who are not picked up in counts or estimates, due to being hidden, and those staying in insecure or severely crowded accommodation. 'Hidden homelessness' also includes those young people who are sofa-surfing, meaning those staying with family, friends and others for short periods because they have nowhere else to go.

Sofa-surfing is identified as a common experience for young people facing homelessness, often before a young person comes into contact with statutory or voluntary support.³⁰ In one survey of 227 homeless young people across England, almost three quarters (73 per cent) had

experienced sofa surfing before being supported by homelessness services.³¹ Sofa surfing has been associated with a range of negative impacts, including insecurity, poor living conditions, abuse and exploitation, risk to personal safety, health impacts and intensifying multiple needs and exclusions.³²

While the scale of sofa surfing (like all forms of hidden homeless) is by its nature difficult to accurately estimate, there is some evidence to suggest that it has been experienced by significant numbers of young people in the UK. One 2014 survey found that more than a third (35 per cent) of young people reported having sofa-surfed, and more than one in four (26 per cent) had slept rough at some point in their life.³³ In Crisis's estimate of the scale of 'core' homelessness in England in 2020, defined as the number of households either rough sleeping, in unconventional accommodation such as cars or sheds, in hostels, in unsuitable temporary accommodation, such as bed and breakfasts, or sofa surfing, more than half of the 203,400 were identified as sofa surfing.³⁴

Young people in hostels and other temporary accommodation

For young people experiencing homelessness across the UK, there are a range of supported and temporary accommodation options intended to provide a safe place to stay and support a young person to develop the skills needed to move into independence. These range in size, from larger hostels to rooms in private homes, and can be variously provided by charities, local authorities and housing associations, and specialist organisations. The kind of service and support can also differ from service to service, from emergency overnight accommodation to help young people off the streets, to longer-term supported accommodation providing wraparound support for a young person's health, wellbeing and development.

The range of different types of emergency, temporary and supported housing, and the lack of any single dataset or comparable datasets across the UK means it is difficult to get an accurate estimate of the number of young people who may be in 'homeless' accommodation and receiving support outside of the statutory homelessness system. Previous estimates, utilising service data but different data, have ranged from 32,900 young people accessing homelessness services in 2011³⁵ to 39,491 in 2014.³⁶

In November 2021, there were 42,485 single under 25s claiming Housing Benefit and living in social rented housing across the UK, with around a quarter of these being households with children.³⁷ Since housing costs for supported and temporary accommodation have remained

within the Housing Benefit system and not moved to Universal Credit, these figures can begin to give some indication of how many young people are in this kind of housing. However, they should not be used as a direct proxy as will contain households in 'general needs' accommodation who have not been moved to Universal Credit.

Another measure is by looking specifically at homeless accommodation, such as hostels and foyers. Homeless Link's most recent annual review of homelessness services in England estimated that there were 32,041 bedspaces in accommodation projects around the country. Of these, 33 per cent of accommodation service users were young people aged 16-24, suggesting that around 11,000 young people in England were accessing homelessness accommodation services in 2020, not including certain types of emergency and specialised accommodation.

Taken together, these various estimates suggest that there are up to around 40,000 young people accessing homelessness services and accommodation across the UK. While these services are critical in providing thousands of young people with a safe place to stay and wraparound support, they are only intended as temporary options. However, wider housing challenges faced by young people mean it is increasingly difficult to access independent accommodation and as a result many remain in hostels and temporary accommodation far longer than they need to be.³⁸ These housing challenges are explored later in this review.

The Causes and Drivers of Youth Homelessness

It is important to remember that pathways to youth homelessness are a complex interaction between many factors including individual difficulties and larger structural issues³⁹. For example, poor mental health may have influenced a person's ability to maintain a job and they may have begun to rely on social security and when

this was not enough to support their household, it may have caused a relationship breakdown, resulting the loss of their accommodation and leading to homelessness. Often what is recorded as the cause of homelessness may be the 'final straw' which has caused the young person to present officially as homeless⁴⁰.

Relationship breakdown

As of 2020/21, the top three causes of youth homelessness in England were: family no longer willing or able to accommodate (49 per cent); domestic abuse (9 per cent); and friends no longer willing or able to accommodate (6 per cent)⁴¹. Research by Centrepoin suggests that here have been increased tensions within households of young people during the pandemic – the challenges of experiencing a lockdown together has led to more relationships becoming strained⁴². Consequently, this has led to more relationship breakdowns and a greater number of young people presenting as homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Research has shown some of the disagreements young people experience with their household may be influenced by cultural differences⁵⁰. This may be particularly prominent within households where the young person is the first generation to be born in the UK. Young people can find it challenging to balance the culture of their family and the culture of being a young British person. Relationship breakdown can come as a result of these cultural disagreements and lead to the young person becoming homeless.

There are many reasons that may contribute to a family being no longer willing or able to accommodate a young person. For example, financial pressure may play a key role in the relationship breakdown⁴³. There is considerable evidence to suggest that poverty and socioeconomic marginalisation are contributing factors to homelessness⁴⁴. Moreover, the interactions between poverty and individual vulnerabilities play a complex role in the causes and perpetuation of homelessness. Parental unemployment has been found to be common in the households of young people who had experienced family breakdown⁴⁵. The hardship of supporting a family on a low income can cause conflict between parents which can in turn affect the relationships between them and the young people in the household. Problems can arise when families are effected by the benefit cap which can severely limit a family's income⁴⁶. Young people can feel pressured to contribute and when they are unable to it can result in them leaving home⁴⁷. Additional challenges are experienced within large families as they can be greatly impacted by the two-child limit for child benefits, while rules around non-dependent deductions can impact overall household incomes⁴⁸. There is some evidence that homeless young people are more likely to come from larger families – 30 per cent of homeless young people had 5 or more siblings compared to 7 per cent of all young people⁴⁹.



Crime, violence and exploitation

Domestic abuse was the second most common cause of homelessness in 2020/21⁵¹. The vast majority of domestic abuse cases were reported by young women⁵². One study found that 48 per cent of homeless young people had come from families where there was intra-familial abuse⁵³. Domestic abuse has increased as a result of the pandemic – young people who were facing homelessness due to domestic violence has increased by 9.3 per cent from April 2020 to the end of March 2021⁵⁴. There is evidence that lockdowns and restrictions led to difficulties accessing support services and remaining in informal accommodation which many people would rely on to avoid homelessness and domestic abuse⁵⁵. It is important to ensure these support services are available in order to protect vulnerable young people from being at risk of abuse. Furthermore, research by Crisis has found that women were more likely to have formed an undesired sexual partnership with a person in order to obtain a roof over their head than men (28 per cent of women and 14 per cent of men)⁵⁶. These experiences, while not exclusive to women, pose a great risk to the safety and wellbeing of a large number of homeless young women and it is important to try and prevent the risk in future. It is critical that laws are put in place and enforced to prevent this kind of exploitation.

Furthermore, poverty and instability can be a contributing factor to drive young people to commit crime which can then subsequently increase their risk of becoming homeless.⁵⁷ Some homeless young people report being exposed to low level crimes within their communities prior to becoming homeless⁵⁸. When some young people become involved in petty crimes, it can create tensions at home and lead to family breakdown. Without help, the problem can be exacerbated and lead to the young person leaving home. In some cases, it has been reported that young people who have been involved in gang or criminal activity were forced to flee their family household for fear of danger to themselves or family members⁵⁹. Violence and exploitation can continue to affect young people after they have left their family home and cause difficulties remaining in other accommodation. Some people may face issues with 'cuckooing' of their homes and be forced to leave⁶⁰. One study found almost one fifth of homeless young people accessing accommodation services had become homeless due to crime or antisocial behaviour⁶¹.

Peer influences can also influence family breakdown among homeless young people⁶². Parents concerns about where their children are and who they are with which could lead to conflict in the household. A poll of homeless young people found that 39 per cent had had arguments at home because they were engaging in activities that their family did not approve of⁶³.

Mental health challenges

Poor mental health can be a key contributor to relationship breakdown⁶⁴. Parental mental health problems can place great tension on young people within the household. The young person may take on household responsibilities and begin to fall behind in their school work and struggle in other aspects of their life which can subsequently increase tensions at home. Research has found that some young people who go on to experience homelessness have been young carers⁶⁵. These young people who support their parents with mental health problems may qualify as a young carer and be entitled to additional support. However many young people do not recognise themselves as young carers and miss out on the support⁶⁶.

Additionally, around a quarter of homeless young people arrive at Centrepoint with a formally diagnosed mental health problem⁶⁷. In a study of 90 young homeless people, it was found that the current and lifetime incidence of mental health issues was very high, at 88 per cent and 93 per cent respectively⁶⁸. In the general population of children and young people, it was found that the rate of probable mental disorders was around one in six (17 per cent)⁶⁹. This suggests that mental health problems are more common in the homeless young people population. If young people do not get the support they need for their mental health it can lead to relationship breakdowns and subsequently homelessness⁷⁰.



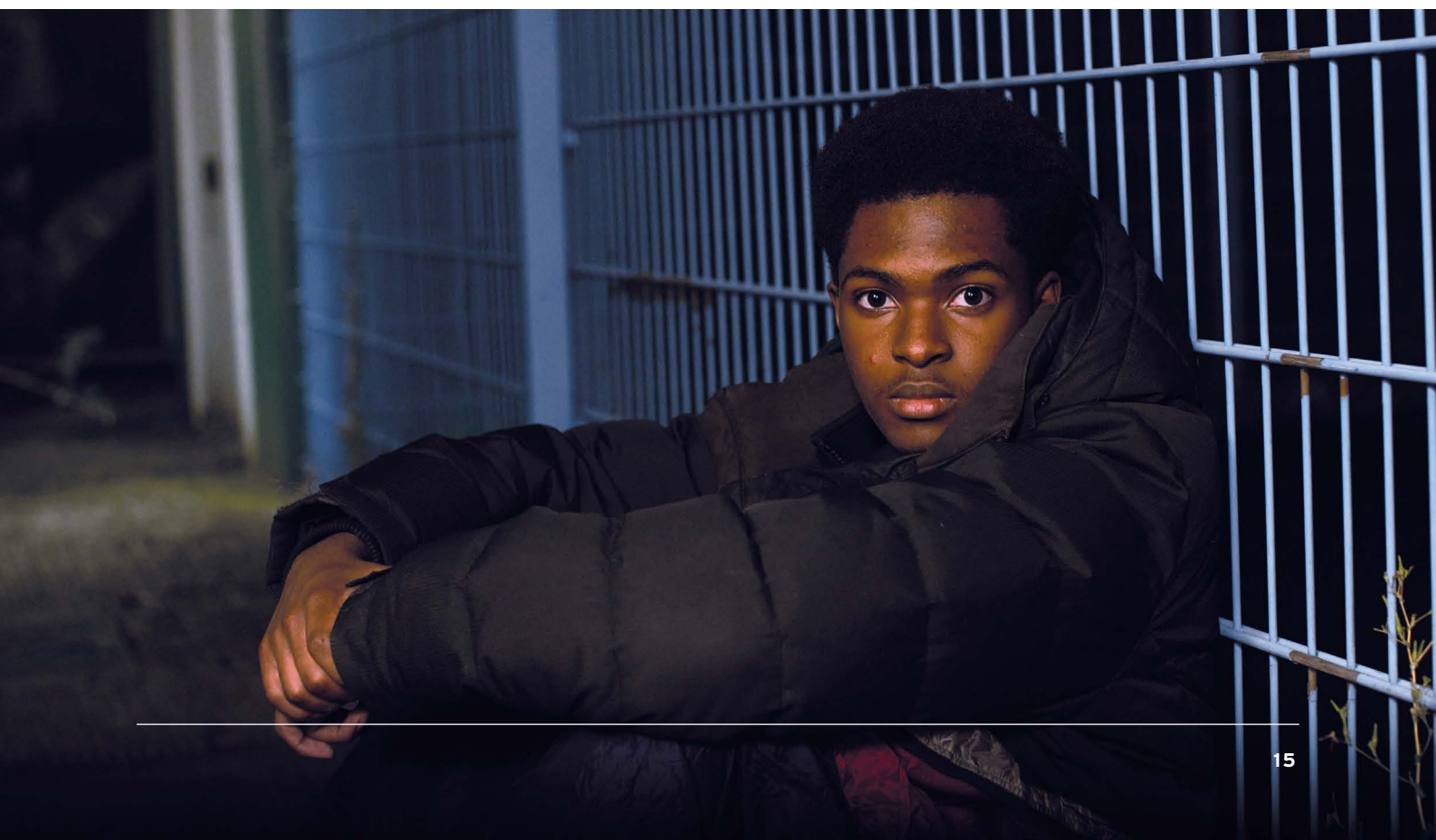
Groups at increased risk of youth homelessness

A large proportion (around 20 per cent) of homeless young people who arrive at Centrepoin have been in care⁷¹. This is compared to just 0.6 per cent of the general population. For some of these young people, their move to Centrepoin has been a planned one. However, for many they find themselves homeless due to difficulties transitioning to independence. One factor relating to difficulties transitioning out of care is a lack of awareness of support available – it has been found that only 29 per cent of young people in care and 17 per cent of care leavers feel they have all the information they need about their entitlements⁷². Another cause of the large numbers of care leavers facing homelessness is communication breakdown with social workers⁷³. A good relationship with social workers is crucial to ensure that young people receive the support and information about entitlements.

Another aspect that is important to consider is that poverty, homelessness and mental health problems disproportionately affect BAME young people⁷⁴. Research has shown that minority ethnic households are significantly over-represented among populations of homeless young people⁷⁵. Additionally, there are a number of differences in different ethnicity groups' experiences of homelessness, including difficulty accessing services due to recent arrival to the UK⁷⁶ or discrimination⁷⁷.

There is evidence to suggest that LGBTQ+ young people are more likely to find themselves homeless than non-LGBTQ+ young people, and represent around 24% of the young homeless population⁷⁸. Furthermore, LGBTQ+ young people are significantly more likely to experience violence, sexual exploitation, substance misuse, mental and physical health problems than other homeless young people⁷⁹. Homelessness charity Akt reported that 65 per cent of LGBTQ+ homeless young people they support are from a BAME background⁸⁰. This suggests that the LGBTQ+ homeless young people are particularly vulnerable and a large proportion could face both sexuality and race discrimination.

Women are often underrepresented in homelessness statistics and the research tends to focus on 'male domains' of homelessness, namely the street, emergency shelters and supported accommodation⁸¹. There are informal situations where a person classifies as 'hidden homeless' and may not be represented in homelessness research and statistics⁸². It has been shown that this form of homelessness is more common in women⁸³. Therefore, when exploring the causes and impacts of youth homelessness, it is critical to consider other types of situations as well as rough sleeping. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that people who alleviate their homelessness by informal accommodation agreements should still receive the support they need in order to find secure accommodation and prevent unhealthy relationships, domestic violence and exploitation.



The Impacts of Youth Homelessness

The experience of homelessness is damaging for any individual. There is significant evidence of the negative effects homelessness can have on someone's mental and physical health, their ability to access and sustain employment, education and training, their ability to form and maintain relationships, and how it potentially leads to increased risks of harm and interaction with the criminal justice system.

Homelessness and housing insecurity are especially damaging for young people, who are at a critical time in their development and transition to independence, destabilising their education or entry into the labour market and the impact can last into later life.



Damage to health and wellbeing

There is now well-established understanding of the role of trauma as both a driver and an effect of homelessness. The experience of homelessness can have damaging effects on a person's mental health and wellbeing, while those experiencing poor mental health can find it more difficult to overcome housing problems and avoid homelessness. In one survey of homeless young people across England, almost three quarters (72 per cent) reported that homelessness had had a negative impact on their mental health.

Research undertaken by Centrepoin in 2021 found that a majority of the young people accessing the organisation's services (54 per cent) reported a mental health problem, and that around a third (32 per cent) had a formal mental health diagnosis, compared to around one in six (17.4 per cent) of 6-19 year olds with a probable mental disorder generally.⁸⁴

Disruption to education and employment

Research by Shelter in 2020 highlights the impact of homelessness on children's education and experiences, with students affected by lower attendance, concentration and ability to learn, social interactions and overall educational outcomes.⁸⁵ One study engaging with homeless young people in England found that for many, disrupted education, low attainment and negative experiences were common.⁸⁶ Likewise, a Centrepoin survey in 2018 found that 40 per cent of homeless young people said that homelessness had a negative impact on their ability to access and sustain education. There is also some evidence to suggest that young people experiencing homelessness may have experienced exclusion from school at a higher rate than their peers.⁸⁷

As well as education, stable employment can be beneficial to a person's health and wellbeing, and can be a critical factor in protecting against poverty and social exclusion.⁸⁸ However, as with education, the experience of homelessness and housing insecurity has clear impacts on a young person's ability to access and sustain employment.

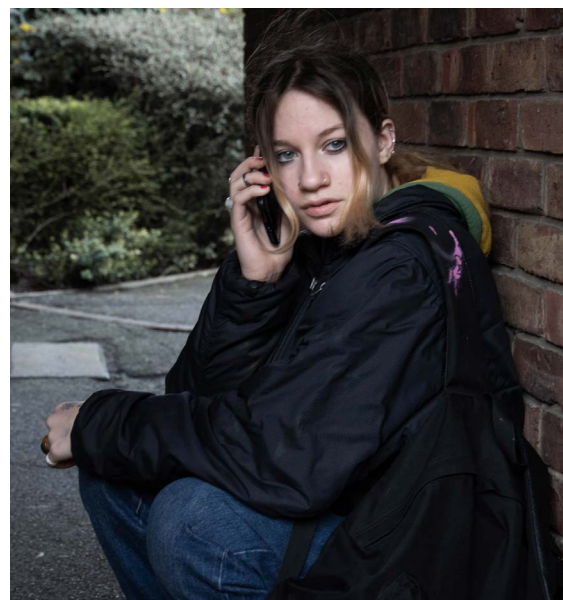
Although rates of youth unemployment have declined over the last decade, those in the 16-24 age group are still three times more likely to be unemployed than the general working age population. Young people experiencing homelessness also face a range of practical barriers to accessing work, such as disrupted education and lack of qualifications, instability in their personal lives and challenges with mental and physical health.⁸⁹ Almost six in ten of the young people moving on from Centrepoin's accommodation services were not in education, employment or training in 2015,⁹⁰ compared to 9.3 per cent of people aged 16-24 across the UK.⁹¹

As well as limiting young people's income and making it more difficult to move on from homelessness, struggling to access work can have long term implications throughout their lives. It is recognised that sustained periods of unemployment and underemployment, particularly at an early stage in someone's career, can have 'scarring' effects on someone's future employment and earnings prospects throughout their life.⁹² Preventing young people from becoming homeless, and relieving it as soon as possible if it does occur is critical to supporting young people to thrive in education, employment and other opportunities.

Risks of violence, abuse and exploitation

Young people facing homelessness also risk increased exposure to ongoing criminal and sexual abuse and exploitation. Centrepoint evidence has highlighted the situations homeless young people can find themselves in – such as having to stay with a stranger or engage in criminal activity for a place to stay.⁹³ Financial hardship and exclusion can also push young people to engage in criminal activity, risking both their health and wellbeing and the impact of criminalisation on future opportunities.⁹⁴

Analysis by Centrepoint and others identified clear links between youth homelessness and vulnerability to violence and crime, from losing accommodation as a result of serious violence, to being targeted while in homeless accommodation, through to facing challenges in moving into accommodation in certain areas.⁹⁵ Models of criminal exploitation such as county lines, in which vulnerable and isolated individuals are targeted by organised criminal groups to buy, sell and transport illegal drugs, have also been noted as presenting particular risks for homeless young people.



Risks of repeat homelessness and ongoing exclusion

Young people experiencing homelessness are also at an increased risk of homelessness in later life, and falling into what the Local Government Association refer to as a 'career' of exclusion, at a cost to their own health and wellbeing, and to wider society through repeat interactions with health and criminal justice services and lost economic potential.⁹⁶

A DLUHC-administered questionnaire of 563 people sleeping rough across local authorities in England, of whom the mean age was 41, found that almost two thirds (64 per cent) of respondents had first slept rough under the age of 25, and that three quarters (75 per cent) had first experienced homelessness during this time.⁹⁷ This survey data suggests that significant numbers of older people facing homelessness and rough sleeping first did so at a young age, and that successful interventions in tackling homelessness at this point could make a real difference in limiting homelessness in later life.

Wider costs of homelessness

In 2016, Centrepoint undertook analysis to understand the additional costs to the state associated with youth homelessness, by looking on the impacts on wider public services, such as health and criminal justice, social security expenditure, and lost tax revenues. The analysis compared homeless young people not in employment, education and training with those not homeless. It proposed that the difference in costs between homeless and non-homeless young people not in education, employment or training was an additional £8,900 a year for a homeless 16 or 17 year old, and £12,200 a year for those aged 18-24.

Applying these figures to the estimated number of homeless young people across the UK, we found that the costs of youth homelessness to government could be £560 million a year – notwithstanding the deep personal and social costs to young people experiencing homelessness.

A review by the then Department for Communities and Local Government in 2012 highlighted estimated costs of around £24-£30,000 per person per year from single homelessness, citing pressures on public services and local authorities and increased social security expenditure.⁹⁸

Barriers to Ending Youth Homelessness

The previous sections show why Centrepoin is committed to ending homelessness in the UK, to both protect and support vulnerable young people here and now, and to prevent cycles of ongoing homelessness and exclusion. To do this, we need the government to commit to the necessary policies and show the political commitment to ensure that every young person has a secure and sustainable place to live.

In order to successfully end youth homelessness, it is critical that the services and agencies helping young people – from councils to charities – are optimised to provide sensitive and youth focused assistance which recognises the specific needs and challenges faced by young people.



Identifying and preventing youth homelessness

To end youth homelessness, it is essential that those young people and families who are at risk are identified and supported before crisis point. Prevention is key to any strategy to reduce homelessness, and the UK government has in recent years made prevention a priority in its ambition to end rough sleeping, combining and enhancing previous funding streams into the Homelessness Prevention Grant.

While this funding has been welcomed by councils and homelessness charities, it comes within the context of deep cuts to local authority budgets over the last twelve years. Councils in England have seen, on average, a 16 per cent cut to their operational budgets since 2010, with cuts falling heaviest on areas with high levels of homelessness and housing need.⁹⁹ As a result, many authorities have had to focus resources on statutory services and supporting those in crisis, with preventative and upstream services being reduced or cut entirely.¹⁰⁰

One example of this is the reductions in funding for the Supporting People programme, which was established in 2003 to provide ring-fenced funding for housing-based support and flexible work to support people to access and sustain accommodation. The ring fence for this funding was removed in 2009 before being rolled into general council grant funding, leading to steep reductions in spending in this area. Analysis by WPI Economics for St Mungo's in 2020 found that in 2018/19, nearly £1 billion less was spent on support

services for single homeless people, encompassing prevention and support work and funding through Supporting People, than a decade earlier.¹⁰¹

Alongside specific housing-based prevention and support, budgetary changes have impacted on wider non-statutory services for young people, such as youth services and advice provision such as Connexions. Local authority youth services across the country have seen steep reductions in funding since 2010, leading to the closure of hundreds of youth centres and loss of thousand of youth jobs, while cuts led to the closure of Connexions employability advice centres across the country.¹⁰² Recent measures have however been taken to increase investment for employability and careers advice for young people in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, such as investment into youth employability coaches and Youth Hubs.

Recent increases to funding for homelessness prevention and housing based support are much needed and greatly welcomed. However, these must be put in context alongside over a decade of reduced investment and cuts to homelessness budgets, alongside an overall increase in homelessness and rough sleeping. If youth homelessness is to be prevented and ultimately ended, it is critical that local authorities and other agencies working with young people and families have the resources they need to deliver effective prevention services, from universal advice and guidance to targeted family support.

Access to Housing

Difficulties accessing housing also create significant barriers to preventing and relieving homelessness for young people. To end homelessness, a supply of genuinely affordable housing across the country, which is accessible to young people on a range of incomes, is essential.

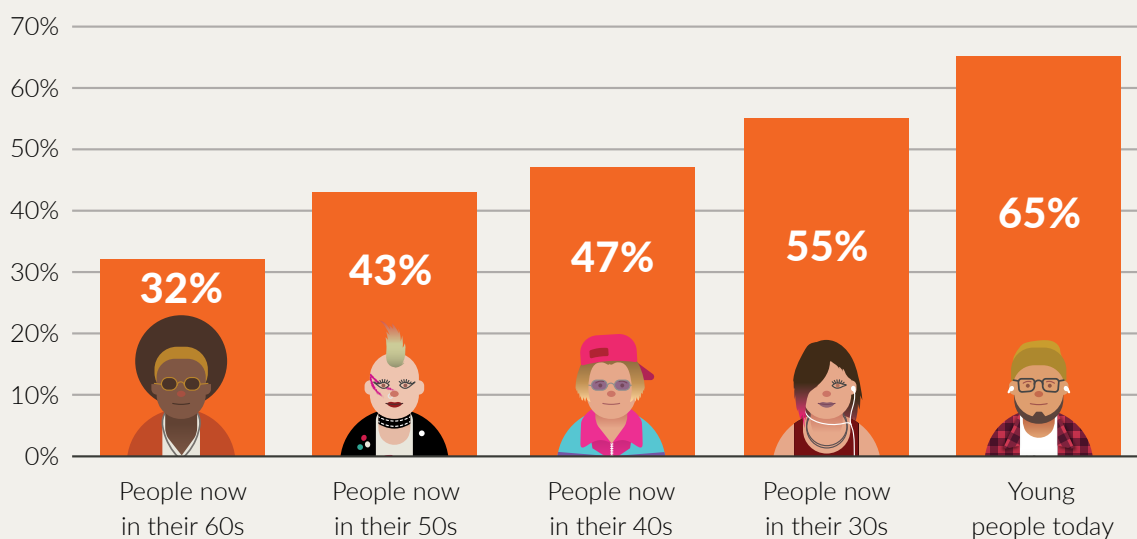
For young people with nowhere to stay at all, a lack of specialist supported and emergency housing provision means that those in crisis often struggle to access appropriate accommodation. Where emergency accommodation is available, it is often all-age and can put young people at risk of harm.¹⁰³

Over the last three decades, young people's access to affordable housing has been increasingly challenging, not just in Britain but around the world.¹⁰⁴ In the UK, house

prices hit a record high in February 2022, and in England and Wales average house prices were 7.69 times average yearly earnings, compared to 5.05 times in 2002.¹⁰⁵

Related to this, housing costs in the private rental market have also seen sharp increases, with rents increasing 60 per cent faster than incomes between 2011 and 2017.¹⁰⁶ Centrepoin analysis in 2019 found that 65 per cent of younger people (aged between 18 and 29) spent more than 30 per cent of their income on housing costs when they first moved out, compared to 32 per cent for those in now in their 60s.¹⁰⁷ High housing costs are also compounded by concerns by some landlords in letting to younger people, particularly those who may have experienced homelessness or receiving support from the benefits system.¹⁰⁸

Proportion of respondents who spent over 30% of their monthly income on their rent/mortgage when they first moved out



Access to social rented housing is also increasingly difficult for young people facing homelessness and housing insecurity. A critical lack of social housing across the country means that there are over 1.15 million households on local authority waiting lists, with waiting times running into decades in areas of the highest demand. The supply of new social housing has been in decline since the late 1980s and has contracted sharply in the past decade: 5,955 additional homes for social rent were delivered in 2020-21, compared to 37,677 a decade earlier in 2011-12.¹⁰⁹

These challenges affect young people across the country – from those unable to move out and start a family to young workers spending an unaffordable amount of their income on rent. But for the young people Centrepoin supports, a lack of genuinely affordable housing leaves them trapped in homelessness and instability.

Welfare reform and young peoples' incomes

Welfare reforms over the last decade and beyond have also been identified as a barrier to many peoples' ability to find and sustain accommodation, and to efforts to prevent and relieve homelessness.¹¹⁰

Young people in particular face lower benefit entitlements both for their living and housing costs. An under 25 receives £15 a week less than an over 25, for no reason other than their age, while most under 35s are only able claim housing costs for a shared room in the bottom thirty percent of local market rates. As recent Centrepoin evidence highlights, these lower rates leave young people struggling to meet essential living costs, damage their health and wellbeing and increase their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.¹¹¹ Low rates and restricted entitlements also make it more difficult for young people to find housing they can afford, too many at risk of homelessness and unable to move on from hostels and supported accommodation.¹¹²

In order to end youth homelessness, it is essential that young people are able to access the level of income needed, either through employment or the social security system, to be able to find and keep a sustainable place to live.

Navigating services and systems of support

For young people facing homelessness, accessing support, advice and accommodation from statutory and voluntary organisations is critical in order to get into pathways and get the resources they need in crisis. However, for many young people, the systems and organisations meant to support them can be difficult and confusing to navigate, and fail to provide the youth-specific support they need to avoid or overcome homelessness.

Centrepoin's Youth Homelessness Databank found that of the 122,000 young people who approached their local authority for help in 2020/21, only four in ten (59 per cent) received a positive outcome – meaning their homelessness was successfully prevented or relieved, or they were accommodated under the main housing duty – while a third (34 per cent) of those presenting did not receive an assessment at all.¹¹³

Although recent legislation and policy changes have improved people's access to advice and support from local councils, there are still clear gaps which leave young people unable to access the support they need. There is evidence from organisations supporting homeless young people across the country of young people struggling to get help from services while in crisis: such as being told to 'prove' their homelessness or being told to sleep rough in order to be referred to support.

In order to end youth homelessness, it is essential that the support networks and organisations working with young people are optimised to provide accessible, sensitive and person-centred support to young people in need across the country.



Our Next Steps

This review explores the problem of youth homelessness and some of the key barriers to resolving the issue. Centrepoint is committed to ending youth homelessness by 2037 and our next step is to identify the solutions needed to make this a reality.

We can only end youth homelessness together. We are calling on individuals and organisations across the country to join us on our mission. This means supporting our public campaign launching in Autumn 2022, and sharing any experience and expertise which can help us identify and develop the solutions needed to tackle youth homelessness.

Open Consultation/Call for Evidence

We want to hear from organisations, groups and individuals about the steps needed to end youth homelessness by 2037, including charities, public bodies, local councils, academics, campaign groups, people with lived experience, members of the general public.

We have set out some broad questions below, but would welcome any contributions, particularly **any research evidence, case studies and examples of good practice** you or your organisation may already be involved in.

We are also happy to have a chat about our Vision and this document – you can get in touch using the contact details below.

Please respond to this consultation no later than 1 June 2022 by sending an email to policy@centrepoint.org or by post to Centrepoint, 25 Camperdown Street, London E1 8DZ.

Clarifying the problem

- **What do you think it means to end youth homelessness? Do you agree with the definition Centrepoint has set out here?**
- **What are some of the biggest structural barriers that have made it harder for you to prevent and tackle youth homelessness?**
- **What do you see as the main triggers and causes for youth homelessness for the young people you work with?**
- **Do you think that tackling homelessness for young people requires a different approach to tackling homelessness? Why is this?**
- **What are the immediate and long-term impacts of homelessness on young people? Do you have any anonymous case studies or stories you can share?**
- **What are the wider costs and impacts to society from youth homelessness?**

Building the Solution

- **What work do you or your organisation currently do to support young people facing homelessness?**
- **What innovative practice are you aware of that is making a real difference on the ground?**
- **What are the key changes to policy and practice you think are needed in order to end youth homelessness by 2037?**
- **What support do you need from government/vol sector/funders/other government agencies to make that happen?**

Thank you.

End notes

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