House of Commons Library

Research Briefing

6 November 2026

By Faye Greaves,
Cassie Barton,
Eva Morris

Rough sleeping in England: Causes and statistics



Summary

1 The causes of rough sleeping
2 The number of rough sleepers

Image Credits

Homeless by Leo Reynolds. Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 / image cropped.

Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing 'Legal help: where to go and how to pay' for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

Sources and subscriptions for MPs and staff

We try to use sources in our research that everyone can access, but sometimes only information that exists behind a paywall or via a subscription is available. We provide access to many online subscriptions to MPs and parliamentary staff, please contact hoclibraryonline@parliament.uk or visit commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources for more information.

Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at commonslibrary.parliament.uk. If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

Contents

Summary **5**

1 The causes of rough sleeping **9**

1.1 Reasons for leaving or loss of last settled home 10

Similarities between the triggers for rough sleeping and statutory homelessness 10

Flow of rough sleeping 13

1.2 Underlying causes 14

1.3 Rough sleeping among specific groups 16

People with no recourse to public funds 16

People leaving an institution 17

Groups likely to be underrepresented in official data 19

1.4 Rural rough sleeping 21

1.5 Pet ownership 22

2 The number of rough sleepers **24**

2.1 The number of rough sleepers, 2010 to present 24

What are the trends in rough sleeping numbers? 24

Where is rough sleeping most common? 26

What are the demographics of rough sleepers? 28

How reliable are official rough sleeping statistics? 29

2.2 The Rough Sleeping Data Framework 29

Indicators that rough sleeping is prevented 30

Indicators that rough sleeping is rare 30

Indicators that rough sleeping is brief 31

Indicators that rough sleeping is non-recurring 32

Data quality 32

2.3 Statistics from the London CHAIN database 33

2.4 Deaths of homeless people 36

Office for National Statistics analysis 36
Statistics from the Museum of Homelessness 36
2.5 Past approaches to counting rough sleepers 37

Summary

Rough sleeping refers to people who are homeless and sleeping in the open air, such as on streets, in parks and doorways, or in places not intended for habitation, such as cars, sheds and abandoned buildings. It is the most visible form of homelessness and poses significant risks to health and wellbeing. Despite sustained efforts by successive governments to reduce rough sleeping, the number of people estimated to be sleeping rough in England has increased over the long term.

Causes of rough sleeping

Rough sleeping arises from a combination of structural, personal and interpersonal factors. Structural drivers include poverty, the high cost of accommodation, limited welfare support, and shortages of affordable and social housing. Individual factors that may increase vulnerability include poor physical or mental health, substance dependency, offending histories, childhood trauma, domestic abuse and the loss of social support networks.

People typically enter rough sleeping following a specific triggering event, such as leaving asylum accommodation, a relationship breakdown, eviction, or being asked to leave by family or friends. Data from the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) database, which records information on people sleeping rough in Greater London, identifies the ending of asylum accommodation (after being granted permission to remain living in the UK) as the most commonly recorded reason for 'new' rough sleeping in 2025/26. Among new rough sleepers for whom data was recorded, 18.5% cited the end of asylum accommodation as the reason they lost their 'last settled base'. The annual CHAIN reports for 2022/23 and 2023/24 show a more than tenfold increase over this timeframe, in the number of new rough sleepers who had left Home Office accommodation prior to sleeping rough. Relationship breakdown also accounts for a growing share of rough sleepers.

Rough sleeping among specific groups and contemporary challenges

Certain groups of people face a heightened risk of rough sleeping. People with no recourse to public funds (because of their immigration status) are particularly vulnerable because they are ineligible for most welfare benefits, housing assistance and homelessness support. People leaving institutions,

including prisons, hospitals and Home Office asylum accommodation, are at increased risk. Data from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's rough sleeping data framework show that 9% of people sleeping rough in March 2026 had recently left an institution. Prison leavers are the largest group at risk of rough sleeping following discharge. People moving on from asylum accommodation and people being discharged from hospital also face heightened risks.

Some groups may also be underrepresented in official rough sleeping statistics. Women, young people and LGBT+ people may be less visible to outreach services or less likely to engage with homelessness services, often because of safety concerns. As a result, official data may not fully capture the scale of rough sleeping experienced by these groups.

Rural rough sleeping can be more difficult to identify and address because people may be dispersed across large geographical areas and face barriers accessing housing, services and essential support. A lack of pet-friendly accommodation can also contribute to rough sleeping, with some people unwilling to accept accommodation that does not allow them to keep their pets.

How many people are sleeping rough?

Despite considerable national government efforts to reduce rough sleeping over the last 15 years, an estimated 4,793 people slept rough on a given night in autumn 2025. This is a 3% increase on the 2024 estimate and a 171% increase on the 2010 estimate. The 2025 figure is slightly above the 2017 peak of 4,750. Rough sleeping is most prevalent in London and southern England, with 27% of the 2025 total recorded in London.

Other key points from the data include:

- Official statistics are recognised as underestimating the true extent of rough sleeping, as they do not account for all forms of homelessness or hidden populations.
- The majority of rough sleepers in 2025 were male (82%) and UK nationals (65%), with significant representation of EU nationals (13%).
- London consistently has the highest rates of rough sleeping, with demographic shifts showing increasing numbers from countries outside Europe and the UK.

The latest financial year report from the CHAIN database, CHAIN Greater London Annual Report 2025/26 reported that a total of 12,938 people were seen rough sleeping in London across the whole of 2025/26. This is a 2% decrease on 2024/25, a year where 13,231 people were recorded rough

sleeping, the highest number since records began. 8,078 people were seen sleeping rough for the first time in 2025/26.

The CHAIN annual report notes that decreases reported in 2021/22 were largely due to additional resources provided under the government's Everyone In initiative during the covid-19 pandemic. The subsequent increases in 2022/23 and 2023/24 likely reflect the end of these exceptional pandemic-related arrangements.

Efforts to improve data collection, including the introduction of the Rough Sleeping Data Framework in 2023, aim to provide a more comprehensive understanding of trends and outcomes, though challenges in methodology and resource allocation persist.

What measures have been suggested to reduce rough sleeping?

In January 2024, the Conservative government published a report on the circumstances preceding individuals' first experience of rough sleeping. It highlighted that the risk of rough sleeping is increased by missed opportunities for early intervention, gaps in specialist services and inadequate coordination between local authorities and services. It also said first-time rough sleepers are often unaware of housing support options, and that people can be less likely to engage with statutory services when they have had previous negative experiences with them.

In November 2024, multiple witnesses gave evidence to a one-off oral evidence session conducted by the Housing, Communities and Local Government (HCLG) Select Committee as part of their short inquiry on rough sleeping. Witnesses argued that reducing rough sleeping would require greater emphasis on prevention, alongside more social rented housing, higher housing benefit support, and increased access to specialist and supported housing. They also said that some local authorities were preventing people from accessing statutory support.

In its response to the HCLG Committee's inquiry (PDF), the Labour government highlighted the development of a cross-government homelessness strategy and measures to prevent homelessness, reduce rough sleeping and improve support for vulnerable groups.

A National Plan to End Homelessness and the Rough Sleeping Programme

In December 2025, the government published its cross-departmental strategy, A National Plan to End Homelessness, which includes a commitment to halve rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament. The strategy emphasises prevention, earlier intervention, improved coordination between public services, action to prevent people leaving institutions into homelessness, and measures to strengthen the evidence base and support available to groups at increased risk of rough sleeping.

In August 2026, the government launched the Rough Sleeping Programme and has since committed £874 million over three years to support people sleeping rough into accommodation and sustain routes off the streets.

1 The causes of rough sleeping

According to government guidance (for data collection purposes), 'rough sleeping' refers to people who are about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). The term also includes people in buildings or other places not meant for people to live in (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or 'bashes' (makeshift shelters)).

Rough sleeping is the most visible and dangerous form of homelessness and successive governments in England in recent decades have tried to reduce it. The Labour government's cross-government strategy A National Plan to End Homelessness (December 2025) committed to halving rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament. The government has since launched a national drive to end it.

The national Rough Sleeping Programme was launched in August 2026, backed by £442 million over three years. The programme includes:

- Routes Off the Street, providing quick access to accommodation and support
- Settled Accommodation, providing longer-term housing and support for people with complex needs.

In the October 2026 Budget, the government announced a further £432 million for the national programme, increasing total funding to £874 million between 2026/27 and 2028/29.[1]

Like homelessness more broadly, the causes of rough sleeping include a combination of interrelated structural, individual and interpersonal factors. This section provides an overview of what is known about the causes of rough sleeping, with a distinction made between the circumstances immediately preceding an experience of rough sleeping ('triggers') and underlying causes.

Information on the National Plan to End Homelessness is outlined in section 1.4 of the Commons Library briefing Temporary accommodation in England: Issues and government action.

The Commons Library briefing Statutory homelessness (England): Causes and government policy provides information about the causes of homelessness.

[1] HM Treasury, Budget 2026, paras 5.10 and 6.120

Background information on government action to reduce rough sleeping in England is provided in the Commons Library briefing Rough sleeping in England: Local and national government action (January 2025).

1.1 Reasons for leaving or loss of last settled home

Homelessness is often triggered by events such as eviction, relationship breakdown, or leaving care, custody, or other institutions, particularly where people lack the support or housing options needed to prevent homelessness.[2]

The following section examines the circumstances immediately preceding rough sleeping by looking at the reasons people left or lost their last settled home. These reasons can be understood as the immediate 'triggers' of homelessness.

Section 3 of this briefing provides an overview of rough sleeping data.

Similarities between the triggers for rough sleeping and statutory homelessness

It is not possible to directly compare the triggers for rough sleeping with those for other forms of homelessness such as sofa surfing, staying in a refuge, or living in other forms of temporary accommodation. This is due to differences in how the loss of an individual's last settled home is recorded in rough sleeping statistics compared with how it is recorded in statutory homelessness data.[3]

However, there are similarities in some of the reported reasons for people losing their last settled home (or 'base' as it is referred to in the rough sleeping statistics).

Relationship breakdown and being asked to leave

Local housing authorities must take 'reasonable steps' to help eligible applicants secure suitable accommodation if they are homeless. This is called the homelessness relief duty.[4]

Statutory homelessness data show that 37% of applicants owed a homelessness relief duty in 2024/25 reported losing their last settled home because family or friends were no longer willing to accommodate them, or

2 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), A National Plan to End Homelessness. Analytical Annex, 11 December 2025, p2

3 The statutory homelessness live tables record reasons for loss of last settled home for applicants who are homeless and owed a relief duty. Several indicators differ between these figures and those captured in the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) database which contains information about rough sleepers in Greater London.

4 Housing Act 1996, s189B

because of a non-violent relationship breakdown with a partner. These reasons accounted for 30% and 7% of applicants respectively.[5]

The national annual rough sleeping snapshot does not include information about why people ended up rough sleeping.

According to the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) database, which contains information about rough sleepers in Greater London, 18% of new rough sleepers in 2024/25 said "relationship breakdown" was the cause of departure from their last settled base.[6] This category is broken down by type of departure, such as "asked to leave by the person they were staying with" (15%), "left of own accord" (2%), and "other/not known" (1%).[7]

Ending of asylum accommodation

There are also similarities in the growing number of cases where homelessness is preceded by the ending of asylum accommodation. 13,630 applicants who were homeless and owed the relief duty in 2024/25 lost their last settled home after being required to leave Home Office asylum accommodation, accounting for 7.5% of all relief cases for the year.[8] The figure was a more than threefold increase on the number in 2022/23, which was 3,850 and accounted for 2.4% of all relief cases for that year.9

A 'positive asylum decision' means the Home Office has approved someone's asylum application and granted them permission to stay in the UK.

These statistics only include applicants owed a homelessness relief duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. People recorded as having left asylum accommodation will therefore generally have received a positive asylum decision and become eligible for homelessness assistance. The figures do not capture the full extent of homelessness or rough sleeping among people leaving asylum accommodation, particularly those who are ineligible for assistance because of their immigration status.

According to the CHAIN report for Greater London in 2025/26, 16% (957) of new rough sleepers who had information recorded about their last settled base had left Home Office accommodation prior to sleeping rough: a more than tenfold increase on the number recorded in 2022/23 (73 new rough sleepers, accounting for 4% of the total where information was recorded).[10]

The table on the following page shows the reasons given by 4,978 new rough sleepers for leaving their last settled base in 2025/26, as reported in section 4.1 of the CHAIN Greater London full annual report for the year.[11]

5 The relief duty is owed to people who are homeless and eligible for assistance under section 189B of the Housing Act 1996; MHCLG, Statutory homelessness live tables, Table A2R, 13 August 2026

6 Greater London Authority (GLA), CHAIN Greater London full report April 2025 – March 2026, Section 4.1, Table 5

7 GLA, CHAIN Greater London full report April 2025 – March 2026, Section 4.1, Table 5

8 MHCLG, Statutory homelessness live tables, Table A2R, 13 August 2026

9 MHCLG, Statutory homelessness live tables, table A2R, 13 August 2026

10 GLA, CHAIN Greater London full report April 2022 – March 2023, Section 4.1, Tables 5 and 9

11 The total number of new rough sleepers recorded in 2025/26 was 8,657. Information on their last settled base was recorded for 4,978 individuals. The table excludes 3,679 people new to rough sleeping for whom information on their last settled base was not recorded.

Reasons for leaving last settled base

People new to sleeping rough in Greater London during 2025/26

Reason	Number of people	% of total recorded
Relationships / Domestic issues	1,185	24%
Relationship breakdown	*872*	*18%*
End of time-limited stay	*252*	*5%*
Death of relative/friend	*48*	*1%*
Move nearer family/friend	*13*	*0%*
End of asylum accomodation	957	16%
Financial issues	637	13%
Loss of employment	*215*	*4%*
Living costs	*174*	*3%*
Issues with benefits	*88*	*2%*
Other	*84*	*2%*
Change in rent/mortgage	*76*	*2%*
Housing related issues	611	12%
End of time-limited stay	252	5%
End of tenancy agreement	*134*	*3%*
Illegal eviction	*123*	*2%*
Housing conditions	*81*	*2%*
Given non-priority decision	*21*	*0%*
No settled base since arriving in UK	336	7%
Behavioral / Legal issues	241	5%
Anti social behaviour - perpetrator	*106*	*2%*
Unmanaged support need	*100*	*2%*
Taken into custody	*24*	*0%*
Domestic violence - perpetrator	*11*	*0%*
Victim of abuse or violence	156	3%
Harassment/abuse/violence - victim	*98*	*2%*
Domestic violence - victim	*58*	*1%*
No departure - still has the accomodation	50	1%
Other	617	12%
Not known	410	8%
Total (excl.not recorded)	**4,978**	**100%**
Not recorded	3,679	

Source: Greater London Authority, CHAIN annual report April 2025 – March 2026, Section 4.1

Flow of rough sleeping

In January 2024, the government published research into the 'flow' of rough sleeping. The aim of the study was to understand the circumstances preceding individuals' first experience of rough sleeping, and whether any prevention opportunities were missed.[12] The researchers found the following: [13]

- First-time rough sleepers are often unaware of housing support options, and low levels of trust with statutory services based on previous experiences can act as a barrier to timely engagement with these services.
- People without strong social networks are at greater risk of rough sleeping after leaving their last settled accommodation.
- Some people may move between different areas before they end up sleeping rough because of social connections or the perception of accessing effective support services in specific areas.
- While joint working between local authorities was evident, its extent was constrained by local connection requirements.
- Barriers to preventing the flow of rough sleeping include:
  - the pressure to prioritise intervention services for people at immediate risk of rough sleeping
  - the commissioning of services that only work with individuals who have become homeless or slept rough for the first time
- A lack of coordination among statutory services and between service providers across other local authority areas can impede support provision and, in some instances, lead to accommodation being arranged at short notice. This is a particular challenge for supporting people with complex needs and people leaving institutions.
- Gaps in specialist services can result in people not engaging with support to prevent rough sleeping and/or living in accommodation that does not meet their support needs.

[12] Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), Flow of rough sleeping – final report, January 2024

[13] As above.

1.2 Underlying causes

The underlying causes of rough sleeping are not entirely distinct from the causes of homelessness more broadly.

Section two of the "Analytical Annex" to the government's National Plan to End Homelessness outlines the evidence on the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping.[14] In summary, it says that homelessness and rough sleeping arise from a combination of structural pressures and individual circumstances. Important structural drivers include poverty, the high cost of accommodation, limited welfare support, and shortages of affordable and social housing. Individual factors such as domestic abuse, mental ill health, substance dependency, offending histories, childhood trauma, and the loss of social support networks can increase vulnerability, particularly for people experiencing repeat or long-term homelessness. Family homelessness is often linked to economic hardship and housing insecurity, while single homelessness is more frequently associated with personal circumstances such as leaving care or custody.[15]

In 2019, the government published the final report of its commissioned review of the evidence on the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping.[16] The authors note that while there is broad consensus on how the causes of homelessness should be organised (between structural and individual factors, which can interrelate and vary), there are gaps in our understanding of the relative importance of different factors, how they interact, and their effects.[17]

The 2019 review was completed alongside two other pieces of government-commissioned research aimed at exploring options for modelling future homelessness trends and assessing policy options.[18]

In November 2024, the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee launched a short inquiry on rough sleeping, to explore the causes of rough sleeping, why it has been on the rise in recent years, and potential solutions. Witnesses highlighted several themes during a one-off oral evidence session on 12 November 2024, including:[19]

- Investment in homelessness prevention, with resources directed upstream, as a potentially more effective approach than responding at the point of crisis.

14 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), A National Plan to End Homelessness. Analytical Annex, 11 December 2025
15 MHCLG, A National Plan to End Homelessness. Analytical Annex, 11 December 2025, p2
16 MHCLG and DWP, Causes of homelessness and rough sleeping: rapid evidence assessment (PDF), 25 March 2019.
17 MHCLG and DWP, Causes of homelessness and rough sleeping: rapid evidence assessment (PDF), 25 March 2019
18 MHCLG, Causes of homelessness and rough sleeping feasibility study, 25 March 2019
19 HCLG Committee, Oral evidence: Rough sleeping HC 339 (PDF), 12 November 2024

- The practice of 'gatekeeping', which can prevent some people from receiving the help to which they are entitled when approaching a local authority.
- The shortage of social rented housing and insufficient housing benefits for private renters, creating significant barriers to avoiding and exiting rough sleeping.
- Insufficient specialist and supported housing provision in some areas to meet need and demand.
- The positive outcomes associated with the Housing First model, alongside barriers to its effective delivery, including funding uncertainty, shortages of suitable housing and challenges in securing the commitment and cooperation of key delivery partners.[20]
- Resource constraints facing local authorities and their partners, despite efforts to support as many people as possible, alongside the potential benefits of a more joined-up approach to grant funding.
- The need to improve arrangements for housing people leaving Home Office accommodation.
- The importance of good-quality evidence and data in supporting decision-making about services and interventions.
- The role of cross-government collaboration in delivering the policy changes needed to address rough sleeping.

The then Chair of the committee, Florence Eshalomi, set out the inquiry's findings and recommendations in a letter to the government (PDF) dated 11 February 2025.[21] The committee's recommendations included:

- Greater investment in homelessness prevention, supported by longer-term and more streamlined funding arrangements for local authorities and service providers.
- Action to increase the supply of social, affordable and supported housing, alongside measures to help people sustain tenancies and avoid homelessness.
- Reforms to reduce barriers to accessing housing support, improve support for people with health and addiction needs, and strengthen arrangements for people leaving institutions and asylum accommodation.

---

20 More information about Housing First is provided in section 2 of the Commons Library briefing CBP-02007, Rough sleeping in England: Local and national government action, January 2025

21 HCLG Committee, Rough sleeping, Letter from the Chair to the Secretary of State and the Minister for Homelessness and Democracy dated 11 February 2025 concerning rough sleeping, 14 February 2025.

- Wider use of effective interventions such as Housing First, supported by sufficient housing provision and funding for a range of support models.
- Improved cross-government coordination and better data collection and sharing to inform policy and service delivery.

In responding to the committee's recommendations on 8 April 2025 (PDF), the government emphasised that its approach to rough sleeping and homelessness would be shaped through the development of a new cross-government homelessness and rough sleeping strategy. The response also pointed to a range of existing and planned measures, including increased homelessness prevention funding, reforms to private renting, investment in affordable housing (including supported housing), support for vulnerable groups (including care leavers, veterans and prison leavers), and improvements to data collection and service coordination.[22]

The government's national strategy A National Plan to End Homelessness was published on 11 December 2025.

1.3 Rough sleeping among specific groups

Evidence indicates that people from some groups face increased risks of rough sleeping. These are summarised below.

People with no recourse to public funds

In the UK, the term 'no recourse to public funds' broadly applies to people who are subject to immigration control as defined by section 115(9) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

Unless an exemption applies, people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) are ineligible for most types of statutory welfare, housing and homelessness assistance. This means they are particularly vulnerable to rough sleeping.

Some organisations have criticised the lack of support for people who are homeless and have NRPF status.

In January 2022, national homelessness charity Homeless Link published a policy briefing Facing up to homelessness among non-UK nationals. The charity said that the briefing "reviews the existing evidence to make the case for the inclusion of people with immigration-based eligibility restrictions in mainstream homelessness systems, for good."

On 22 September 2022, the No Accommodation Network (NACCOM), published a briefing outlining their views on how the 2019 Conservative government's rough sleeping strategy approaches ending rough sleeping in migrant communities. NACCOM is a national network of frontline organisations and charities across the UK whose work aims to "end

[22] HCLG Committee, Rough sleeping, Letter from the Minister for Homelessness and Democracy to the Chair dated 8 April 2025 concerning the government's response to the Committee's inquiry on Rough Sleeping, 8 May 2025.

destitution" amongst people seeking asylum, refugees and other migrants who are unable to access public funds because of their immigration status.

People leaving an institution

Many rough sleepers have spent time in institutional settings such as local authority care, prison or the asylum support system. Data reported through the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) new rough sleeping data framework shows that 9% of the total 7,541 people sleeping rough in March 2026 had recently left an institution.[23] Section 2.2 of this briefing provides a breakdown of these numbers by type of institution.

The National Plan to End Homelessness outlines the government's "long-term ambition that no one should leave a public institution into homelessness". First steps towards this will be taken through:

> joint cross-government targets to reduce the number of people leaving institutions into homelessness, such as prisons, hospitals and care to improve information sharing for people leaving asylum accommodation, and to improve awareness of local support for former members of the Armed Forces at risk of homelessness. This is a coordinated effort built on strong partnerships across government and with councils, wider public services and the voluntary and community sector.[24]

Prison discharge

Prison leavers are at significant risk of homelessness and rough sleeping. A July 2026 House of Lords Library briefing Homelessness and rough sleeping among released prisoners reported that around 1,000 prisoners per month, representing 14% of all prison leavers, were sleeping rough on the night of their release in the year April 2024 to March 2025. This was an increase of around 40% on the previous year. The briefing emphasised that access to stable accommodation is critical to successful resettlement and reducing the risk of reoffending.

The National Plan to End Homelessness identifies prison leavers as the largest group at risk of rough sleeping after leaving a public institution. The strategy commits to halving, by the end of this Parliament, the proportion of people subject to probation supervision who become homeless on their first night after release, while increasing the number of prison leavers living in settled accommodation three months after release and beyond. To achieve this, the government will continue funding Community Accommodation Service provision, strengthen pre-release planning and partnership working between prisons and local services, improve information sharing and accommodation matching through digital systems, and seek to reduce homelessness risks associated with short custodial sentences through the implementation of the Independent Sentencing Review.

---

23 MHCLG, Rough Sleeping Data Framework, June 2024, 3 October 2024

24 MHCLG, A National Plan to End Homelessness, para 3.1

Leaving Home Office asylum accommodation

People leaving Home Office accommodation after a decision on their asylum application face increased risks of rough sleeping. As noted above, the ending of asylum accommodation after a positive decision from the Home Office is the leading cause of homelessness among people who are new to rough sleeping in Greater London.

Research published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in December 2025 found that people granted refugee status often struggle to secure alternative accommodation before their asylum support ends. The research identified short move-on periods, delays in information sharing, difficulties accessing benefits, and shortages of affordable housing as factors contributing to homelessness and rough sleeping among people leaving asylum accommodation.[25]

Through its National Plan to End Homelessness, the government has committed to ensuring local authorities receive timely information about refugees at risk of homelessness, alongside improvements to referral and data-sharing processes between asylum accommodation providers and local authorities. The national plan also commits to providing early, targeted support to help refugees secure housing and employment as they transition from asylum accommodation into settled communities.[26]

Hospital discharge

Work carried out by Homeless Link and St Mungo's on behalf of the Department of Health in 2012 found more than 70% of people who were homeless on their admission to hospital were discharged without receiving help with their housing situation.[27] Since October 2018, emergency departments, urgent treatment centres and hospitals have been subject to the duty to refer under section 10 of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.[28] However, a freedom of information request submitted to hospital trusts in England by The Independent in early 2024 showed that at least 4,200 people were discharged from hospital with no fixed abode in 2022/23.[29]

The government's National Plan to End Homelessness commits to ensuring that "no one eligible for homelessness assistance is discharged to the street after a hospital stay".[30] To achieve this, the government intends to work with

25 MHCLG, Systems-wide evaluation of homelessness and rough sleeping: Interaction with the asylum system, 11 December 2025

26 MHCLG, A National Plan to End Homelessness, para 3.4.6

27 Housing Learning and Improvement Network, Improving hospital admission and discharge for people who are homeless, 16 March 2012. Note that hospitals are now subject to the duty to refer subject to the person giving their consent – see section 1.

28 Information about the duty to refer is provided in the Commons Library briefing CBP-02007, Rough sleeping in England: Local and national government action, January 2025

29 The Independent – news article, Cancer and stroke NHS patients among thousands discharged with nowhere to live, 17 March 2024 [accessed 19 December 2024]

30 MHCLG, A National Plan to End Homelessness, para 3.4.2

the NHS and councils to implement existing discharge guidance, Discharging people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This will include[31]:

- promoting earlier identification of housing needs
- improving joint discharge planning between the NHS and councils
- expanding access to intermediate care services
- ensuring people receive appropriate ongoing health, care and housing support after discharge

The government will also work with councils and Integrated Care Boards to improve how funding streams, including the reformed Better Care Fund and the new Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant from 2026/27, can be used to fund tailored intermediate care services for people experiencing homelessness, supporting recovery and continuity of care after hospital discharge.[32]

Groups likely to be underrepresented in official data

Women, young people and LGBT+ people may be underrepresented in official rough sleeping figures.

Women

Evidence indicates that official rough sleeping counts may underestimate the true scale of rough sleeping among women, who may be less visible due to the risks associated with sleeping on the streets. To keep themselves safe, many women experiencing rough sleeping will shelter in locations unlikely to be identified by outreach workers tasked with verifying and supporting people sleeping rough. These locations include buses, trains, hospital waiting rooms, in squats, and many other locations where they are unlikely to be identified by outreach workers.[33]

In September 2023, a group of women's and homelessness organisations compiled the first national week-long census of women sleeping rough in 41 local authority areas across England.[34] The aim of the census was "to collect more comprehensive data on women experiencing rough sleeping and trial a different method of data collection."[35] The results of the most recent census (2025) highlighted that the number of women sleeping rough could be up to

31 As above.

32 As above.

33 Solace Women's Aid, Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2023 Report (PDF), May 2024; HCLG Committee, Oral evidence: Rough sleeping HC 339 (PDF), 12 November 2024, Q6

34 Solace Women's Aid, Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2023 Report (PDF), May 2024. The local authorities were mainly in London and 14 were in other areas of England.

35 Solace Women's Aid, Women's Rough Sleeping Census [accessed 2 November 2026]

ten times higher than suggested by officially recorded figures for the same areas.[36]

In September 2026, a coalition of charities, led by Single Homeless Project and Solace Women's Aid wrote to the Prime Minister urging the government to fund and roll out the Women's Rough Sleeping Census across England from 2027.[37] The government says it "recognises that women experiencing rough sleeping are often less visible and may be at greater risk of violence, abuse and exploitation" and encourages all local authorities to carry out a women's census in their area.[38]

Through its National Plan to End Homelessness, the government has committed to developing an Outreach Toolkit and a Single Homelessness and Complex Needs Toolkit. These toolkits will include guidance on identifying and engaging women sleeping rough, informed by evidence from the Women's Census and engagement with specialist organisations.

The government has provided guidance on how it expects local authorities to support women experiencing rough sleeping through the Rough Sleeping Programme:

> Local areas should not rely on outreach to identify women who may need support, and instead work proactively with specialist women's services, domestic abuse and violence against women and girls services, health partners and community organisations to identify and support women who may be sleeping rough or at risk of doing so.
>
> Support should be trauma-informed, centred on safety and designed around individual needs. Areas should consider how accommodation (including single-sex accommodation with specialist, intensive, trauma-informed support), support and outreach can be delivered in ways that help women feel safe and access help early, including through links with specialist services where appropriate.[39]

Young people

In July 2024, Depaul UK conducted a pilot Young People's Rough Sleeping Census across three London boroughs to gather more accurate data on the prevalence of rough sleeping among young people.[40] Its findings revealed that 28% of the 18-to-25-year-old young people surveyed had slept rough in London but were not recorded in official data. The type of accommodation that young people were most likely to have left before sleeping rough for the first time was asylum accommodation.

---

36 Solace Women's Aid, Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2025 National Report: Missing Women, June 2026

37 Single Homeless Project, Make Women Count, 21 September 2026

38 PQ 33761 [on Sleeping Rough: Women], 20 October 2026

39 MHCLG, Rough Sleeping Programme Guidance, 30 September 2026

40 In total, the census reached 40 young people who said they had slept rough in the three months prior to completing the survey.

Like women's homelessness, homelessness among 16-to-24-year-olds is less likely to be picked up during usual outreach counts.[41]

LGBT+ people

Studies have indicated LGBT+ people are likely to be underrepresented in official figures. However, a dedicated census has not been carried out to understand the potential extent to which this is the case.

Research commissioned by the 2019 Conservative government highlights that "LGBT participants reported making concerted efforts to remain out of sight to avoid other homeless people as a result of fearing for their safety as LGBT people." [42] The findings also revealed that many service providers interviewed for the study "reported the view that LGBT homeless people were at particular risk of rough sleeping because mainstream hostels can be hostile spaces for this group."[43]

A 2024 Cardiff University study, LGBTQ+ Housing & Homelessness Survey 2022-23, also found that "the LGBTQ+ population as a whole is not engaging with homelessness services".[44]

1.4 Rural rough sleeping

Rural rough sleeping can present different challenges to rough sleeping in urban areas. According to Homeless Link's Spotlight on Rural Homelessness, people sleeping rough in rural areas may be dispersed across large geographical areas and sleep in isolated locations, making them harder for services to identify and support. The organisation also points to factors such as limited affordable housing, low-paid and insecure employment, poor transport links, and difficulties accessing homelessness services as contributing to homelessness and rough sleeping in rural communities.[45]

A report by the countryside charity, CPRE, published in December 2023, found that rural rough sleeping had increased by 40% in the last five years. The authors of the report said that people sleeping rough in rural areas experience specific challenges including difficulties accessing food, water and other supplies, and higher prices in rural shops which are "often located too

41 HCLG Committee, Oral evidence: Rough sleeping HC 339 (PDF), 12 November 2024, Q8

42 MHCLG, The Government Equalities Office, Equality Hub, Women and Equalities Unit, Office for Equal Opportunity, Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people's experiences of homelessness, 27 September 2024, Section 5.4

43 MHCLG, The Government Equalities Office, Equality Hub, Women and Equalities Unit, Office for Equal Opportunity, Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people's experiences of homelessness, 27 September 2024, Section 5.4

44 Edith England, Neil Turnbull, 2022-23 LGBTQ+ Housing and Homelessness Survey Final Report, p54

45 Homeless Link, Spotlight on Rural Homelessness [accessed 30 October 2026]

far away". They also highlighted challenges with accessing support through food banks:

> Food banks in rural areas were also limited and often only open once or twice per week. Donations for food banks are often inappropriate as items need to be cooked, and most people sleeping rough do not have access to cooking facilities. There was also an interesting denial of the fact of rough sleeping in rural areas at all as well as ignorance about service provision.[46]

1.5 Pet ownership

A lack of pet-friendly accommodation can force people to sleep rough rather than give up their pet.

Pet ownership is common among people experiencing rough sleeping. The Centre for Homelessness Impact (CHI) notes that studies report anywhere between 5% and 25% of people experiencing homelessness own a pet, with the majority being dogs.[47] Studies have also shown that "companion animals" play a crucial role in providing emotional support, acting as a "buffer against stressful life events", and that dogs in particular can also help facilitate social interaction between rough sleepers and the general public.[48]

Lack of pet-friendly accommodation services

Despite the evidence for the positive impacts of pet ownership, availability of pet-friendly accommodation is a commonly reported challenge for pet-owning rough sleepers in England.

A poll carried out by St Mungo's in April 2024 showed that in the 12 months prior to taking part in the survey, 43% of people experienced challenges in finding housing that allows pets. The proportion rose to 58% for people in Greater London, and 70% for people aged 18 to 24.[49]

According to a 2022 study by the Dogs Trust, 70% of homelessness services said that their clients had experienced barriers to accessing homelessness services because they owned a dog. In addition, 84% of service providers were aware of cases where someone had refused an offer of accommodation because they would have had to give up their dog.[50]

Several organisations are working to address this issue including:

46 Dr Carin Tunaker, Professor Helen Carr, Laura Burke with Guillermo Reyes-Pascual, Homelessness in the countryside: A hidden crisis, March 2023, p26

47 CHI, Unleashing hope: the power of dog ownership for people experiencing homelessness, 21 August 2023

48 CHI, Unleashing hope: the power of dog ownership for people experiencing homelessness, 21 August 2023

49 St Mungo's – news story, 50% of individuals have been forced to choose their pets over housing or face homelessness, 15 April 2024 [accessed 13 January 2025]

50 Dogs Trust – news story, New study from Dogs Trust reveals lack of dog-friendly accommodation is a barrier for people experiencing homelessness, 7 November 2022 [accessed 13 January 2025]

- The Dogs Trust's Together Through Homelessness schemes, which collaborates with hostels and housing providers to encourage pet-friendly policies. They include an online directory of dog-friendly homelessness services, searchable by region, town, or postcode.
- StreetVet Accredited Hostel Scheme, which provides training and support to hostels, enabling them to implement positive pet policies and accommodate residents with pets.
- Street Paws, which aims to prevent people from having to choose between their pets and accessing shelter by partnering with temporary accommodation to help them become pet friendly.

2 The number of rough sleepers

2.1 The number of rough sleepers, 2010 to present

What are the trends in rough sleeping numbers?

An estimated 4,793 people slept rough on a single night in autumn 2025.

A 'snapshot' of the number of people sleeping rough on a given night in autumn is published annually by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG, formerly known as the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)).[51] The most recent available data is for autumn 2024, with figures available back to autumn 2010.

Local authorities are asked to produce either a formal count or an estimate of the number of people sleeping rough in the area. Counts must be conducted between 1 October and 30 November each year. Estimates should relate to a date in the same period and be produced in consultation with agencies working with rough sleepers in the area.

The resulting statistics are intended to give an idea of the number of people sleeping rough on a given night in this period, rather than a complete picture of the number of people sleeping rough across the year.

In 2025, 51 local authorities carried out a count of rough sleepers and 245 produced an estimate. 175 of these estimates included a 'spotlight count', where a count is taken in some parts of the local authority and this data is combined with other evidence.

The charity Homeless Link verified each response from local authorities independently.[52]

An estimated 4,793 people slept rough on a single night in autumn 2025, an increase of 3% on the number in autumn 2024. The number of rough sleepers in 2024 was 164% higher than the number in 2010 (1,768 people).

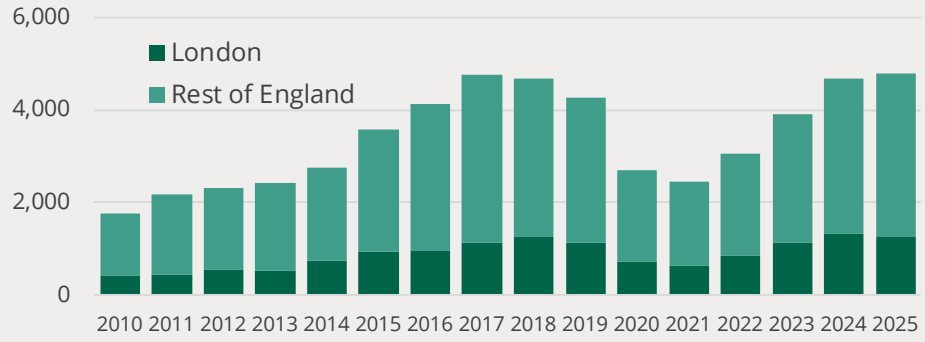
The estimated number of people sleeping rough on a given night increased each year between 2010 and 2017, when it reached a peak of 4,750.

[51] The department currently called the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG, since July 2024) has been known by multiple names since it was first created in 2001 when it was called the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). It was known as the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) between 2006 and 2018, and MHCLG between January 2018 and September 2021. Between September 2021 and July 2024, it was called the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). It returned to the name MHCLG in July 2024.

[52] MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2024, 27 February 2025

The number of rough sleepers was higher in 2025

Estimated number of rough sleepers on a given night in autumn, England



Source: MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: Autumn 2025 – Tables, Table 1

Autumn rough sleeping estimates, 2010 - 2025

Estimated number of people sleeping rough on a given night

	England		London	
	Number	% change on prev. year	Number	% change on prev. year
2010	1,768		415	
2011	2,181	*23%*	446	*7%*
2012	2,309	*6%*	557	*25%*
2013	2,414	*5%*	543	*-3%*
2014	2,744	*14%*	742	*37%*
2015	3,569	*30%*	940	*27%*
2016	4,134	*16%*	964	*3%*
2017	4,751	*15%*	1,137	*18%*
2018	4,677	*-2%*	1,283	*13%*
2019	4,266	*-9%*	1,136	*-11%*
2020	2,688	*-37%*	714	*-37%*
2021	2,443	*-9%*	640	*-10%*
2022	3,069	*26%*	858	*34%*
2023	3,898	*27%*	1,132	*32%*
2024	4,667	*20%*	1,318	*16%*
2025	4,793	*3%*	1,277	*-3%*

Source: MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: Autumn 2025 – Tables, Table 1

As the chart above shows, there was a downward trend in the number of people sleeping rough from 2017 to 2021. The estimate for 2025 is 96% higher than the estimate for 2021, and 12% higher than the 2019 count, the last before the 2019 pandemic.

The table shows full figures for both England and London. Over a quarter (27%) of rough sleepers in 2025 were recorded in London.

It's likely that much of the fall in rough sleeping between 2020 and 2021 was due to the Conservative government's covid-19 response, as well as subsequent efforts to retain low levels of rough sleeping.

The government's attempt to reduce the number of rough sleepers during the early stages of the pandemic has become known as the 'Everyone In' initiative. On 27 March 2020, local authorities were directed to provide accommodation to people who were either sleeping rough, at risk of sleeping rough or living in homeless accommodation that would make it difficult to self-isolate.[53]

The Commons Library briefing Coronavirus: Support for rough sleepers (England) has more detail on the government's response to rough sleeping during the pandemic.

Where is rough sleeping most common?

The table below shows the rate of rough sleeping in each region in England in autumn 2025 (the number of rough sleepers per 100,000 people living in the region). London had the highest rate of rough sleeping (14.7 rough sleepers per 100,000 people), followed by the South West (9.1) and the South East (8.4).

London has the highest rate of rough sleeping

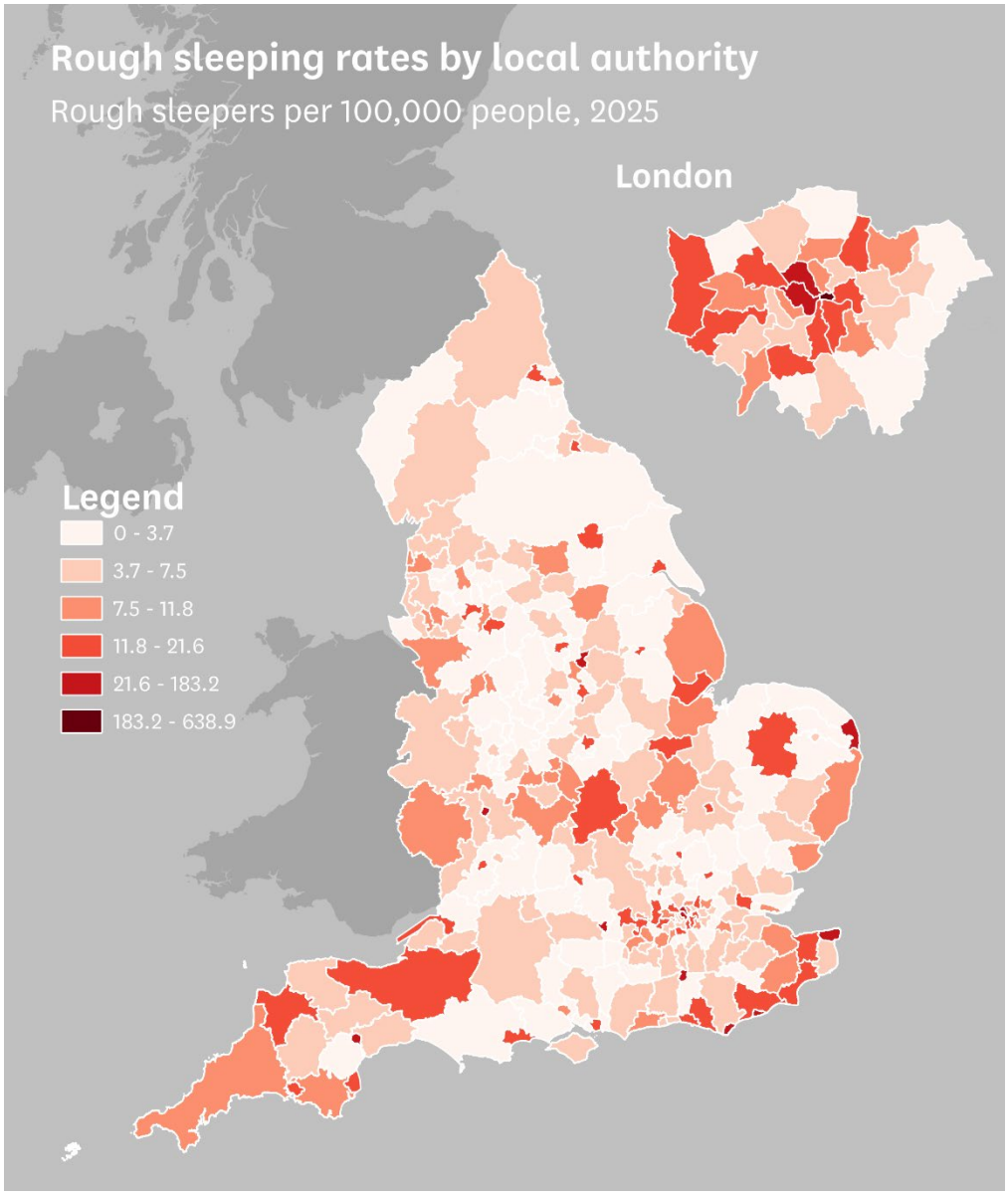
Rough sleepers per 100,000 people by region, 2025

Region	Number of rough sleepers	Rate per 100,000 people
London	1,277	14.0
South West	585	9.9
South East	797	8.2
East Midlands	387	7.6
East of England	437	6.6
West Midlands	378	6.1
North East	162	5.9
Yorks & the Humber	329	5.8
North West	441	5.7
England	**4,793**	**8.2**

Source: MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2025 – Tables, Table 1 and 5

[53] MHCLG and Luke Hall, Coronavirus (COVID-19): letter from Minister Hall to local authorities on plans to protect rough sleepers, 27 March 2020

The map below shows the rate of rough sleeping in each local authority in England in autumn 2025. Local authorities with the highest rough sleeping rates are mostly in London and the south of England.



Source: MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2025 - Tables, Table 5

The table below shows the local authorities with the highest rates of rough sleeping, within and outside London. The City of London has a high rate because it has a fairly high number of rough sleepers and a small resident population. Westminster has a high rate because it has the highest number of rough sleepers in the country by a considerable margin.

Which local authorities had the highest rate of rough sleeping?

Rough sleepers per 100,000 people: top five local authorities, Autumn 2025

Within London			Outside London		
Local authority	Number of rough sleepers	Rate per 100,000 people	Local authority	Number of rough sleepers	Rate per 100,000 people
City of London	89	589.0	Middlesbrough	76	48.7
Westminster	496	236.2	Gloucester	65	46.9
Camden	97	44.7	Hastings	38	41.7
Southwark	90	28.6	Reading	75	41.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	53	28.1	Stoke-on-Trent	108	39.9

Source: MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: Autumn 2025 – Tables, Table 1 and 5

What are the demographics of rough sleepers?

Local authorities also collect demographic information as part of the autumn 'snapshot'. Demographic information isn't recorded for all rough sleepers, so this data is subject to some uncertainty.

Demographics of rough sleepers in England

Estimated number of rough sleepers, 2025

	England		London	
	Number	% of total	Number	% of total
Gender				
Male	3,938	82%	1,029	81%
Female	733	15%	185	14%
Not known	122	3%	63	5%
Nationality				
UK	3,101	65%	447	35%
EU	622	13%	303	24%
Non-EU	546	11%	293	23%
Not known	524	11%	234	18%
Age				
18-25	212	4%	66	5%
26 and over	4,108	86%	1,009	79%
Not known	473	10%	202	16%

Source: MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: Autumn 2025 – Tables, Tables 2a-c

The table above summarises the rough sleeping data for 2025. The majority of rough sleepers were male (82%), while a relatively small number were female (15%). 86% were aged 26 and over and 4% were aged 18 to 25. As mentioned in section 2 of this briefing, evidence suggests that women and young people may be underrepresented in official statistics.

Nationality was also recorded. 65% of rough sleepers were UK nationals, 13% were EU nationals, and 11% were non-UK, non-EU nationals. In London, rough sleepers were more likely to be from overseas: 24% were nationals of EU countries and 23% were nationals of non-EU, non-UK countries.

How reliable are official rough sleeping statistics?

The rough sleeping statistics published by MHCLG are understood not to give a complete picture of the number of people who sleep rough during a given year, and do not capture data on other forms of homelessness.

MHCLG described the autumn figures as a 'snapshot' of rough sleeping and notes that "accurately estimating the number of people sleeping rough within a local authority is inherently difficult given the hidden nature of rough sleeping".[54]

The figures do not have 'accredited official statistics' status. This is an accreditation that indicates official statistics have been independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation, and meet the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.[55]

In July 2020, the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) completed a review of the compliance of the rough sleeping estimates with the Code of Practice for Statistics. A letter from the OSR to the Head of Profession for Statistics at DLUHC highlighted "positive features that demonstrate the quality and value of the statistics" as well as identifying areas for improvement.[56]

2.2 The Rough Sleeping Data Framework

In May 2023, MHCLG (then DLUHC) launched the Rough Sleeping Data Framework, a set of metrics designed to monitor the extent to which rough sleeping is "prevented where possible, and where it does occur [is] rare, brief, and non-recurring".

MHCLG collects monthly data from local authorities on these metrics. Unlike the annual count, the data is not independently verified but is quality-assured by MHCLG.

MHCLG publishes the data in a quarterly release. The release with data up to March 2026 covered all the indicators and is summarised below.

54 MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2024, 27 February 2025
55 UK Statistics Authority, Types of official statistics [accessed 29 November 2024]
56 OSR, Letter from Mark Pont to Sandra Tudor: Compliance Check of Rough sleeping snapshot in England, 3 July 2020

Indicators that rough sleeping is prevented

MHCLG's indicators of the extent to which rough sleeping is prevented are:

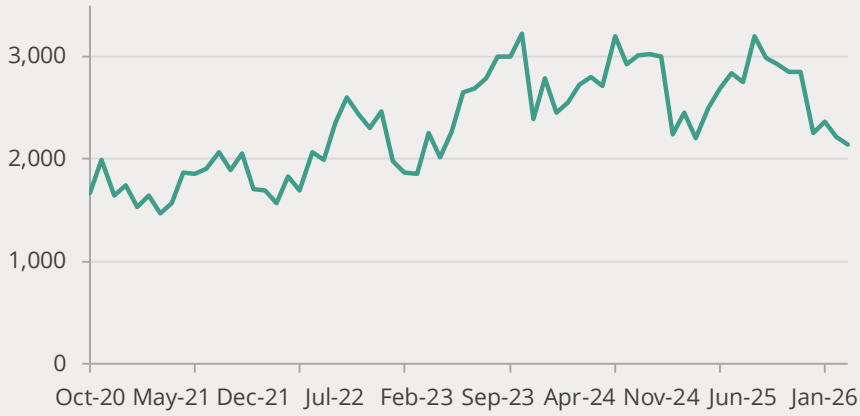
- the number of new people sleeping rough (on a single night and over the course of the month)
- the number of people sleeping rough over the month who have been discharged from institutions

The number of new people sleeping rough has risen since data started to be collected in 2020.

An estimated 2,139 new people started sleeping rough over the course of March 2026, down from 2,449 in March 2025.

Number of new people sleeping rough

Monthly estimates, October 2020 to March 2026, England



Source: MHCLG, Rough Sleeping Data Framework, June 2025 Data tables, Table 7 and Rough Sleeping Data Framework, March 2026, Data tables, Table 6

Around 711 people sleeping rough in March 2026 (including returning rough sleepers) had left an institution such as prison, asylum support or hospital. This is 10% lower than March 2025's figure of 790.[57]

Of people sleeping rough who had left an institution, 54% had left prison in the last 85 days. 23% had left asylum support in the last 85 days, down from a high of 51% in December 2023.[58]

Indicators that rough sleeping is rare

MHCLG's indicators of the extent to which rough sleeping is rare are:

[57] MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, March 2026, Data tables, Table 7, 28 May 2026
[58] MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, March 2026, Data tables, Table 7, 28 May 2026

- the number of people sleeping rough (on a single night and over the course of the month)
- the number of people sleeping rough over the course of the month who have moved into accommodation over the course of the month

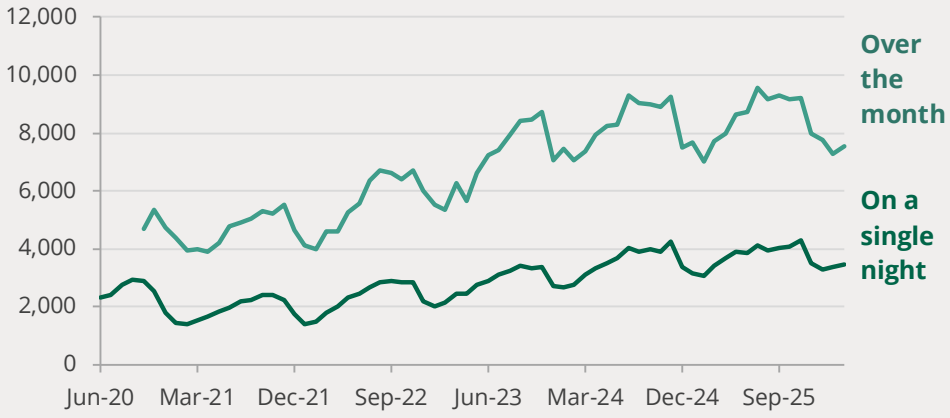
The number of people sleeping rough is rising. There were 7,541 people estimated to have slept rough during March 2026, down 3% since March 2025.

There were 3,461 people estimated to have slept rough on a single night in March 2026, up 1% since March 2025.

As the chart below shows, these are both long-term trends.

Total number of people sleeping rough

Monthly estimates, June 2020 to December 2024, England



Source: MHCLG, Rough Sleeping Data Framework, March 2026, Data tables, Tables 1 and 3, 28 May 2026

1,233 people who slept rough in March 2026 moved into accommodation during that month, up 4% from June 2024 when this data started to be collected.[59]

Indicators that rough sleeping is brief

MHCLG's indicators of the extent to which rough sleeping is brief are:

- the number of people sleeping rough over the course of the month who have been sleeping rough long term
- the number of nights on which people were seen sleeping rough

[59] MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework March 2026, Table 5, 28 May 2026

Of the people who slept rough over the course of March 2026, 3,045 were thought to be sleeping rough long term (40% of the total). This is an increase of 9% since March 2025.[60]

The majority of people sleeping rough long term had been seen sleeping rough for one night over the previous six months.

1,802 people had been seen sleeping rough for more than 10 nights over the past six months (24% of people seen sleeping rough over the course of the month).[61]

Indicators that rough sleeping is non-recurring

MHCLG's indicators of the extent to which rough sleeping is non-recurring are:

- the number of people sleeping rough over the course of the month who are returning to sleeping rough
- the number of people sleeping rough over the course of the month who are returning to sleeping rough, who had previously moved into settled accommodation

1,013 people who slept rough over the course of March 2026 were thought to be returning to rough sleeping, a decrease of 1% since March 2025.

292 people (29% of all returning rough sleepers) were returning to sleeping rough having moved into settled accommodation at some point in the preceding year.[62]

Data quality

MHCLG explains that the data used in the Rough Sleeping Data Framework publications are based on management information from local authorities and are not subject to the same quality assurance processes as the main snapshot figures.[63]

The Office for Statistics Regulation has said that it 'welcomes' this data publication and has made recommendations for its development.[64]

60 MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, March 2026, 28 May 2026
61 MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, March 2026, 28 May 2026
62 MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, March 2026, 28 May 2026
63 MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, March 2026, 28 May 2026
64 OSR, Letter from Ed Humpherson to Sandra Tudor: support for people rough sleeping management information, 20 July 2022

2.3 Statistics from the London CHAIN database

The Greater London Authority (GLA) publishes data about rough sleepers in London collected from the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) database.

CHAIN contains information about rough sleepers who have been in contact with outreach teams or who have accessed accommodation for rough sleepers in Greater London. It is used by people working with rough sleepers across a range of organisations and is maintained by the homelessness charity Homeless Link. The data doesn't include people from 'hidden homeless' groups such as those sofa surfing, unless they have also been in contact with outreach workers.

The table below shows the total number of people seen rough sleeping in London in each financial year. Between 2024/25 and 2025/26, there was a 2% decrease in the number of people sleeping rough. In 2024/25, numbers reached their highest since records began at 13,231. The number of people sleeping rough had been rising each year since 2010/11 with decreases in numbers only appearing in 2017/18 and 2021/22.

Number of people seen rough sleeping in London

Any point in the year

Year	Number of people	*% change on previous year*
2010/11	3,975	
2011/12	5,678	*+42.8%*
2012/13	6,437	*+13.4%*
2013/14	6,508	*+1.1%*
2014/15	7,581	*+16.5%*
2015/16	8,096	*+6.8%*
2016/17	8,108	*+0.1%*
2017/18	7,484	*-7.7%*
2018/19	8,855	*+18.3%*
2019/20	10,726	*+21.1%*
2020/21	11,018	*+2.7%*
2021/22	8,329	*-24.4%*
2022/23	10,053	*+20.7%*
2023/24	11,993	*+19.3%*
2024/25	13,231	*+10.3%*
2025/26	12,938	*-2.2%*

Source: Greater London Authority, CHAIN annual report April 2025 – March 2026, Section 2.1

The annual report notes that the decreases reported in 2021/22 were largely due to additional resources provided under the government's Everyone In initiative during the covid-19 pandemic. The subsequent increases in 2022/23 and 2023/24 likely reflect the end of these exceptional pandemic-related arrangements.

Out of all rough sleepers recorded in 2025/26, 62% had not been seen rough sleeping before that year. 25% had been rough sleeping the year before, and 13% had been rough sleeping in previous years but not the year before.[65] 55% of all the people recorded had been seen rough sleeping just once during the year.

During 2025/26, 38% of all people seen sleeping rough during the year were booked into accommodation: a total of 4,893 people. Hubs, shelters and emergency accommodation were the most common types of accommodation booked, accounting for 42.1% of all bookings. 42% of all bookings were for temporary accommodation, and 15.8% for long-term accommodation. Note that a person may be booked into accommodation more than once during the year (and long-term accommodation, by its nature, is likely to be booked less frequently).[66]

Data about the nationality of rough sleepers is also included in the CHAIN database. The table below shows the change in the number of rough sleepers in broad nationality categories over the last two years. Around 7 to 10% of rough sleepers were recorded without a nationality identified, so these figures should be treated as indicative only.

The number of rough sleepers from outside Europe and the UK decreased by about 2%, while the number of UK nationals stayed roughly the same. The number of people from European countries also decreased by around 14%. Overall, 42% of rough sleepers with a recorded nationality were from the UK; 16% were from Europe (European Economic Area); 2% were from elsewhere in Europe; and 27% were from outside Europe and the UK.

65 Greater London Authority, CHAIN annual report April 2025 – March 2026, p7

66 Greater London Authority, CHAIN annual report April 2025 – March 2026, p49

Nationality of London rough sleepers

	2024/25	2025/26	% change
UK	5,462	5,475	*+0.2%*
Europe (EEA)	2,406	2,033	*-15.5%*
Africa	1,953	2,009	*+2.9%*
Not known	1,667	1,796	*+7.7%*
Asia	1,315	1,198	*-8.9%*
Americas	230	217	*-5.7%*
Europe (Non-EEA)	126	124	*-1.6%*
Europe (Not known)	62	73	*+17.7%*
Australasia	10	13	*+30.0%*

Source: Greater London Authority, CHAIN annual report April 2025 – March 2026, Section 5.2

The 2023/24 data showed a significant shift in the demographic composition of rough sleepers. For the first time since CHAIN began recording, the proportion of rough sleepers from countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas and Australasia exceeded those from Europe excluding the UK. This pattern has held in 2025/26 with 31% of rough sleepers from Africa, Asia, the Americas and Australasia and 20% from Europe excluding the UK.[67]

The table on the next page shows the ten most recorded nationalities for people sleeping rough in London in 2025/26.

Most common nationalities recorded, 2025/26

	Nation	Total
1	UK	5,475
2	Romania	719
3	Eritrea	713
4	Poland	438
5	India	386
6	Sudan	378
7	Afghanistan	186
8	Nigeria	162
8	Iran	151
10	Lithuania	136

Source: Greater London Authority, CHAIN annual report April 2025 – March 2026, Section 5.2

CHAIN reports for 2025/26 and previous years are published on the GLA's London Datastore website. The reports include further breakdowns of the characteristics of people seen sleeping rough in each year.

[67] Greater London Authority, CHAIN annual report April 2025 – March 2026, p34

2.4 Deaths of homeless people

Office for National Statistics analysis

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published statistics on deaths of people experiencing homeless in England and Wales between 2013 and 2025, following a series of previous releases between 2018 and 2022.

The figures are based on death registrations, where the registration includes information indicating that the person was sleeping rough or using emergency or temporary accommodation around the time of their death. This is a different definition of homelessness from those used in other official statistics, including the rough sleeping statistics discussed above. Death certificate data is used to model the likely total number of people who have died whilst homeless, including those not identified on death certificates.

The ONS estimates that 974 people experiencing homelessness died in 2025. This is a similar figure to 2024 (when an estimated 978 people died). The ONS estimates that deaths have risen in the long term: around 550 people experiencing homelessness were estimated to have died in 2013.

Men accounted for the majority of deaths: according to the estimates, 85.5% of the people who died were men and 14.5% were women.

The ONS also looked at the average age of death for those who died at age 15 to 74 years. Average age at death is not the same as life expectancy: it only describes the age of people in that age group who died in that period. For men, the average age of death was 47.3 years and for women it was 43.3 years.

Drug poisoning accounted for an estimated 31% of deaths (304 people), while suicide and alcohol poisoning accounted for around 11% each (112 and 105 people respectively).

Statistics from the Museum of Homelessness

The Museum of Homelessness (MoH) has put together a report on homeless deaths across the UK from 2020 to 2024 in its 'Dying Homeless Project'.[68] The MoH's approach uses sources such as Freedom of Information requests to local authorities, media reports, and other sources. The analysis aims to identify people who have died whilst sleeping rough, living in emergency or temporary accommodation, 'sofa surfing', or squatting.

The most recent report from 2024 records the deaths of 1,611 people across the UK. The MoH reports an ongoing increase in the number of people dying

[68] Museum of Homelessness, The Dying Homeless Project 2024 Findings, 8 October 2025

while homeless. It is not known how much of this increase is attributable to the MoH compiling more comprehensive data over time.

The MoH reports cause of death for a smaller number of people, as cause of death is not always captured in their data. Available data for 2024, for 482 people, found deaths were most commonly associated with drug or alcohol related issues with 44% of deaths (209 people). Physical health related issues like cancer, cardiac arrest and strokes were next most common at 34% (165 people) and 11% (51 people) died by suicide.

2.5 Past approaches to counting rough sleepers

From 1996, local authorities were asked to provide annual estimates of rough sleeping in their statistical returns to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) as part of the Housing Investment Programme process. Authorities were encouraged to work with voluntary sector agencies to conduct head counts of people sleeping rough in their areas where there was a known rough sleeping problem. Policy on how these counts were to be conducted is described below:

- at least two counts a year in areas with a substantial number of rough sleepers (20 or more on a single night);
- at least one count a year in areas with between 10 and 19 rough sleepers on a single night; and
- counts in a selection of areas estimating fewer than 10 rough sleepers on a single night to spot check the validity of those estimates.[69]

The figures from the single night street counts in 1998 produced an estimate of 1,850 rough sleepers in England on any one night. The same count in 1999 produced an estimate of 1,633, of which 635 were in Greater London.[70] The 1998 figure was taken as the baseline figure for the Labour government's target to reduce rough sleeping by two thirds by 2002.

In May 2000, Hilary Armstrong, Minister for Local Government and the Regions, reported that street counts in January 2000 showed a fall of around one third in the number of people sleeping rough in central London since June 1998.[71] The June 2000 street count found 546 rough sleepers in Greater London and 1,180 in England as a whole, indicating the downward trend was continuing.[72] The Rough Sleepers Unit (RSU) predicted that if the fall in rough

69 HC Deb 10 December 2001 c574W
70 HC Deb 15 December 1999 cc193-194W
71 HC Deb 9 May 2000 c630
72 HC Deb 15 November 2000 c655W

sleeping continued at that rate the unit would have met its target by August 2001.[73]

On 3 December 2001, the Labour government announced that the RSU had achieved its target of reducing rough sleeping by at least two thirds by 2002. The November 2001 count found 532 people sleeping rough in England.[74]

On 12 September 2005, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) reported that rough sleeping had fallen to its lowest level ever:

> Annual rough sleeping figures for 2005 show a 75 per cent reduction in the number of people sleeping rough in England since 1998, from 1,850 to 459.
>
> ...National statistics also published today show the number of people becoming homeless was 17 per cent lower than in the same period the previous year.[75]

In 2008, when announcing a new strategy to end rough sleeping by 2012, the Homelessness Minister, Iain Wright, referred to street count figures which indicated that there were around 483 rough sleepers across the country on any given night.[76]

On 15 July 2010, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) reported that the numbers of rough sleepers in England had hit an 11-year low: 70 councils had conducted street counts and reported that there were 440 rough sleepers in England on any given night. By comparison, in 2009, 76 councils conducted street counts and recorded a total of 464 rough sleepers.[77]

Homelessness charities had long questioned whether street sleeping had been reduced by the extent claimed. Philip Burke of the charity, the Simon Community reportedly said the 2001 figures "do not reflect the full picture" because "the figures centre on some major cities and London Boroughs and are only a sample reflecting one night of the year."[78] The final estimates were the sum of all counts conducted by local authorities, but each year the majority of local authorities did not conduct a count.

The Simon Community's July 2002 newsletter claimed that prior to the November 2001 head count, the RSU had decanted rough sleepers into bed and breakfast accommodation and held all-night parties to draw the homeless off the streets in order to push down the count figures.[79] The RSU

---

73 Housing Today, Rough Sleepers Unit on schedule to achieve its goal, 24 August 2000 [not available online]

74 RSU Press Release, Government meets target on reducing rough sleeping, 3 December 2001

75 ODPM Press Release 2005/190, 12 September 2005

76 DCLG – press release, New Goal to end rough sleeping,18 November 2008, published by Wired Gov

77 DCLG – news story, Rough sleeping hits an 11-year low, 15 July 2010; DCLG, Rough sleeping in England: Total street count and estimates 2010, 23 July 2010

78 Inside Housing, Rough sleeping figures are 'quick fix' says charity chief, 8 September 2000 [not available online]

79 Simon Star, Issue 89, July 2002 [not available online]

and Lord Falconer (the then Minister for Housing) denied these allegations.[80] Questions on the methodology used were asked in the House.[81]

In January 2007, Inside Housing reported that the number of people sleeping rough could be "as much as four times higher than the official figure because of the way the statistics are collected."[82] Authorities recording between zero and 10 rough sleepers during the June 2006 count had had their results rounded down to zero. DCLG conceded that the counts did not represent a comprehensive picture of homelessness but said they "provide a useful snapshot of the number sleeping rough on a particular night."[83] Revised guidance on evaluating the extent of rough sleeping (PDF) was published in March 2007.[84]

In November 2008, the Labour government said it would adopt a new approach to assessing the number of rough sleepers as part of its strategy to end rough sleeping:

> While we will keep the local counts as a useful measure, we know that they provide a limited snapshot. They should be the start of the process not the end. We want to use the counts and other sources of data to bring together a fuller picture of the different needs of people sleeping rough, the services offered and the outcomes achieved. We want to make sure that people are getting the help that they need.
>
> This information needs to drive further action to tackle rough sleeping. So we will:
>
> - launch a new approach to help local authorities monitor progress and track people sleeping rough, ensuring that counts are not just an opportunity to identify levels of need but more importantly to do something about it;
> - launch "Street Needs Audits" to give us a much better understanding of the needs of people on the streets; and
> - develop new ways of using data to understand and monitor outcomes for people who have slept rough.[85]

Alongside the publication of the rough sleeper counts in July 2010, the new Housing Minister at that time, Grant Shapps, said he would "shortly consult" on an overhaul of the rough sleeping count methodology. He said:

> Today's figures show that rough sleeping is at an 11-year low - but I am sceptical that these figures reflect the situation on the streets.

---

80 Housing Today, Falconer defends rough sleeper count, 24 January 2002 [not available online]

81 HC Deb 5 March 2002 c186W

82 Inside Housing, Number of homeless could be four times official figure, 11 January 2007 [subscription required]

83 Inside Housing, Number of homeless could be four times official figure, 11 January 2007 [subscription required]

84 DCLG, Guidance on evaluating the extent of rough sleeping – 2007 revision (PDF), March 2007

85 DCLG, No One Left Out: Communities ending rough sleeping (PDF), 18 November 2008

> Only councils considered to have a rough sleeping problem have been required to conduct counts - so in some of our biggest cities, while local people would be acutely aware of the problem of rough sleeping, official street counts were not conducted.
>
> That's why I will shortly publish plans for a complete overhaul of the way the problem of rough sleeping is assessed so councils and charities can be given a credible measure of the problem in their area.[86]

A consultation document, Proposed changes to guidance on evaluating the extent of rough sleeping: Consultation (PDF) was published on 23 July 2010.

On 14 September 2010, the coalition government issued new guidance for local authorities, Evaluating the Extent of Rough Sleeping: A new approach (PDF).

The new methodology has been applied by authorities since October 2010. The guidance says it is "aimed at getting a clearer picture of the scale of the problem in each area so more targeted support can be provided to some of the most vulnerable in society."[87] Section 2.1 of this briefing describes rough sleeping estimates calculated using this methodology in each year since 2010.

86 DCLG – news story, Rough sleeping hits an 11-year low, 15 July 2010

87 HC Deb 25 October 2010 c89W

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on commonslibrary.parliament.uk.

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe or scan the code below:

commonslibrary.parliament.uk

@commonslibrary