



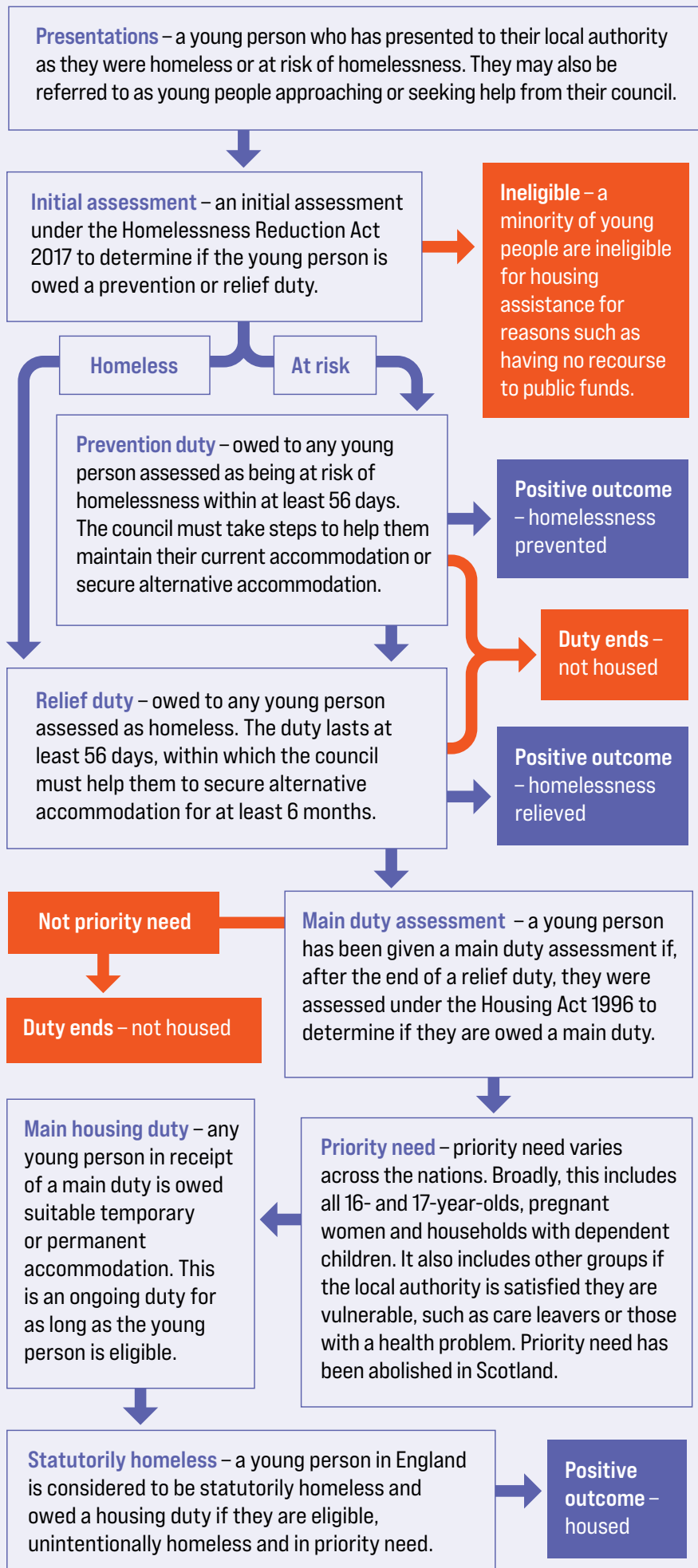
FAILURE TO ACT: THE SCALE OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN THE UK

Glossary

Young person – the young people referenced in this report are aged 16-24. This includes young people who are single, in a couple, and those with dependent children.

Personal housing plan – if a young person is assessed as homeless or at risk of homelessness a personal housing plan must be put in place based on their needs, outlining the steps to be taken to prevent or relieve homelessness.

Intentionally homeless – young people may be deemed intentionally homeless if the council asserts they could have prevented their homelessness.



Contents

Glossary	2
Executive Summary	4
Recommendations	5
Introduction	6
Methodology	7
Policy framework	8
The scale of youth homelessness	9
Regional focus	10
The impact of the cost of living crisis	12
Young people’s journey through the Homelessness Reduction Act	13
Case study: Councils failing to support homeless young people	15
Rural areas struggling to support homeless young people in England	16
Causes of homelessness	17
Conclusion	18
Technical appendix	20

Centrepoint would like to express gratitude to all the local authorities in England who provided data in response to Freedom of Information requests on youth homelessness, and to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Scottish Housing and Social Justice Directorate, the Housing Statistics team at the Welsh Government and the UK Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Author: Alessandro Nicoletti
Centrepoint, 2023

Executive Summary

Young people facing homelessness are amongst the most vulnerable individuals in our society. At critical moments in their lives, timely and effective support from councils and their partners can help young people to find stable homes, complete their educational programmes and start professional careers. However, if these opportunities are missed, homelessness can rob young people of the chance to successfully transition into adulthood, pushing some in to a vicious cycle of exclusion and deprivation.

Centrepoint's Youth Homelessness Databank monitors the number of young people presenting to their local authority as homeless or at risk of homelessness across the United Kingdom. In Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales data broken down by age is collected at a central level and sourced from the devolved governments. However, in England data is unavailable at the national level, meaning that it is collected through Freedom of Information requests to individual local authorities.

Centrepoint estimates that **135,800 young people in the United Kingdom approached their council for help as they were homeless or at risk of homelessness during the financial year 2022/23**. This means that the number of young people who asked for help from their local council because they were homeless or at immediate risk of homelessness has increased for the sixth year in a row.

While the figures for the devolved nations have decreased for the last three years, with the exception of Scotland which experienced an increase this year, **English councils recorded an increasing number of young people presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness**. Furthermore, England currently has the highest youth homelessness rate amongst the four nations, with around 1 in 50 people aged 16-24 homeless or at risk of homelessness. In 2017, the Homelessness Reduction Act was introduced, expanding the statutory duties of local authorities by requiring them to prevent and relieve homelessness – in addition to providing the main housing duty. In 2018, the government also published a Code of Guidance that set out expectations for local councils in implementing the HRA. This states that: "if there is reason to believe that they may be homeless or threatened with homelessness", the local authority must carry out an assessment to verify the eligibility of the person approaching the council. Unfortunately, as in previous years, our data suggests that **more than a third of the young people who approached their local authority in England were not assessed for eligibility**. Moreover, since the HRA has been in force, there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of young people receiving an assessment, going from 79 per cent in 2018/19 to 65 per cent in 2022/2023.

As in previous years, our data shows a very concerning picture regarding the proportion of young people having a positive outcome¹ after presenting as homeless or at risk to their local authority. In 2022/23 **in England, only 33 per cent of those who presented had a positive outcome**. This percentage has not substantially changed since the implementation of the HRA, suggesting that the HRA process is failing to successfully address the housing needs of six in ten young people who present as homeless or at risk.

Family breakdown remained the main cause of homelessness amongst young people owed a duty by their local authority. **In 54 per cent of cases, family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate was named as the main reason why young people owed a homelessness duty lost their last settled home, compared to 52 per cent in 2021/22**. Our data also shows that one in nine young people are homeless or at risk due to domestic violence (11%). This is especially concerning for young women, who are five times more likely to be homeless or at risk because of domestic abuse than young men. Finally, as expected due to the lifting of the eviction ban implemented during the pandemic, we recorded a 40 per cent increase in evictions as the leading cause of homelessness for young people (9% of young people owed a duty).

Once again, the Youth Homelessness Databank highlights how important it is to have robust data to understand the scale and nature of youth homelessness. At present in England, the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) does not publish age disaggregated data for all stages of the HRA process, instead publishing data only for those accepted as being owed a prevention or relief duty. This means that the government is unable to properly examine youth homelessness and how these trends vary across the country.

The big discrepancy between the number of young people presenting as homeless and those being assessed demands urgent attention from government and local authorities. Therefore, we strongly urge the Westminster and devolved governments to begin collecting presentation and/or initial interview figures from local authorities to understand the true scale of demand from vulnerable young people. Without this, we risk missing information on thousands of young people who are approaching their local authorities for assistance, making it less likely that the government will develop solutions to tackle youth homelessness.

¹ We define a positive outcome when a young person is offered suitable accommodation or is owed a main housing duty. This means that their homelessness was successfully prevented or relieved.

Recommendations

At national level:

1. The government should create a new cross-departmental strategy to end youth homelessness. This should ensure that there is a youth specific emergency housing offer in every local authority so that young people facing homelessness can access age-appropriate accommodation up to the age of 25.
2. Introduce a new Youth Independence Payment for young people living independently without family support. This would raise their overall Universal Credit entitlement to the rate that over 25s receive, supporting them with their living costs, preventing them from getting into arrears and facing homelessness as a consequence.
3. Uprate the current Local Housing Allowance rates, taking into account latest data on inflation in the private housing market and making sure they are aligned with the 30th percentile in all the broad rental market areas (BRMA). With the recent inflationary pressure on rents, the private rented market has become inaccessible for many young people who are receiving benefits, therefore uprating LHA is crucial to widen the housing options that are accessible to young people.

In both England and the devolved nations:

4. The government should require local authorities to report the number of homelessness presentations to give a fuller picture of levels of demand among young people (and older groups). In England, this should be added as a new required field on H-CLIC (the system used to record data related to the HRA). This would give a more accurate reflection of the number of people seeking help from local authorities, as our analysis has shown that a significant proportion of presentations do not reach the formal assessment stage.
5. The government should launch a national awareness campaign on homelessness, reaching at-risk individuals, especially those in hidden homelessness situations, making them more aware of their rights under the HRA.

In England, we call on the Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities to:

6. Make publicly available all H-CLIC data broken by age to enable the government and those working in the homelessness sector to better understand how effectively the HRA is supporting young people. In the longer-term, we encourage the Department to make all H-CLIC data searchable via an online tool (similar to the Stat-Xplore tool used for the Department for Work and Pensions data²) which would enable more detailed analysis of trends in youth homelessness. Moreover, it would allow for an analysis of differences between subgroups of young people (segmented by categories such as gender and ethnicity), thereby providing national and local government with the means to ensure that funding and commissioning of services are more closely linked to needs and outcomes.
7. To ensure that all young people who are facing homelessness get the support they need from local authorities, the Homelessness Code of Guidance should be amended to clarify the obligations of local authorities at the presentation, initial interview, and assessment stage to ensure that all local authorities are aware of what is and is not acceptable practice. In doing this, they should delineate a) the factors a local authority must take into account and b) what constitutes a realistic burden of proof when the Homelessness Code of Guidance states that a local authority must only have "reason to believe" a person is homeless or at risk to get an assessment. This should cover what forms of evidence or burden of proof is acceptable to require at this early stage of the HRA.
8. The government should review local delivery of the HRA and adherence to the Homelessness Code of Guidance to ensure the intentions of the Act are made a reality across the country, with a particular focus on rural areas. This should include a review of the timing of support to ensure that young people get an initial interview and assessment in line with the urgency required by their situation. Where local authorities are not fully carrying out their statutory duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act, DLUHC should work closely with them to address problems and support them to improve systems where required.

Local authorities should:

9. Make sure, through training and communication, that all relevant local agencies working with young people, including local education providers and third sector organisations, are aware of referral procedures for homelessness support (even if they do not have a legal duty to refer).
10. Consistently adopt models of best practice in supporting young people, particularly by having a youth-specific homelessness prevention and relief service (or specialist worker in smaller authorities). This could be delivered in-house or in partnership with the voluntary sector, but must be focused on tailoring the service to the distinct needs of young people facing homelessness.

² For more information: <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/login.xhtml>



Introduction

As of today, there is no official measurement of the scale of youth homelessness in the United Kingdom. However, without accurate and comparable national, regional, and local data on the scale and experience of youth homelessness, we cannot know how best to tackle it nor ensure sufficient funding is allocated so that young people receive the support they need.

The Centrepunkt Youth Homelessness Databank significantly increases the available information on youth homelessness by collecting council level data to build a more informed national understanding of the problem. It represents the only publicly accessible resource that provides information across the entire HRA pathway. By collecting data on the number of young people at every stage of their application at district and unitary council level, we are able to build a more informed national picture.

This report presents an analysis of data collected by local authorities during the financial year 2022/2023, and examines the development of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA)³ in its fifth year. To do this, local authorities provided data on the number of 16 to 24-year-olds who applied to them for help because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness and their subsequent journeys through local authority support.

This report also updates the previous year's findings, including Centrepunkt's estimate of the national scale of youth homelessness. The report is mainly focused on available data collected by councils in England; however, data from the devolved nations is included whenever possible.

Centrepunkt's estimate only includes those young people who have sought help from their local authority. It is not currently possible to accurately gauge the scale of hidden homelessness amongst young people who have not approached their councils for support. It is also important to stress that the factors that affect youth homelessness go beyond homelessness support provided by councils. They also include limited and inappropriate housing stock, scarce and insecure employment opportunities, welfare entitlements which do not meet living costs and many other social and personal factors. If we are to succeed in ending youth homelessness, the proactive, preventative approach enshrined in the HRA must be extended to other services working with those at risk of homelessness.

Visit our website⁴ to explore the data discussed in this report. The databank includes data from individual local authorities, as well as regional and national data, providing the only single point of access to the most complete source of information on youth homelessness in the United Kingdom.

³ The Act, implemented in April 2018, introduced two new universal homelessness duties on local authorities in England: a 'prevention duty' and a 'relief duty'. Under the prevention duty, local authorities must take reasonable steps to prevent homelessness for anyone at risk within 56 days. Under the relief duty local authorities must take reasonable steps to help secure accommodation for those who are currently homeless and eligible. Both duties apply to people regardless of priority need or intentionality and the prevention duty applies irrespective of whether the applicant has a connection to the local area.

⁴ <https://centrepunkt.org.uk/ending-youth-homelessness/what-youth-homelessness/stats-and-facts>

Methodology

Due to differing legislation in the devolved nations, the data collected and published varies significantly between each nation. Data for Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales was obtained from their respective central government departments. Data for England was obtained through Freedom of Information requests to relevant local authorities, with 89 per cent of them providing data. The strong response rate from local authorities in England, alongside data from the other three nations allows us to provide an overall picture of the number of young people presenting to their local authority because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The FOI request sent to all the local authorities in England requested data on the number of young people aged 16-24 independently of whether they were the main applicant or household members of the main applicant, who⁵:

- presented to their council as they are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- were assessed for a prevention or relief duty under the HRA
- received an initial assessment of being owed a prevention duty
- received an initial assessment of being owed a relief duty
- had a successful prevention duty outcome
- had a prevention duty end leading to a relief duty
- had a prevention duty terminated for any other reason
- had a relief duty ended successfully
- had a relief duty end and lead to main duty assessment
- had a relief duty end for any other reason
- assessed under the Housing Act 1996
- accepted as statutorily homeless and owed a housing duty by their council.

This data provides a more extensive picture of youth homelessness than Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities (DLUHC) statutory homelessness data sources which only provide a 16-24 age group breakdown for those who are owed either a prevention or relief duty combined.

The responses to Centrepoin's Freedom of Information request show a slight increase in the number of instances where councils were able to provide the requested data. Last year, 87 per cent of local authorities were able to provide full or partial data for April 2021 to the end of March 2022, whereas this year 89 per cent provided at least some of the requested data. Many of the councils that were unable to provide data cited the increased demand on councils and the time pressures from fulfilling FOI requests as the reason for their inability to respond. For the local authorities that could not provide data, an econometric model was used to estimate the number of young people presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness taking into account correlated factors, in particular the number of 16-24 years claiming Universal Credit⁶.

Throughout this report all figures referring to key stages of the HRA and how it has performed this year, including percentages for assessment rates, provision of homelessness duties, and the outcomes of this support, will all refer to data from local authorities in England unless otherwise stated.



⁵ The response rate for each specific question can be found in the Technical Appendix.

⁶ For more details, please refer to the Technical Appendix.

Policy framework

In the United Kingdom, responsibility for tackling homelessness is devolved and each nation has adopted different duties for those who approach them for help.

England

Local authorities in the UK have been required to provide assistance to homeless people since 1977. However, the **Housing Act 1996** provides much of the statutory under-pinning for local authorities to prevent homelessness and provide assistance to people threatened with or actually homeless. Since devolution, Welsh and Scottish governments have adapted the provisions of the Housing Act 1996 in different ways.

In England, the **Homelessness Reduction Act** came into effect in **April 2018**. This amended the 1996 Act and changed the homelessness support model provided by local authorities. Through this, **prevention and relief support were added as additional tiers of statutory duties regardless of intentionality or the applicant's priority need status**. Moreover, if these prevention and relief duties were unsuccessful, applicants could then be assessed to determine if they are owed a full housing duty.

These changes to legislation mean that single homeless young people who would have previously received inconsistent support should now all receive prevention and/or relief support according to their needs. This is particularly significant for those young people who are at risk of homelessness, but not necessarily at the immediate point of crisis. Previously they may not have received support, as single people are generally less likely to be priority need. Now, under the HRA, everyone threatened with homelessness must be given up to 56 days of support to help secure accommodation.

The HRA aims to give applicants increased influence over their homelessness application through a more collaborative process. The personal housing plan was brought in as part of the Act to be created in partnership with the applicant. Following the assessment, the personal housing plan puts in place the necessary actions to prevent or relieve homelessness. Applicants also now have the right to request internal reviews of decisions at any stage of the HRA process, as well as the right to present at any local authority for support.

To support local authorities with these changes, the government provided additional burdens funding for an initial period of three years - with the expectation that funding would not be required beyond this period. Funding for delivery of the Act was later distributed through the Homelessness Reduction Grant and now the Homelessness Prevention Grant. A new data reporting system known as H-CLIC was also introduced as well as a **duty to refer**, which places responsibilities on certain agencies to refer people who may be homeless or at risk to local authority housing teams.

Northern Ireland

Currently, Northern Ireland operates much like England did prior to the HRA. **Young people who are eligible, unintentionally homeless, and in priority need are owed a duty to help them secure accommodation**. Unlike in England, however, **the responsibility lies with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)**, as opposed to individual local authorities. In addition, eligibility criteria are more complex in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the UK as prior behavior 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.

The data provided by the NIHE includes main duty presentations and main duty acceptances and is broken down by age range, gender and local authorities.

Scotland

Scottish homelessness policy operates on a significantly different model to the other nations. With the abolition of priority need on 31 December 2012, the **Scottish government's policy has been to provide a full housing duty to all eligible and unintentionally homeless young people via their council**.

In Scotland all those who present are assessed. This means that the data provided by the Scottish Government focuses on the totals for each of the four potential decisions following presentation which are broken down by local authority. These are homeless and potentially homeless which are then broken down into intentional and unintentional.

Wales

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. Under the Wales (Housing) Act, **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**. A full housing duty is then only owed to those in priority need in the event that this support is not successful. **The Wales (Housing) Act 2014 is the most similar to the HRA and provided a model for its development**.

The data collected by the Welsh Government focuses on the number of outcomes and allows for a breakdown by age group and local authority. The data, available via the online tool from StatsWales, includes information at every stage of the application process. These totals include prevention and relief duties (sections 66 and 73 of the Act) and their outcomes (successful, unsuccessful leading to the next stage of support, and duty ended), as well as the different main duty outcomes (eligible and homeless but not in priority need, eligible homeless and in a priority need but intentionally so, and eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need [Section 75]).

The scale of youth homelessness

Across the United Kingdom, we estimate that 135,800 young people aged 16-24 presented to their local authority as homeless or at risk of homelessness between April 2022 and March 2023. This represents a five per cent increase compared to the previous financial year, when 129,000 young people faced homelessness.

According to our estimates, in 2022/2023 young women represented 56 per cent of the total number of young people approaching their local authority because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness (almost 76,000 young women). This means that less than half of the presentations were from young men (39%, almost 53,000), with the remaining four per cent (around 7,000) formed by those young people who identify as another gender, other than male or female, or whose gender was not recorded at the time of the presentation.

In **England**, a total of **119,300 young people presented** as homeless or at risk of homelessness to their local authority during the financial year 2022/2023, **an increase of 6,800 (+6%)** compared to the previous financial year (112,500).

In **Northern Ireland**, **2,900 young people** presented as homeless or at risk of homelessness in 2022/2023, compared to 3,200 in the previous year, representing a **10 per cent year-on-year decrease** (-300 presentations).

Scotland experienced an increase (+6%) in the number of young people presenting in 2022/2023, going from 7,200 in 2021/2022 to 7,500 in 2022/2023. This is the first increase after three annual decreases in a row.

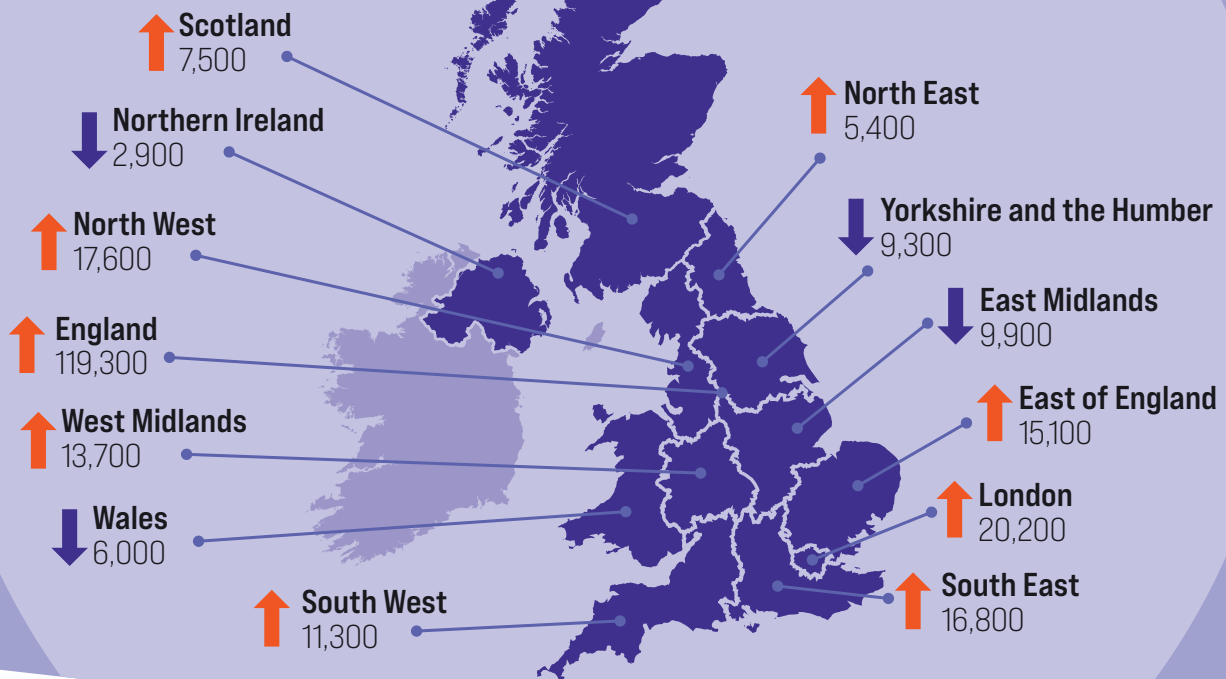
In **Wales**, there were around **6,000 young people** who presented as homeless or at risk of homelessness in 2022/2023. This represents a **decrease of 100 (-1%)** from 6,100 presentations in the financial year 2021/2022.

As these figures show, the overall year-on-year trend varied between the nations, and the local data revealed significant differences in trends even within the same region. It is noteworthy that, while in the last few years the other devolved nations have been showing signs of improvement and an overall decrease in the number of young people approaching their local authority for homelessness support, England saw an increase in presentations for the seventh year in a row, showing a continuous growth in demand from young people for homelessness support services.



Regional focus

UK Total: 135,800



In England, most of the regions recorded an increase in the number of young people approaching their local authority because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness. The regions which saw the largest increases were:

- The **East of England** which experienced a **14% increase**, going from 13,200 presentations in 2021/2022 to 15,100 presentations in 2022/2023. This represented also the largest absolute increase among the English regions with 1,900 more presentations than in the previous financial year;
- The **West Midlands**, with a **14% increase**, going from 12,000 to 13,700 presentations;
- The **South East** with an **12% increase**, going from 15,000 to 16,800 presentations;
- The **South West** with an **11% increase** in the number of presentations, going from 10,200 to 11,300;
- **London** which saw a **10% increase** in the number of young people presenting as homeless or at risk, going from 18,300 to 20,200, the highest number of presentations among all regions in England;
- The **North East** with an **8% increase**, going from 5,000 presentations in 2021/2022 to 5,400 in 2022/2023, the lowest number of presentations among all regions in England;
- The **North West** which recorded a **4% increase**, going from 17,000 to 17,600 presentations, the second highest figure behind London.



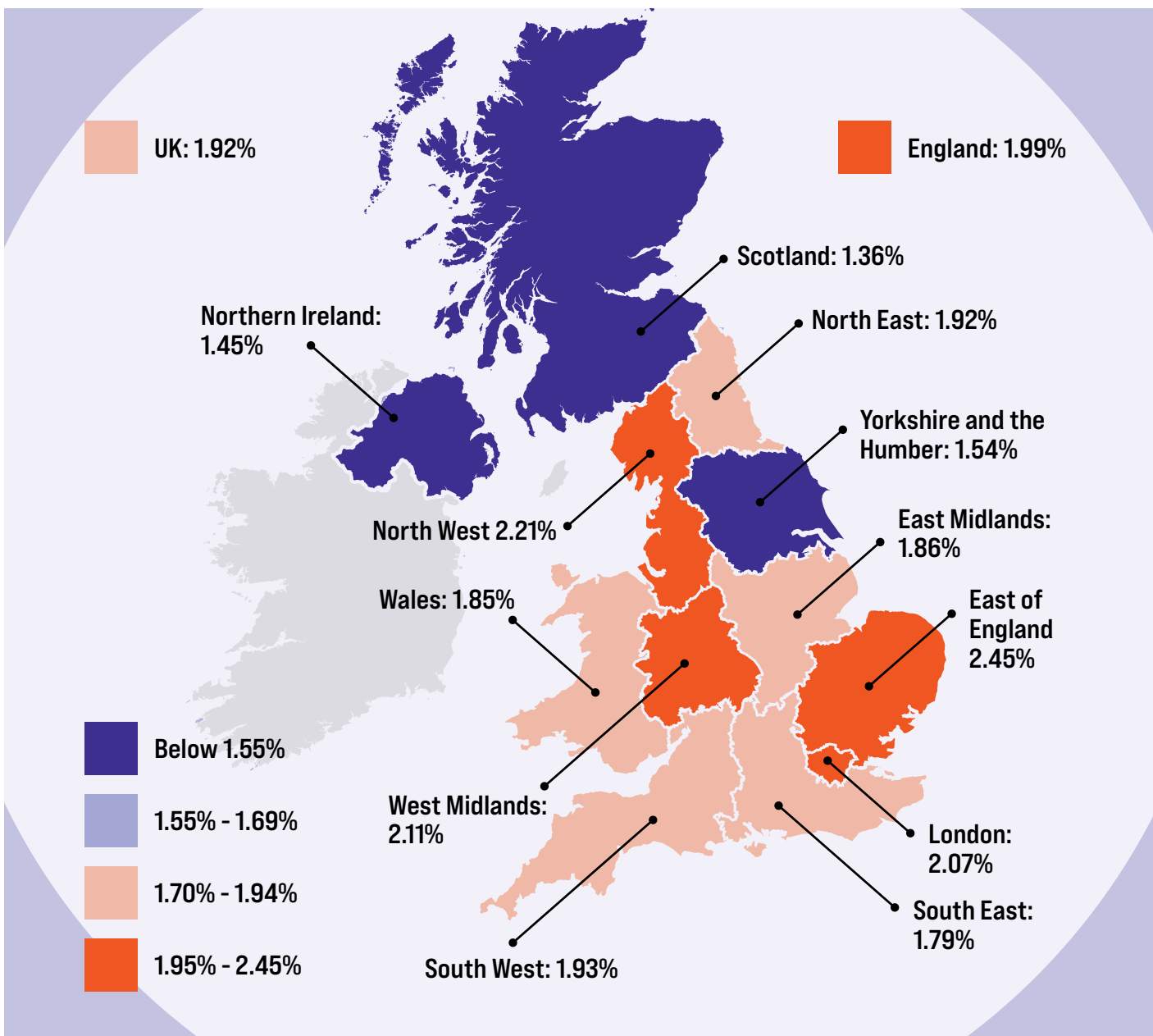
On the other hand, two regions experienced a year-on-year decrease in the number of presentations. These regions are:

- The **East Midlands** with a **15% decline** in the number of presentations, going from 11,600 in 2021/2022 to 9,900 in 2022/2023;
- **Yorkshire and the Humber** which saw a **9% decrease** from 10,200 to 9,300.

Using the preceding figures on young people aged 16-24 who presented as homeless or at risk of homelessness to their local authority and population estimates for the age group 16-24, it is possible to calculate a rate of youth homelessness for each nation, region and the United Kingdom as a whole.

According to these rates, around **1 out of 52 young people aged 16-24 is homeless or at risk of homelessness in the United Kingdom**, corresponding to a 1.92% rate of youth homelessness, compared to 1.83% in 2021/2022. Among the four devolved nations, England has the highest rate of youth homelessness (1.99%), followed by Wales (1.85%), Northern Ireland (1.45%), and Scotland (1.36%). This means that **a young person in England is 46% more likely to be homeless or at risk of homelessness than a young person in Scotland, 38% more likely than in Northern Ireland and 8% more likely than Wales.**

Among the English regions, **the East of England has the highest rate of youth homelessness, 2.45%**, followed by the North West and the West Midlands, respectively 2.21% and 2.11%. London is the other region with a youth homelessness rate higher than the average of England (2.07% vs. 1.99%). On the other hand, the lowest youth homelessness rate among the English regions is registered in Yorkshire and the Humber (1.54%), which is still higher than the rates of Northern Ireland and Scotland.



7 Source: Mid-2021 estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalescotlandandnorthernireland>



The impact of the cost-of-living crisis

Despite the government's Energy Price Guarantee and Cost of Living Support schemes, inflation-driven increases in the cost of living have dramatically worsened the socio-economic and material conditions of the most vulnerable households in the UK. This impact has been particularly felt by vulnerable young people who have also faced rising youth unemployment and increases in the number of 16-24 years olds not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Last winter, Centrepont conducted research on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on young people⁸. This included a survey of 28 voluntary sector homelessness organisations across England who support over 12,000 young people, analysis of data from the Centrepont Helpline, which offers advice and signposting to any young person facing homelessness, and a focus group with Centrepont Helpline Advice Workers.

In our survey, 77 per cent of the organisations said that demand from young people had increased due to the cost-of-living crisis. Almost 60 per cent said that young people needing food support had increased significantly over the course of the winter and 46 per cent said that young people needing emergency financial support had increased significantly.

Alongside this, the research found that the Centrepont Helpline had experienced its busiest period since it opened five years ago, with record numbers of callers in October and November 2022. In doing this, the Helpline supported a record number of young people in October, answering the calls of 721 young people, a third more than the same month in 2021. In November, the service exceeded that record – with 850 young people in need of support, a 44 per cent increase on the same month last year (592 number of calls in November 2021), doubling the pre-pandemic number of young callers (427 calls in November 2019).

The anxieties over budgeting to pay rent, bills and food, had a negative impact on young people's mental health, with 44 per cent of the organisations mentioning that more young people with mental health issues reached out for support. A challenge that was also highlighted by Centrepont Helpline Advice Workers, with only "a small minority of the calls [that] don't interlink to their mental health". In addition, an alarming number of young people on the line were feeling suicidal, with a Helpline Advice Worker who commented "before we had barely any calls regarding suicide, now many spoke about ending their life or being at a place where they can't see themselves living".

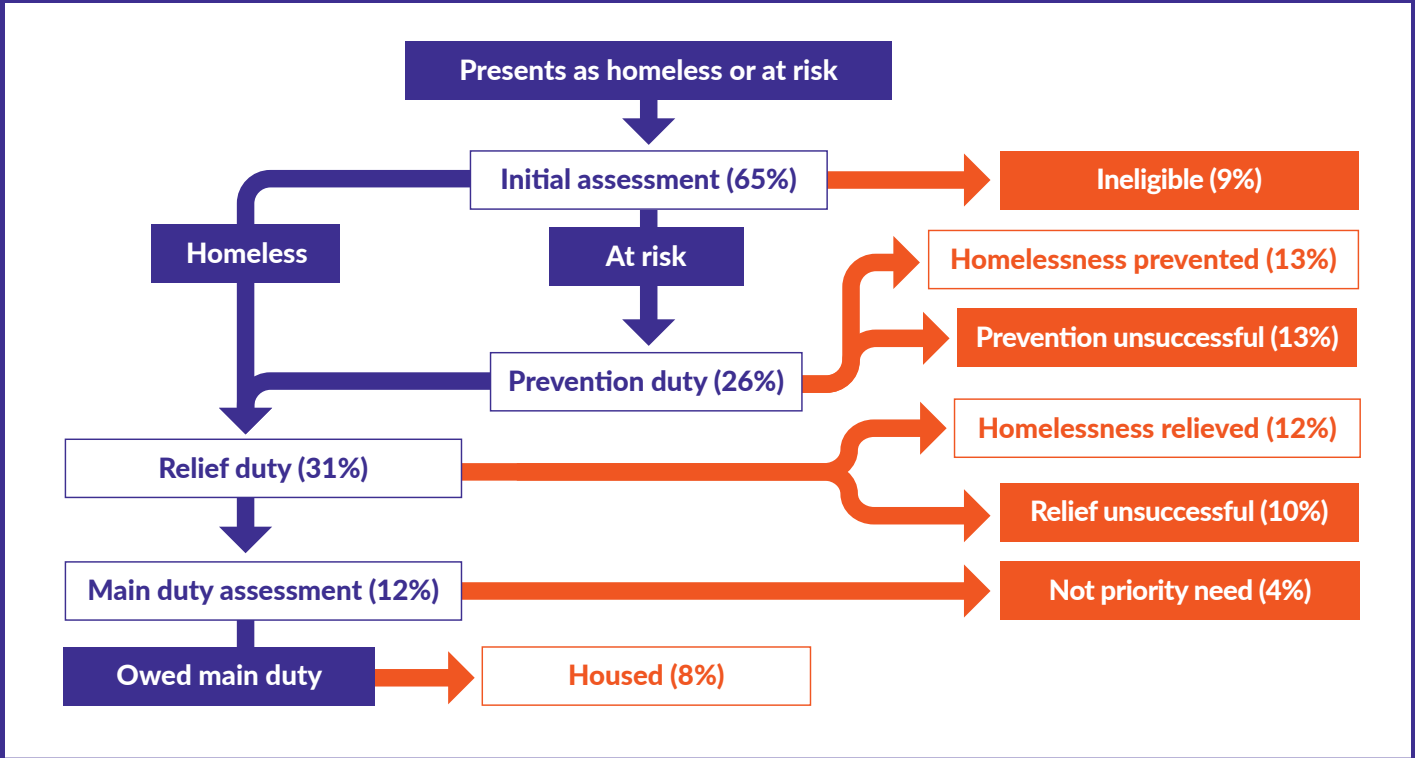
In addition, more young people in full-time employment reached out for support last winter. Helpline Advice Workers at Centrepont noticed a considerable increase in the number of young people working full-time who could not afford private rents, especially in London and Manchester. Some Helpline Advice Workers mentioned that callers were wondering whether they should quit their jobs in order to increase the likelihood of accessing social housing from councils. This is because young people were being told to look for private accommodation during their homelessness assessments due to them being in employment – therefore reducing their ability to access social housing. However, private renting is not a realistic expectation for many vulnerable young people. This is because they are in the middle zone as they are "not earning enough for private rent, not little enough for council support", as highlighted by one of the Helpline Advice Workers. This suggestion was further confirmed, in our recent survey of frontline staff working for 30 homelessness organisations, with 89 per cent of the respondents who said that the cost of renting in the private rented sector is an extreme barrier for homeless young people trying to move into independent accommodation.

⁸ For more details, see: <https://centrepont.org.uk/research-reports/impact-cost-living-crisis-homeless-young-people>

Young people's journey through the Homelessness Reduction Act

Local authorities provided the Centrepoin't's Youth Homelessness Databank with figures showing how many young people had presented as homeless or at risk, had an assessment, and how many had been provided homelessness assistance as well as the outcomes of this assistance by the local authority.

The diagram below shows the percentage of young people in England that presented to a council who have reached each stage of the HRA pathway. The percentages for each of the outcomes may not match the totals for each of the duties exactly as some cases were ongoing at the time when the data was collected.



This diagram shows the percentage of applicants that presented to a council who have reached each stage of the pathway. The percentages for each of the outcomes may not match the totals for each of the duties exactly as some cases were ongoing at the time when the data was collected.

The assessment rate for young people is still far from 100 per cent, meaning that significant numbers of young people presenting as homeless or at risk to their local authority are not even getting an initial assessment to determine whether or not they can receive support. Centrepoin't's data shows that in England one third of young people who are facing homelessness and who approach their local authority do not even get an assessment.

This is despite the fact that the government's Homelessness Code of Guidance [which sets out expectations for local councils in dealing with homelessness] states that: "if there is reason to believe that they may be homeless or threatened with homelessness", the local authority must carry out an assessment to assess eligibility".





“11.3 Every person applying for assistance from a housing authority stating that they are or are going to be homeless will require an initial interview. If there is reason to believe that they may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days the housing authority must carry out an assessment to determine if this is the case, and whether they are eligible for assistance.”

Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities 2018

During the financial year 2022/2023, 65 per cent of the young people who approached their local authority in England because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness were assessed. This percentage is lower than last year (68% assessment rate in 2021/2022) and considerably below the values recorded in the pre-pandemic period (79% in 2018/2019 and 71% in 2019/2020). This means that **more than a third of the young people who approached their local authority seeking support were not even assessed for eligibility**. According to our estimates, around 47,000 young people did not get the chance to see whether they may be eligible for support, let alone receive the actual support itself. As mentioned, the rate of assessment has decreased since the Homelessness Code of Guidance – which was set up to help local authorities effectively implement the Homelessness Reduction Act - was released, and indicates a worrying trend in young people not getting the assessment and support to which they may be entitled.

The government’s Homelessness Code of Guidance states that every young person who presents to their local authority as homeless or at risk of homelessness will require an initial interview, whereupon if there is only reason to believe that they may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days, the housing authority must carry out an assessment to determine whether they meet the conditions and are eligible to receive support.

Given these experiences and the large discrepancies between the number of young people presenting and receiving a full assessment from local authorities, Centrepoint strongly urges the government to begin collecting data before the assessment stage of the Homelessness Reduction Act - at present the DHLUC figures do not collect data on presentations or initial interviews, and only start at the assessment stage. This effectively means that the official figures are missing large numbers of young people who may be in need, but are not getting to the assessment stage.

The high response rate to our FOI (89%) demonstrates that local authorities are able to provide this information, so we highly encourage DHLUC to incorporate the number of presentations into their H-CLIC software and their statutory homelessness live tables to ensure this is collected on a national basis. Doing so, would enable government to have a clearer view of demand from young people who are homeless or at risk, so that they can develop the appropriate response to tackling youth homelessness.

For the fifth year running, more than 60% of the cases, where a young person approached their local authority in England to seek assistance, ended without the young person being supported into housing.

While 56 per cent of the young people who presented as homeless or at risk of homelessness were offered a prevention or relief duty, this does not always translate to them receiving the support to which they are entitled. As in previous years, young women were owed a prevention duty or relief duty in a similar proportion, while young men were more likely to be owed a relief duty (60% of the cases), showing that young men are more likely to experience rough sleeping.

Case study: Councils failing to support homeless young people

Ryan*, 25 from London fled his home in Council A due to threats of violence. He was additionally vulnerable suffering from poor mental health. He ended up in Council B, where he slept on the floor of a hairdresser's shop for about seven months. He approached Council B for homelessness support, however Council B declined to assess him due to lack of local connection (technically not required because he was fleeing threats of violence).

With the support of one of Centrepoin's Helpline Advisors, Ryan approached Council B again on the phone. However, he was yet again told that his 'main local connection' was still in Council A and that he should present there instead. This was despite Ryan being able to provide evidence to Council B that he had been a resident of the area for seven in the last 12 months (via a letter from the hairdresser's owner) and the fact that he was fleeing violence in Council A.

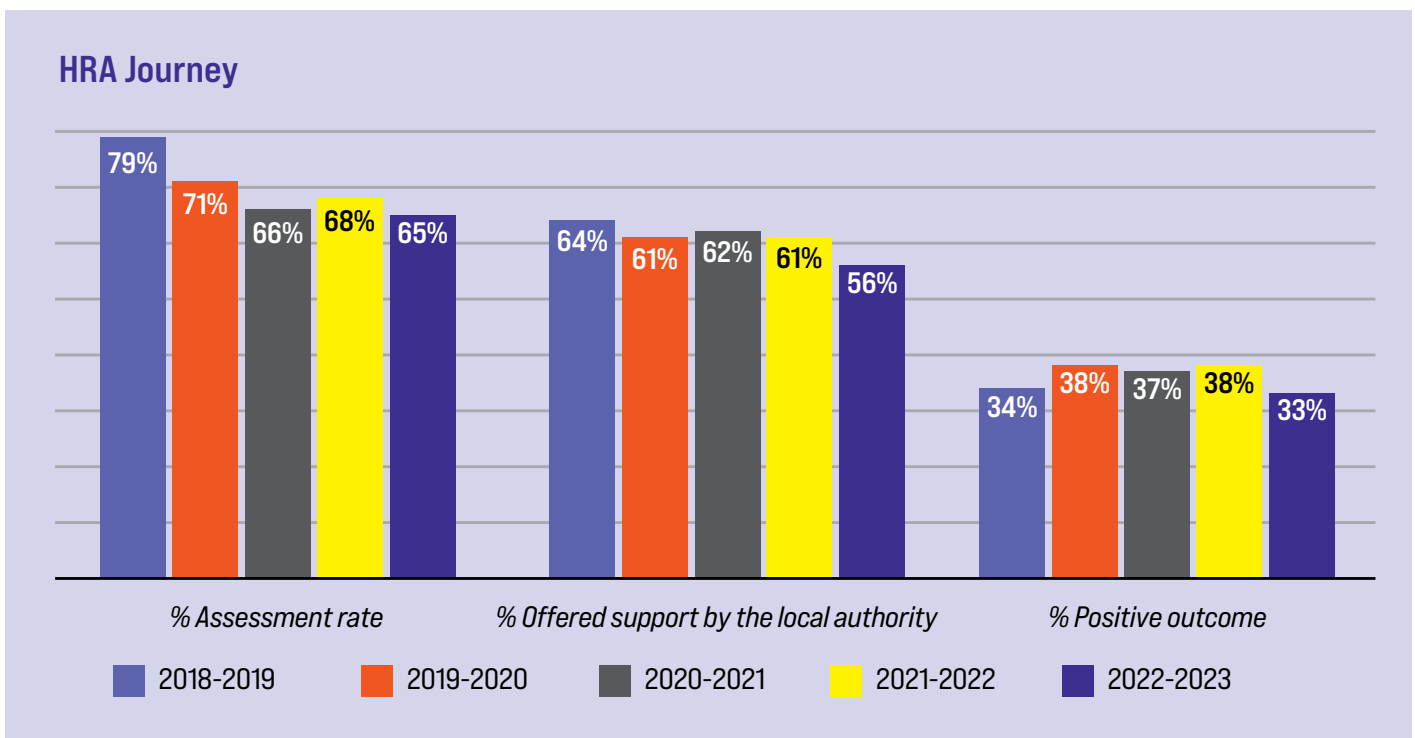
At this point, our Helpline Advisor interjected on the call by stating that the 'main local connection' was not established by any law, and that Ryan had the required evidence to prove his local connection in Council B. This was followed up with an email to the triage officer and their manager to reiterate what discussed on the phone. After this, Council A provisionally accepted Ryan's case and referred him for an assessment. However, the council did not recognize Ryan as being in priority need and, consequently, did not provide him with temporary accommodation for another five days. At this point, Ryan had been hospitalised due to a mental health breakdown.

*Name has been changed

Even when young people do receive a full assessment and are accepted as being owed a duty, the proportion of young people seeing a positive outcome from the process remains concerningly low. Centrepoin collected data on:

1. the percentage offered support (through receiving a decision of being owed a relief duty or prevention duty)
2. the percentage who had their homelessness successfully prevented or relieved under these duties, and
3. the percentage who were housed under the main housing duty (because they are in priority need).

Between April 2022 and March 2023, 33 per cent of the presentations to local authorities from young people had positive outcomes (a young person being housed or being owed a main housing duty), compared to 38 per cent in the previous financial year. This is the lowest level we have ever recorded and represents a worrying result. Unfortunately, our data showed that **the proportion who are housed or had their homelessness effectively prevented or relieved has not substantially improved over the years since the HRA has been in force.** This means that more and more of the young people who face homelessness in England do not appear to be getting the support they need when approaching their local authority.





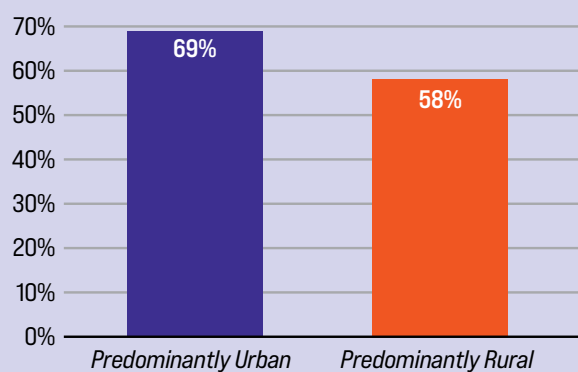
Rural areas struggling to support homeless young people in England

Using the 3-step 2011 Rural Urban Classification of Local Authority Districts and other higher level geographies from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs⁹, we categorized all the local authorities in England according to their physical settlement and related characteristics. The three categories include: predominantly urban areas, predominantly rural areas, and urban with significant rural areas.

In terms of the number of young people approaching their local authority because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness, 15 out of the 20 local authorities with the highest number of presentations were predominantly urban areas. Looking at the average number of presentations per local authority during the financial year 2021/2022, predominantly urban areas had a significantly higher average number of presentations (390) than predominantly rural and urban with significant rural areas, respectively 252 and 247 presentations on average between April 2022 and March 2023. Compared to the 2021/2022 financial year, the average number of presentations decreased by 18 per cent for predominantly urban areas, while it increased respectively by 9 and 10 per cent for predominantly rural and urban with significant rural areas. This suggests that this year's increase in the number of young people at risk of homelessness in England is predominantly due to higher number of presentations outside of urban areas.

Despite predominantly urban local authorities in England receiving much higher numbers of assistance requests by homeless young people or those at risk of homelessness, they seem to deal much better with homelessness cases under the HRA system. In particular, there is a significant gap in assessment rates between predominantly urban and predominantly rural areas. Predominantly urban areas had a 69 per cent assessment rate, compared to 58% for predominantly rural - a lower proportion than the England average (65%).

Rural areas struggling to assess homeless young people



Similarly, there are discrepancies in the percentage of young people who were offered prevention or relief duty by their local authority: 60 per cent for predominantly urban and only 50 per cent for predominantly rural areas, compared to a 56 per cent average in England. In predominantly rural areas, only 31 per cent of the homelessness cases were successfully prevented or relieved, while 35 per cent of cases had positive outcomes in predominantly urban areas.

These figures suggest that rural areas in England face multiple challenges in implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act. Given the large discrepancies identified between rural and urban local authorities in assessing and offering support to homeless young people or at risk, Centrepoin strongly urges the government to increase its support to local authorities in rural areas in implementing the HRA, providing assessments and offering support to eligible young people in need.

⁹ More information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2011-rural-urban-classification-of-local-authority-and-other-higher-level-geographies-for-statistical-purposes>

Causes of homelessness

Between April 2022 and March 2023, the biggest five single reasons for loss or threat of loss of the last settled home for young people aged 16-24 owed a homelessness duty in England were:

1. **Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate (54%)**
2. **Domestic abuse (11%)**
3. **Eviction from a private, social or supported housing tenancy (9%)**
4. **Landlord wishing to sell or re-let the property (4%)**
5. **Non-violent relationship breakdown with partner (4%)**

Source: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities¹⁰

The top three causes of homelessness were identical for all regions in England, with the exception of the South West and the East of England where evictions were the second most common reason of loss or threat of loss of the last settled home (12% and 10% respectively).

As in previous years, family or friends no longer willing or being able to accommodate the young person remains the most mentioned reason for being homeless or risk of homelessness. Compared to last year, the percentage of young people who lost or were threatened to lose their last settled home due to family or friends not being willing or able to accommodate them slightly increased from 52 to 54 per cent. Amongst the regions in England, London had the highest proportion of young people who lost or were threatened with the loss of their last settled home because of family or friends no longer being willing or able to accommodate them (56%).

Since the pandemic, domestic abuse has become an even bigger driver of youth homelessness. For the second year in a row, domestic abuse was the second most mentioned reason for young people becoming homeless or being threatened with the loss of their home, now affecting one in nine young people who face homelessness (11% compared to 8% in pre-pandemic period). Yorkshire and the Humber and the West Midlands were the regions with the highest proportion of young people becoming homeless or being at risk of homelessness due to domestic abuse (12% of the young people owed a duty in these regions). Overall, **young women were almost five times more likely than young men to be homeless or at risk due to domestic abuse** (15% compared to 4%). In particular, 87 per cent of the homelessness cases attributed to domestic abuse involved young women.

Rising homelessness due to evictions

Between April 2022 and March 2023, a total of 5,180 households with a main applicant aged 16-24 were owed a prevention or relief duty faced homelessness due to evictions from private, social or supported housing, compared with 3,674 in 2021/2022. **The number of young people facing homelessness due to evictions increased by more than 40 per cent during the financial year 2022/2023.**

Evictions from private, social or supported housing now represents the third largest reason for loss or threat of loss of the last settled home concerning 9 per cent of the young people aged 16-24 owed a homelessness duty in England. In the previous financial year, it only represented 7 per cent of the total homelessness cases amongst young people.

Despite representing only 38 per cent of the total number of young people being owed a duty, **60 per cent of the eviction-related homelessness cases involved young men.** Evictions from private, social or supported housing represented a reason for homelessness for 14 per cent of young men, while they only concerned 6 per cent of the young women owed a prevention or relief duty.

This rise in homelessness due to evictions in the past financial year is likely connected to the lift of the eviction ban introduced by the government during the pandemic, which had already produced an increase in evictions in the last financial year. Following the surge of COVID-19 in the United Kingdom, the government introduced a stay on evictions and the usual two-month notice period was extended to protect tenants in a difficult socio-economic period. The eviction ban was lifted in England in June 2021, and in October 2021 eviction notice periods reverted to two months. Evictions in England are currently regulated by Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988¹¹, which allows private landlords to evict tenants on an assured tenancy agreement or rolling contract without having to establish that the tenant is at fault. 'No fault' evictions, as regulated by Section 21, are destined to be ended by the Renters (Reform) Bill¹², introduced in May 2023 in Parliament, however it is likely this will cause a further rise in evictions as landlords may seek to evict tenants before the Bill is passed into law.

¹⁰ Information obtained through Freedom of Information request in August 2023.

¹¹ You can find more details about Section 21 here: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/50/section/21>

¹² You can find more details about the Renter (Reform) Bill here: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3462>

Conclusion

This year's Youth Homelessness Databank shows an overall increase in the number of young people presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness to their council in the United Kingdom. In particular, while the other devolved nations have shown some progress in tackling youth homelessness, for the sixth year in a row the number of homeless young people in England has risen. In addition, England also has the highest youth homelessness rate amongst the four nations, with one in 50 people aged 16-24 homeless or at risk of homelessness.

With the HRA in its fifth financial year, it is concerning that the assessment rates and positive outcomes for homeless young people have worsened. A third of young people approaching their local authority for support are not even assessed, let alone receive any kind of assistance. Moreover, only 33 per cent of the young people who presented as homeless or at risk of homelessness to their council had their homelessness successfully prevented or relieved.

These numbers are worse for rural local authorities in England. There is a significant gap in assessment rates and positive outcomes for local authorities in rural areas, despite receiving, on average, significantly fewer presentations from homeless young people, compared to urban local authorities.

Regarding the causes of homelessness, while family breakdowns remain the primary reason for young people to be homeless or at risk, more than one in ten young people facing homelessness in England were forced out of their home due to domestic violence – an experience that is particularly prevalent amongst young women. Moreover, a higher number of young people were evicted in the last financial year, due, in part, to the lifting of the eviction ban in June 2021.

What is most concerning is that behind these numbers there are thousands of young people in desperate need of support. Not having a place to sleep affects young people's physical and mental well-being and, subsequently, impacts on their educational and work outcomes. Moreover, youth homelessness affects society as a whole, costing us billions in direct government payments and missed educational and employment opportunities per year. While many of these young people will receive the support they are entitled to, our data shows that far too many do not. This represents a societal failure, and it is therefore crucial that national government, local authorities and the homelessness sector now work together to support young people presenting as homeless and end youth homelessness for good.





Technical appendix

Homelessness policy in the United Kingdom is devolved in the four individual nations, each having independent policy that inform their different data collection policies. At present the government in England does not publish data broken down by age with the exception of a combined figure for people owed a prevention or relief duty, which does not allow for an understanding of the full scale of youth homelessness. Therefore Centrepoin sends a Freedom of Information request to every local authority in England in order to collect a more complete dataset. This data is combined with publicly available data from Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales in order to build a complete picture for the United Kingdom.

This year saw a very good response rate to Centrepoin's Freedom of Information request, with 89 per cent of local authorities responding, compared to 87 per cent last year. Additionally, the majority of those councils that responded to our request were able to provide some or all of the data requested, helping to produce the most complete picture to date on the scale of youth homelessness.

This year we separated the question on the number of young people presenting to the local authority as main applicant or as part of a household. Only half of the local authorities that provided the figure of main applicants managed to respond to the second question on household members. The majority of those who did not respond were unable to provide data due to this specific request exceeding the 18 hours allocated for Freedom of Information requests often because issues with IT systems had meant the request would have had to have been carried out manually. For totals, we used the number including the household members when provided, while using the figure on main applicants for local authorities that could not send this information.

The table below shows the response rates and number of responding councils in England across each question in the Freedom of Information request we sent out. The percentages below for the response rate refer to the 295 local authorities in England with responsibility for homelessness support.

% local authorities	# responses	Question
88%	261	presented themselves as homeless or at risk of homelessness, as main applicant
43%	127	were included as part of any household presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness, including as main applicant
85%	252	were assessed under the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017
85%	252	received an initial assessment of being owed a prevention duty
85%	252	received an initial assessment of being owed a relief duty
85%	250	had a successful prevention duty outcome
84%	247	had a prevention duty end leading to a relief duty
82%	243	had a prevention duty end for any other reason
84%	247	had a relief duty end successfully
82%	243	had a relief duty end for any other reason
82%	243	assessed under the Housing Act 1996
82%	243	accepted as statutorily homeless and owed a housing duty by their council
38%	113	provided data for all parts of the Freedom of Information request

Estimating the scale of youth homelessness

Centrepoin's annual estimate of the scale of youth homelessness in the UK is based on responses to the Freedom of Information request query about the number of young people presenting to each local authority in England as they were homeless or at risk, in addition to the same measure across the devolved nations. The calculation uses data from the 89 per cent of councils in England who provided this data and uses this as the basis of an estimate of the number of young people presenting in the local authorities which did not respond.

A data quality audit was carried out on each local authority that provided data. Councils where figures at one stage exceeded the numbers upstream were contacted to explain the discrepancy. Data received as part of the Freedom of Information request was compared to the only publicly available DHLUC data with age breakdowns, prevention and relief duties owed. Where there was a discrepancy this was queried with the local authority.

A selection of variables related to the structural factors understood to affect the rates of homelessness, including house affordability, benefit uptake, alcohol and drugs consumption, and poverty indicators, were used to create a prediction model for the councils with known and verified presenting figures. These variables were all sourced from government data publications and needed to be available at a local authority level so that they could be appended to the presenting data.

A linear regression model was used trying to estimate the natural logarithm of the number of young people presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness to each local authority. This approach has multiple benefits, primarily it ensures that the data meet all the assumptions of linear regression and, secondly, it improves the linearity of the relationships between the presenting data and the significant predictor variables.

	Estimate	Std. Error	t stat
(Intercept)	-0.77320*	0.38815	-1.992
UC_claimants	0.87340***	0.05296	16.493
R ²	52%		
Num. obs.	214		

*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

UC_claimants: total number of Universal Credit claimants aged 16-24 [Source: Department for Work and Pensions, 2022-2023]

Other variables that were highly correlated with presentations, but were not included in the final model, were: child poverty after housing costs; the number of alcohol-related hospital admissions, the number of drug-misuse deaths.

Due to data quality issues, it was not possible to obtain robust local authority level data on personal factors that contributed to homelessness nor was it possible to get sufficient data on the fragmentation of families.

It should be noted that although they inform the estimate, it is not possible from this alone to infer any causation from this report, in either direction. For example, we cannot conclusively say that an increase in these factors would cause an increase in the number of young people approaching their council or vice versa. We would however support any further research into how these could affect the scale of youth homelessness in the UK.

The final model was then run on those local authorities who had not provided a (valid) presenting figure in response to Centrepoin's Freedom of Information request. This process output a prediction for the presenting figure for all local authorities. The estimated presentations were used for the local authorities who had not provided a figure for presentations in England. The final estimate of the scale of youth homelessness in England was calculated by summing the known presenting figures in local authorities that responded to the request with usable data, and the estimated presenting figure for those local authorities that did not. This produced the estimate of 135,800 young people who presented to their council as they were homeless or at risk.

Equivalent data collected in previous years (the Databank holds data dating back to 2012/13) allows for a comparison over time to understand any changes in the scale of youth homelessness at a local and national level. These calculations consider those local authorities that have provided comparable data for multiple years.

Due to a number of councils changing the definitions of what data is returned, or their internal processes, only data starting from the financial year 2018/19 is included in this analysis. This ensures that the comparisons made are valid and reflect only actual change in the scale of youth homelessness.

For the UK wide estimate of youth homelessness, the England figure was added to the total number of young people assessed in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This data was obtained from central sources in each of the nations. All nations here reported that all young people who were presented were also assessed and therefore this data is reflective of presentations. In Northern Ireland, a slightly different reporting structure means that the data represents all young people aged 16-25 years old, so an estimate is provided for the 16-24 age group.

For calculations involved in the outcomes of the HRA process, for instance, the percentages receiving an assessment, a prevention or relief duty, or the percentage of positive outcomes, these are only calculated for local authorities in England that also provided a figure for presentations. This ensures that any figures taken for regional or national levels are as accurate as possible given the data provided from the complete FOIs. Doing this enables a comparison across the years as the response rate has naturally changed, but the percentages obtaining from each of these years will still be a valid comparison. To further reflect this, when comparing across years we have used the percentages rather than the total figures for those given an assessment, or homelessness duty, or positive outcome to compare as these will differ according to the response rate in a given year.



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