

# Record youth homelessness in UK

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Homelessness is rising amongst British youth, with many staying with friends and family, in squats or sleeping rough.

Last year, 4,529 young people contacted the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) about homelessness, a 57 percent increase since 2008. The number of calls from youth threatened with homelessness rose 39 percent during the same period.

"Obviously this is just a sample of the number of young people out there struggling," said Rachael Holmes from the CAB.

"We find many young people are sofa surfing. When they run out of sofas, they are turning to using tents in people's back gardens or in parks," said Sian Drewery from charity Nightstop.

Being homeless at a young age is a traumatic experience that disrupts the transition to a stable adult life. One 18-year-old, who chose to conceal her identity, related her experience to the BBC's *Newsbeat*. After fleeing a violent home at age 12, she moved in with her boyfriend and, "working for about 48 hours a week, I wasn't even earning £400" a month.

She lost her job and sought help from the local council. "I turned up with the majority of my bags and told them 'I have nowhere to live and no friends or family to stay with. I've just lost my job and I really need help.' They didn't ask me any questions and didn't take me seriously because of my age. I left really angry."

Now homeless, she would "stay at a friend's one night, sometimes I'd stay a week."

She said, "It felt horrible. It feels trampy. You haven't got your own home, you go to work in the day and think, 'What am I going to do tonight? What am I going to eat tonight?' I was getting really ill and really thin and not sleeping."

She eventually found work and housing with the assistance of Britain's limited social security system.

There is minimal provision for homeless youth, who bear the brunt of the dismantling of the welfare state. Local authorities prevent homelessness for only one in five of the young people who seek help.

More than two thirds of local authorities lack sufficient youth-specific accommodation. Sixty percent of homelessness agencies face capacity shortfalls that prevent support provision, according to a survey of 160 front-line agencies conducted by Homeless Watch.

Forty-three percent use bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation, according to charity Homeless Link. B&Bs are unsuitable for youth because they may be housed among offenders and addicts.

"The rise is a very clear indicator of the impact the recession has had on this age group," said Holmes.

Unemployment and welfare cuts are increasing domestic strain, leading to family breakdown, the primary cause of youth homelessness. It contributes to almost half of cases, according to Homeless Watch.

As increasing numbers of families struggle to make ends meet, many can't afford to keep all their children. Often, it is the eldest child who is squeezed out.

Many households are on the edge of a financial precipice. As rents continue to rise, last year over 60 percent of families with children struggled to pay their housing bills; 3.9 million households are just one wage packet away from destitution and threatened with losing their homes, according to research by the charity Shelter.

This is pushing record numbers onto the streets. Homelessness for all age groups stands at a five-year high, according to government statistics. The number of people sleeping rough has risen by 31 percent since 2011. More than 50,000 families are homeless and 4,500 live in B&Bs, many beyond the six-week legal limit.

These conditions also force record numbers of young adults to live with their parents; 3.3 million young

workers can't afford to live independently or are unwilling to bear the substantial drop in living standards this would entail. The proportion of such youth is now one in four, the highest level since 1996, according to official figures.

The number of workers aged between 20 and 34 staying at home shot up with the onset of the world economic crisis in 2008. The 20-to-24 age bracket was hardest hit.

Tom, aged 29, said "I recently lost my job at the Environment Agency working with communities to prepare themselves for flooding incidents."

"I had to move back to my parents' as a result of not being able to find another job in Yorkshire soon enough and not being able to pay the rent. JSA [Job Seekers Allowance] is not anywhere near adequate to cover the costs that I had," he told the *Guardian*.

"Ending up back at home wasn't really part of the plan," said Neil, aged 25.

"I graduated with a first in Social Policy and Sociology from the University of Sheffield, followed by a Master's. After completing an unpaid three-month graduate placement, I got some paid part-time work and then full-time work at a housing association in Birmingham (all on temporary contracts)."

"The inability to save anything due to commuting, car, rent and general living costs meant that after six months, both me and my girlfriend moved into my Dad's house."

Young workers are increasingly unable to find secure jobs that pay a living wage.

Youth unemployment is 20 percent, and long-term youth unemployment is the worst for two decades. The unemployment rate amongst youth living with parents is twice that of people the same age living independently. Sixty percent of homeless youth are NEET (not in education, employment or training.)

Rising rents and astronomical house prices are a huge barrier to securing accommodation, and conditions are being aggravated by the policies of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government.

A swathe of reactionary social legislation has been introduced since the announcement of the deepest social security cuts in British history last April. This includes the so-called Bedroom Tax, a financial penalty for the 660,000 housing benefits claimants with unoccupied rooms in local authority and housing

association accommodation. Since it was introduced six months ago, more than 200,000 people have requested emergency financial assistance from local councils. Many have faced eviction or been forced to find private-sector housing.

Prime Minister David Cameron and Chancellor George Osborne have both made clear that the government intends to withdraw Housing Benefit for those under 25 years of age.



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