

Research report

# Unaccounted:

The scale of youth  
homelessness in the UK



Youth  
Homelessness  
Databank



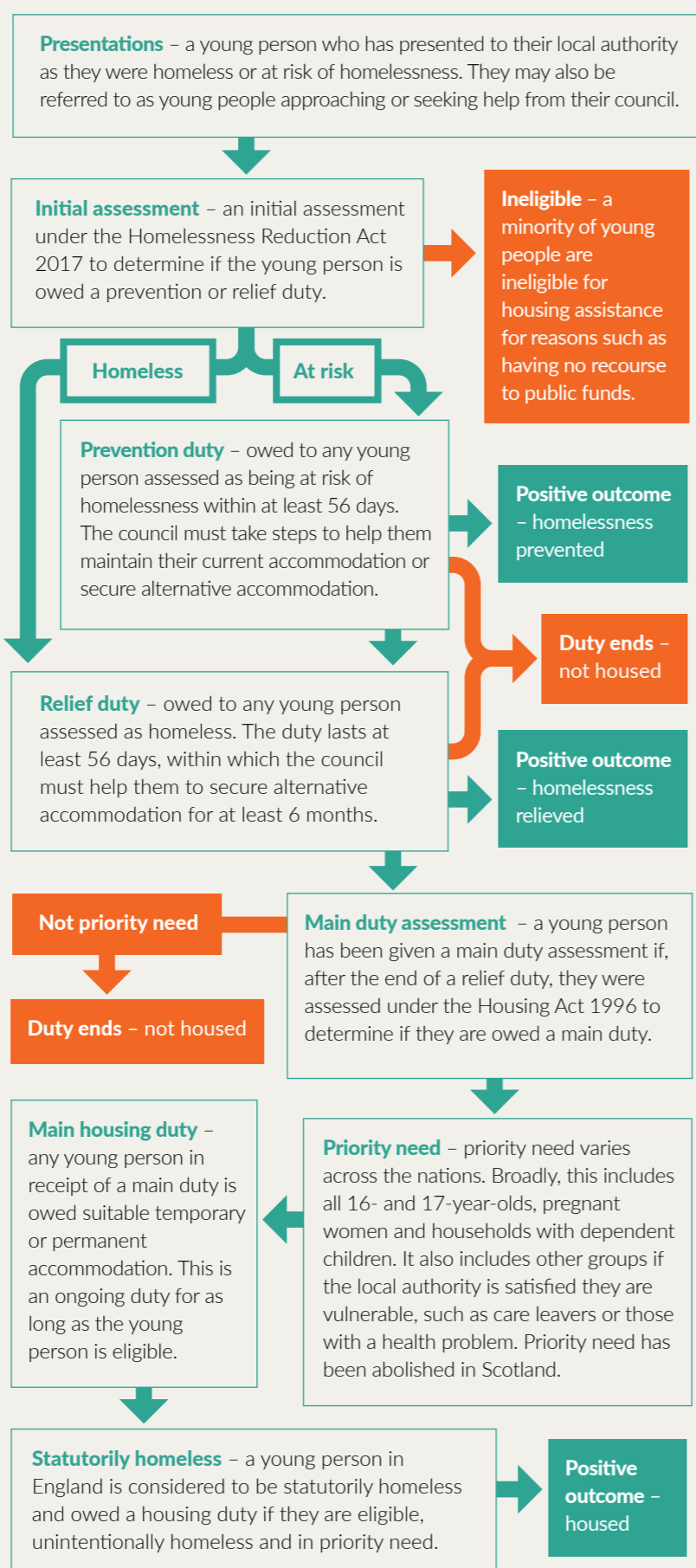
give homeless  
young people  
a future

## 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	6
Introduction	8
Methodology	9
Policy framework	10
The scale of youth homelessness	12
Regional focus	13
Young people's journey through the Homelessness Reduction Act	15
Rural areas struggling to support homeless young people in England	18
Causes of homelessness	19
Conclusion	20
Technical appendix	21

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.

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Centrepoint, 2023



## Executive Summary

Young people facing homelessness are among the most vulnerable individuals in our society. At a critical moment in their lives, timely and effective support from councils and their partners can help the young person to find a stable home and support them in completing their educational program or starting their professional career. If this opportunity is missed, homelessness can rob them of their chance of a successful transition to adulthood, pushing some to a vicious cycle of exclusion and deprivation.

Centrepunkt'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. While in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales this data is collected at central level and sourced from the devolved governments, in England the data is collected through Freedom of Information requests to individual local authorities as there is less data available broken down by age at the national level.

Centrepunkt estimates that **129,000 young people in the United Kingdom approached their council for help as they were homeless or at risk during the financial year 2021/22.**

For the sixth year in a row, 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. **While the figures for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have been going down for the last two years, an increasing number of homeless young people were recorded in England.** Furthermore, England currently presents the highest youth homelessness rate among the four nations: around 1 in 53 people aged 16-24 is homeless or at risk of homelessness in England.

In England the government published a Code of Guidance that sets out expectations for local councils in implementing the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA 2017). 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 **almost a third of the young people who approached their local authority in England were not assessed for eligibility.** Since the HRA has been in force, the proportion of young people receiving an assessment appears to have fallen significantly over time, from 79 per cent in 2018/19 to 68 per cent in 2021/2022.

Following the initial assessment, local authorities have a duty to try to prevent or resolve the person's homelessness by helping them to find a suitable accommodation. Some young people may also be owed a "full duty" if they fit specific criteria and are considered in priority need, and then the council must secure accommodation for them. As in previous years, our data shows a very concerning picture regarding the proportion of young people having a positive outcome after presenting as homeless or at risk to their local authority. In 2021/22, **in England only 38 per cent of those who presented had a positive outcome, meaning their homelessness was successfully prevented or relieved, or they were housed under the main housing duty.** This percentage has not substantially changed since the HRA has been implemented, suggesting the HRA process is failing to successfully address the housing needs of six in ten young people who present as homeless or at risk.

Our numbers show an alarming situation developing for local authorities in rural areas, with a significant gap in assessment rates and positive outcomes, despite receiving, on average, only half of the number of presentations from homeless young people, compared to urban local authorities.

Looking at the main reason for homelessness of young people owed a duty, family breakdowns remained the main cause, with **46 per cent of the young people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness because their family were no longer willing or able to accommodate them,** compared to 49 per cent in 2020/2021. Our data also shows an increasing proportion of young people becoming homeless or at risk due to domestic violence (11%), on the rise since the pandemic. This is especially concerning for **young women, who are five times more likely to be homeless or at risk than young men due to domestic abuse.** Finally, as expected due to the lifting of the eviction ban put in place during the pandemic, evictions have been on the rise and they now represent the third most mentioned cause of homelessness (7% of young people owed a duty).

The Youth Homelessness Databank highlights once more 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 breakdowns for all stages of the HRA process, publishing data only for those accepted as being owed a prevention or relief duty.

This means that the government is unable to properly examine the scale and nature of youth homelessness and how these trends vary across the country, missing information on thousands of young people who are approaching their local authority for assistance. Having such a gap in the recorded information means the government is less likely to be able to develop solutions to tackle youth homelessness.

The big discrepancy between the number of young people presenting as homeless and those being assessed demands urgent attention from government and local authorities. We therefore 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 arriving at local authorities' doors. Without this, the government is restricting its field of vision, not having a full understanding of the issue, therefore failing to address the needs of thousands of young people who face homelessness daily in the United Kingdom.



## Recommendations:

### At a national level, the Government should:

1. 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 in recognition that they face the same living costs.
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).

### 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 HCLIC (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, the Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities should:

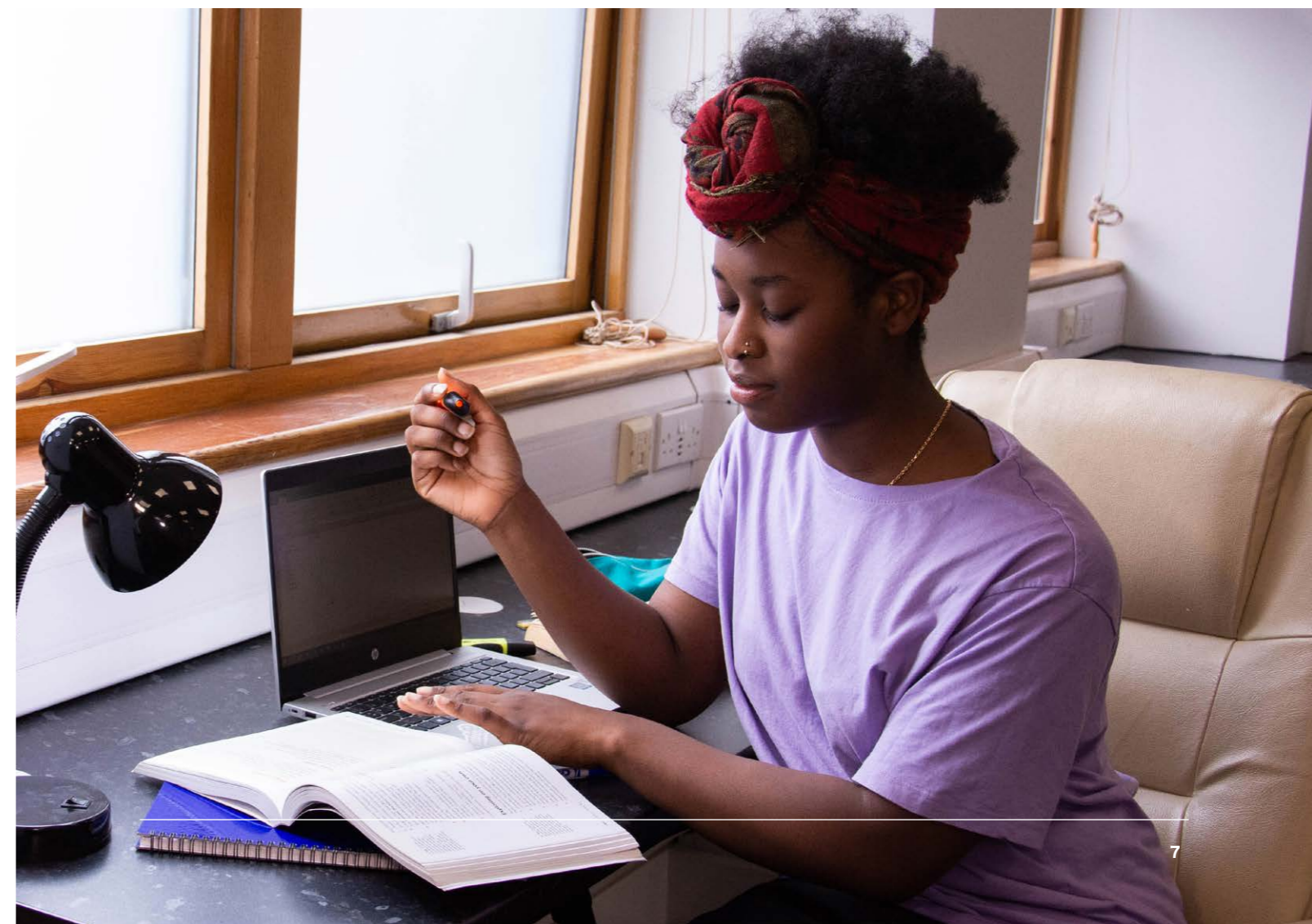
6. Make publicly available all HCLIC data broken by age to enable the government and those working in the homelessness sector to better understand how effectively the HRA is supporting young people. In the longer-term, we encourage the Department to make all HLIC data searchable via an online tool (similar to the Stat-Xplore tool used for the Department for Work and Pensions data) which would enable more detailed analysis of trends in youth homelessness. It would allow for analysis of differences between subgroups of young people (including different genders, ethnicities, etc). This analysis would help ensure that funding and commissioning of services were 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 (HCG) should be amended to clarify the obligations of local authorities at the presentation, initial interview, and assessment stage to ensure that all councils are aware of what is and is not acceptable practice. In doing this they should make clear what factors a local authority should take into account and what constitutes a realistic burden of proof when the HCG 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 attention 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.

9. DLUHC should create a page on its website with details from all local authorities' housing teams, including responsible person, contact details (phone number, email) and opening hours, improving the accessibility of homelessness support services.

### Local authorities should:

10. Create coordination mechanisms and engage with relevant local organisations, including local education providers and third sector agencies, to ensure that all local stakeholders working with young people are aware of referral procedures for homelessness support (even if they do not have a legal duty to refer).
11. 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.





## Introduction

Currently, there is no official definition or measurement of the scale of youth homelessness in the United Kingdom. To end youth homelessness, we need to know how many young people are affected by it. Without accurate and comparable national, regional, and local data on the scale and experience of youth homelessness we cannot devise the most appropriate solutions to tackle it nor ensure sufficient funding is allocated so that young people receive the support they need.

The Centrepoint 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 2021/2022, and looks into how the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA)<sup>1</sup> has developed in the fourth year since its introduction. 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 then their subsequent journey through local authority support.

This report also updates the previous year's findings, including Centrepoint'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.

Centrepoint's estimate can only take into consideration 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 council for support. It is important to stress that the factors that affect youth homelessness go beyond the 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 [www.centrepoin.org.uk/databank](http://www.centrepoin.org.uk/databank) 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## 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 87 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, who<sup>2</sup>:

- 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;
- Were assessed under the Housing Act 1996;
- Were 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. Whilst that is an improvement in available government data on youth homelessness, it does little to demystify the journey that young people take through the homelessness system.

The responses to Centrepoint's Freedom of Information request show a slight increase in the number of responses where the council was able to provide the requested data. Last year, 84 per cent of local authorities were able to give any of the requested data for April 2020 to the end of March 2021, whereas this year 87 per cent provided at least some of the requested data. Whilst this improvement in the data response rate is welcomed, it is still not as high as the response rate for April 2018 to the end of March 2019, for which 95 per cent of local authorities were able to provide some or all 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 specifically as the reason for their inability to respond. For the local authorities that could not provide their 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, such as waiting list for social housing, child poverty rates and alcohol-related hospital admissions<sup>3</sup>.

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, refer to data from local authorities in England unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> The response rate for each specific question can be found in the Technical Appendix.

<sup>3</sup> 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 to those who approach them for help.

## England

Since 1977 local authorities in the UK have been required to provide assistance to homeless people.

The main duties were incorporated into the **Housing Act 1996**, which brought forward the main provisions of previous Acts and sets out the main statutory duties. Since devolution, Welsh and Scottish governments have adapted the provisions in that legislation in different ways.

In England, the **Homelessness Reduction Act** came into effect in **April 2018**. This amends the 1996 Act and changes the homelessness support model provided by local authorities. **Prevention and relief support were added as additional tiers of statutory duties regardless of intentionality or the applicant's priority need status.** If the prevention and relief work is unsuccessful the applicant is then 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 considered 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 their process, as well as the right to present at any local authority for support.

The government provided additional burdens funding for local authorities initially for 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, **Scotland's policy has been aimed towards providing a full housing duty meaning that all eligible and unintentionally homeless young people are owed a housing duty from 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 Welsh legislation in this matter is the most similar to the HRA landscape in England 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 **129,000 young people aged 16-24 presented to their local authority as homeless or at risk of homelessness between April 2021 and March 2022**. This represents a **six per cent increase** compared to the previous financial year, when almost 122,000 young people faced homelessness.

According to our estimates, in 2021/2022 young women represented 57 per cent of the total number of young people approaching their local authority because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness (around 74,000 young women). This means that less than half of the presentations were from young men (39%, approximately 50,000), with the remaining four per cent (around 5,000) 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 **112,500 young people presented** as homeless or at risk of homelessness to their local authority during the financial year 2021/2022, an **increase of 8,100 (+8%)** compared to the previous financial year (104,400).

In **Northern Ireland**, **3,200 young people** presented as homeless or at risk of homelessness in 2021/2022, compared to 3,600 in the previous year, representing an **11 per cent year-on-year decrease** (-400 presentations).

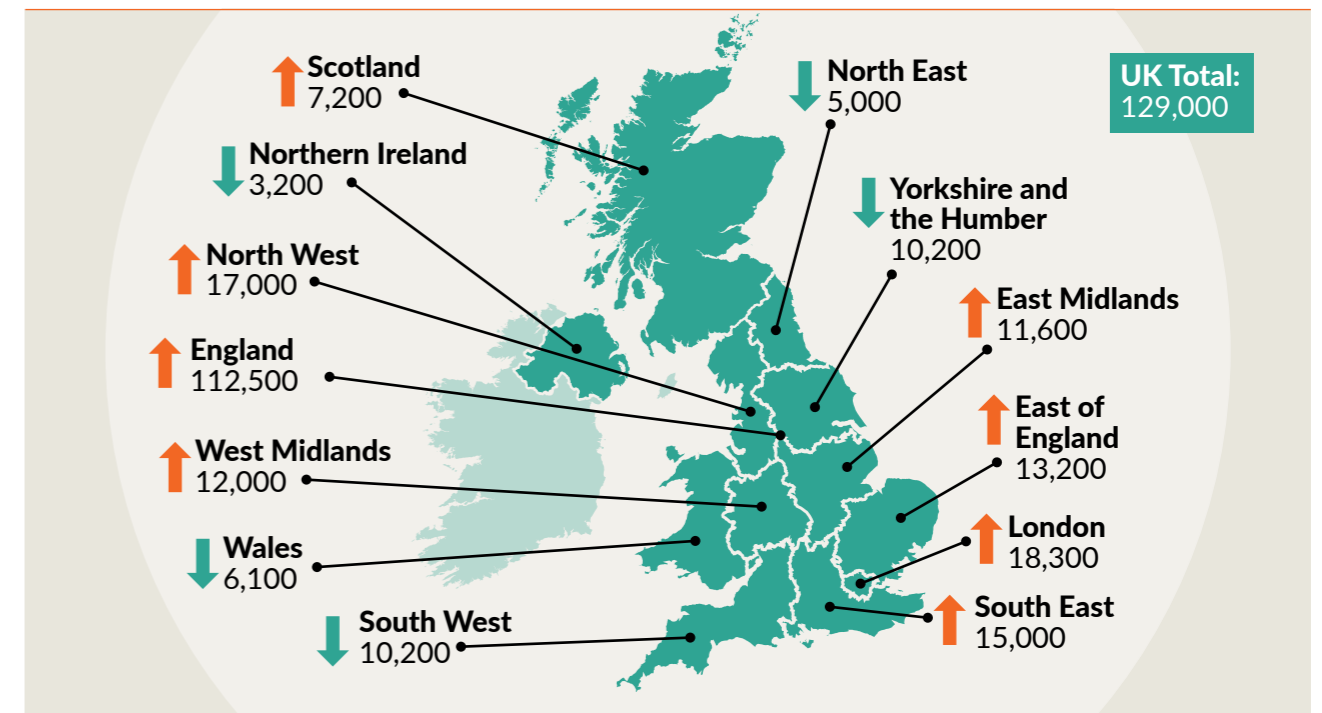
**Scotland saw a slight increase (+3%)** in the number of young people presenting in 2021/2022, going from 7,000 in 2020/2021 to 7,200 in 2021/2022. It is important to notice that this increase is completely due to the fact that the Scottish Housing and Social Justice Directorate managed to provide figures for 16-24 partners of main applicants (around 600 in total), compared to previous years. The number of households, whose main applicant was a young person aged 16-24, actually decreased to 6,600 (-6%) in the financial year 2021/2022.

In **Wales**, there were around **6,100 young people** who presented as homeless or at risk of homelessness in 2021/2022. This represents a **decrease of 700 (-10%)** from 6,800 presentations in the financial year 2020/2021.

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 the other devolved nations showed 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 sixth year in a row, showing a continuous growth in demand from young people for homelessness support services.

4 For more details, please see Technical Appendix.

# Regional focus



**In England, six 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 Midlands** which experienced a **49% increase**, going from 7,800 presentations in 2020/2021 to 11,600 presentations in 2021/2022. This represented also the largest absolute increase among the English regions with 3,800 more presentations than in the previous financial year;
- **London** which saw a **20% increase** in the number of young people presenting as homeless or at risk, going from 15,200 to 18,300 and becoming the region with the highest number of presentations (in the previous financial year, London recorded the second highest figure after the North West);
- The **West Midlands**, with a **13% increase**, going from 10,600 to 12,000 presentations;
- The **East of England** which saw an **increase of 8%**, from 12,200 to 13,200;
- The **South East** with an **increase of 8%**, going from 13,900 to 15,000;
- The **North West** which recorded a **6% increase**, going from 16,100 to 17,000 presentations, the second highest figure behind London.

**Three regions experienced a year-on-year decrease in the number of presentations. These regions are:**

- The **North East** which saw a **decrease of 24%**, going from 6,600 presentations in 2020/2021 to 5,000 in 2021/2022;
- The **South West** with a **9% decline** in the number of presentations, going from 11,200 to 10,200;
- **Yorkshire and the Humber** which saw a **6% decrease** from 10,800 to 10,200.

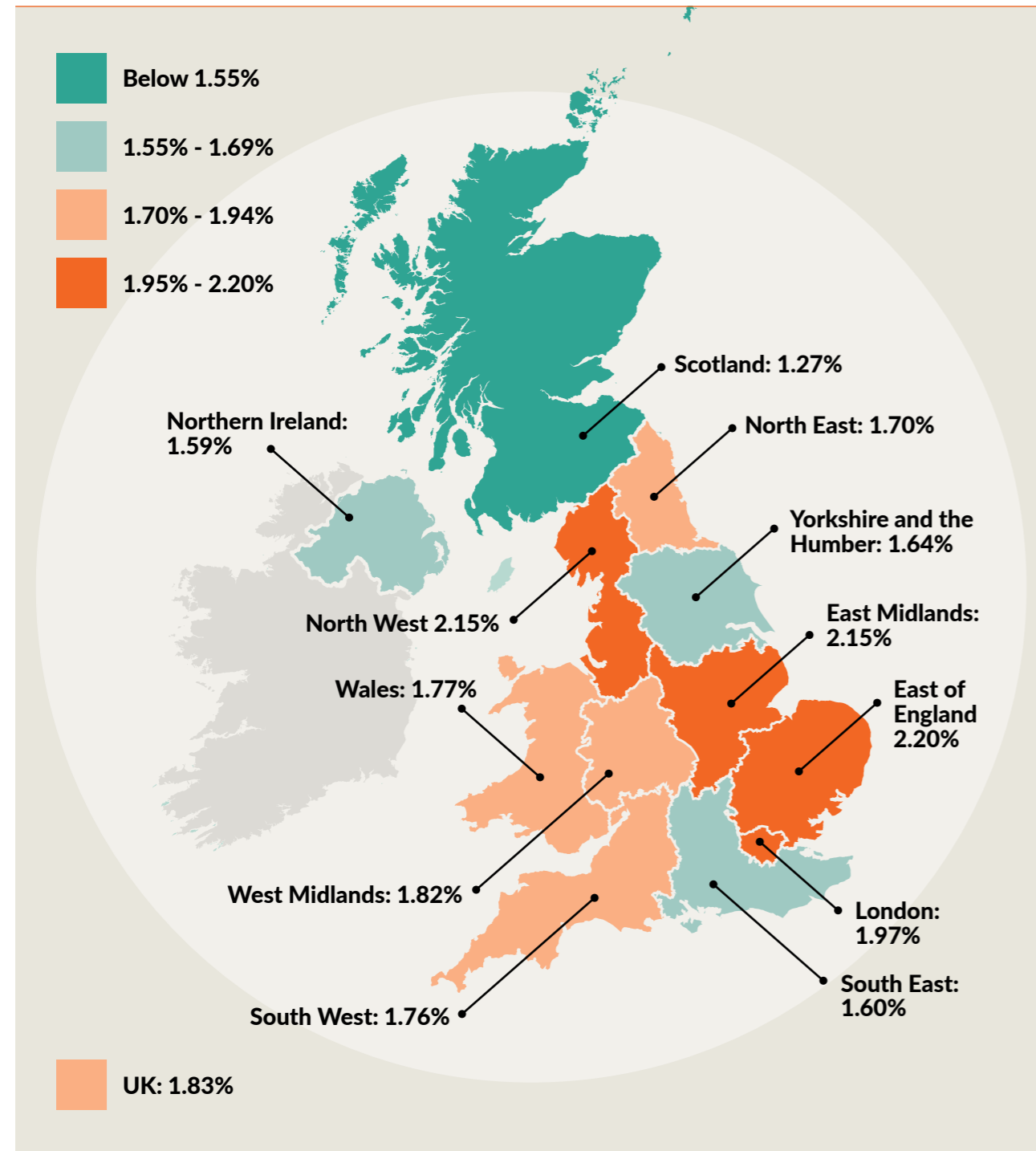
Considering the the figures mentioned above and population estimates<sup>5</sup> for the age group 16-24, it is possible to calculate a rate of youth homelessness for each nation, region and the United Kingdom as a whole.

5 Source: Mid-2020 estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwales/scotlandandnorthernireland>



According to these rates, around **1 out of 55 young people aged 16-24 is homeless or at risk of homelessness in the United Kingdom**, corresponding to a 1.83% rate of youth homelessness. Among the four devolved nations, England has the highest rate of youth homelessness (1.89%), followed by Wales (1.77%), Northern Ireland (1.59%), and Scotland (1.27%). This means that **a young person in England is 49% more likely to be homeless or at risk of homelessness than a young person in Scotland, 19% more likely than in Northern Ireland and 7% more likely than Wales.**

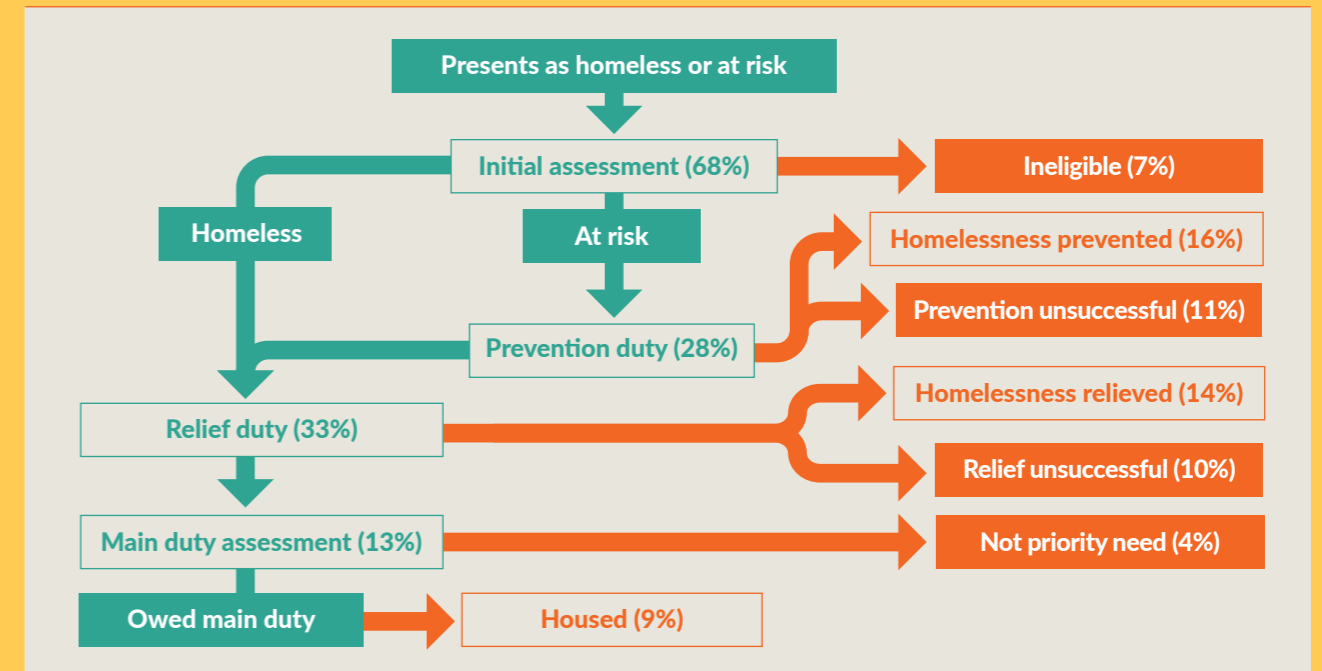
Among **the English regions, the East of England has the highest rate of youth homelessness, 2.20%**, with the North West and the East Midlands presenting a very similar rate, 2.15%. London is the other region with a youth homelessness rate higher than the UK average (1.97% vs. 1.83%). On the other hand, the lowest youth homelessness rate among the English regions is registered in the South East, 1.60%, which is still higher than the rates of Northern Ireland and Scotland.



## Young people's journey through the Homelessness Reduction Act

Local authorities provided Centrepoin'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'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.



<sup>6</sup> This is calculated by adding the number for whom the Prevention Duty prevented their homelessness, the Relief Duty relieved their homelessness, and the Main Housing Duty housed them.



**“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 2021/2022, 68 per cent of the young people who approached their local authority in England because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness were assessed. While this percentage has slightly increased compared to last year (66% assessment rate in 2020/2021), it is considerably below the values recorded in the pre-pandemic period (79% in 2018/2019 and 71% in 2019/2020). This means that almost **a third of the young people who approached their local authority seeking support have not even been assessed for eligibility.** According to our estimates, around 40,000 young people did not get the chance to see whether they may be eligible for support, let alone the actual support itself. As mentioned, the rate of assessment has dropped every year 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 the support they are entitled to. Hopefully, the slight increase in the assessment rate recorded this year is a sign of a reverse trend, which will allow an increasing percentage of young people who are seeking assistance to receive a homelessness assessment and support if appropriate.

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, 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 whether they meet the conditions and are eligible to receive support.

Given 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 assessment stage. This effectively means that the official figures are missing large numbers of young people in need who are not getting to the assessment stage.

The high response rate to our FOI (87%) demonstrates that local authorities are able to provide this information, so we strongly urge the 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 need from young people who are homeless or at risk, so that they can develop the appropriate response to tackling youth homelessness.

**For the fourth 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.**

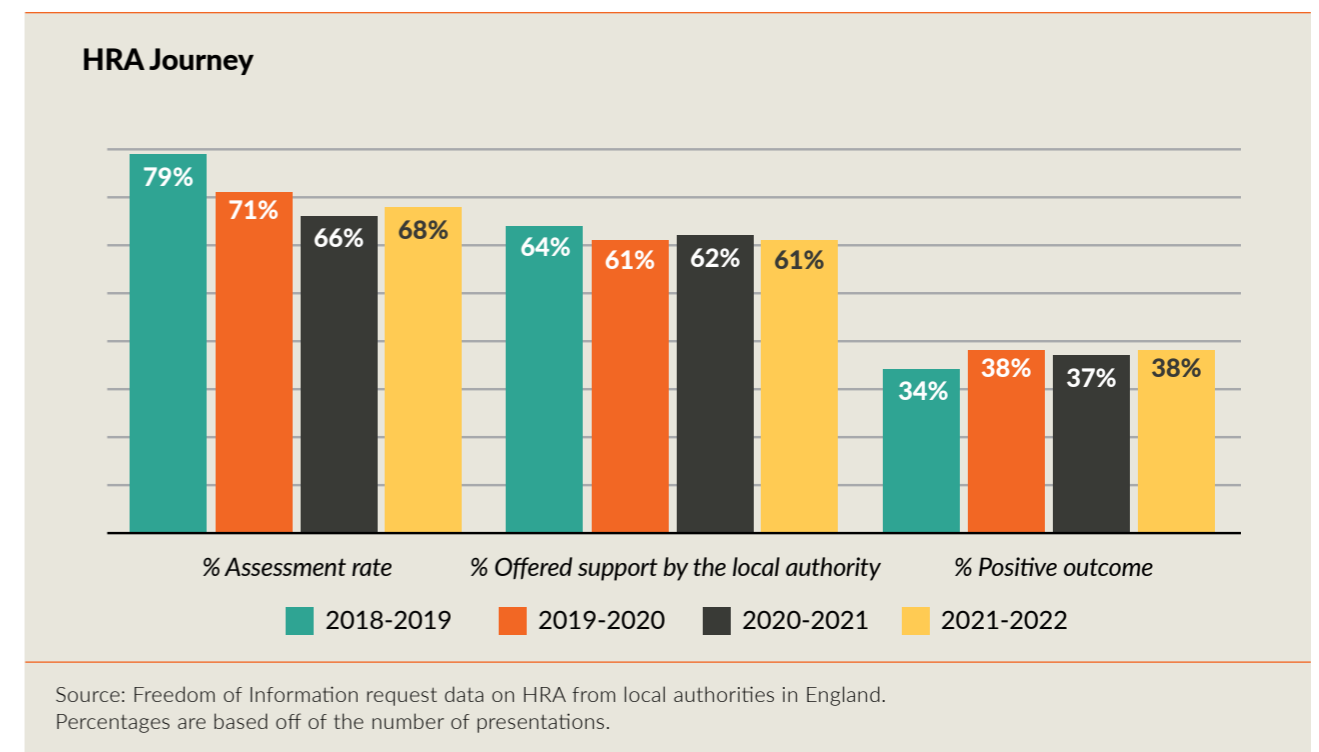
While 61 per cent of the young people who presented as homeless or at risk of homelessness were offered a prevention or relief duty, this does not always translate in them receiving the support they are entitled to. Similarly to previous years, young women are owed prevention duty or relief duty in a fifty-fifty proportion, while young men are more likely to be owed a relief duty (60% of the cases). This shows that young men are more likely to be in rough sleeping circumstances. On the other hand, the high percentage of young women being owed a prevention duty demonstrates the higher chances of young women being in a “hidden homelessness” situation, increasing their possibility of falling through the cracks, being less aware of their entitlements under the HRA<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the situation of young women facing homelessness, read our report “In Her Shoes” here: <https://centrepoint.org.uk/media/5626/in-her-shoes-young-womens-research.pdf>

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. Centrepoint 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 2021 and March 2022, 38 per cent of the presentations from young people were dealt successfully by local authorities in England with positive outcomes (a young person being housed or being owed a main housing duty). 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.** In light of the increasing numbers of young people presenting as homeless seen throughout this time, 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.

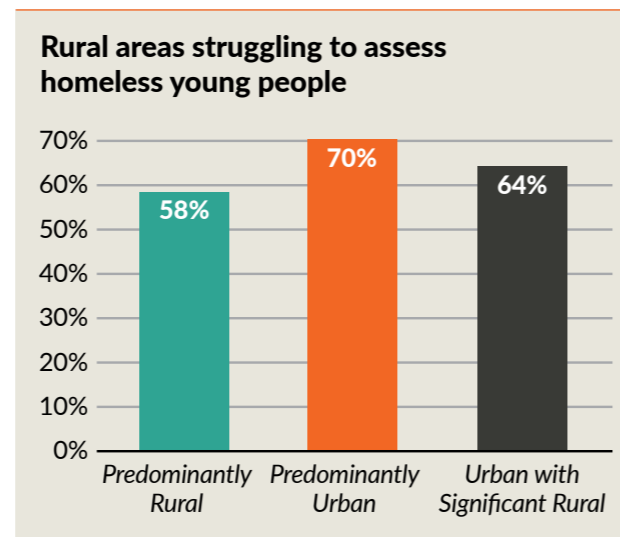


# Rural areas struggling to support homeless young people in England

Using the three-step 2011 Rural Urban Classification of Local Authority Districts and other higher level geographies from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs<sup>8</sup>, we categorised all 309 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, it is unsurprising that **27 out of the 30 local authorities with the highest number of presentations are Predominantly Urban areas.** Looking at the average number of presentations per local authority during the financial year 2021/2022, Predominantly Urban areas have an average number of presentations (475) that is more than twice the average number of presentations received in Predominantly Rural and Urban with Significant Rural areas, respectively 229 and 226 presentations on average between April 2021 and March 2022. Compared to the 2020/2021 financial year, the average number of presentations increased by 11 per cent for Predominantly Urban areas, while it decreased respectively by 14 and 6 per cent for Predominantly Rural and Urban with Significant Rural areas. However, when looking at the median number of presentations, Predominantly Rural local authorities also experienced an increase compared to the previous financial year, showing that especially Predominantly Rural areas with low figures saw an overall increase in their number of young people presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Despite Predominantly Urban local authorities in England receiving much higher numbers of assistance requests by homeless young people or at risk, 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.** With Predominantly Urban areas having a 70 per cent assessment rate, both Urban with Significant Rural (64%) and Predominantly Rural (58%) areas manage to assess presentations from young people in a lower proportion than the England average (68%).



Similarly, there are discrepancies in the percentage of young people who are offered prevention or relief duty by their local authority: 63 per cent for Predominantly Urban, 56 per cent for Urban with Significant Rural, and 55 per cent for Predominantly Rural areas. **In Predominantly Rural and Urban with Significant Rural local authorities, only 34 per cent of the homelessness cases were successfully prevented or relieved,** while Predominantly Urban areas 39 per cent of the cases had positive outcomes.

The figures mentioned above shows a very alarming picture for rural areas in England which seem to 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, Centrepoint strongly urges the government to increase its support to local authorities in rural areas in implementing the HRA, assessing and offering support to eligible young people in need.

<sup>8</sup> 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 2021 and March 2022, the main 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 no longer willing or able to accommodate (46%);
2. Domestic abuse (11%);
3. Eviction from a private, social or supported housing tenancy (7%);
4. Friends no longer willing or able to accommodate (6%);
5. Non-violent relationship breakdown with partner (4%).

Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. Released October 2022<sup>9</sup>

The top three causes of homelessness were identical for all regions in England, with the exception of the South West with evictions being the second most common reason of loss or threat of loss of the last settled home (10% young people aged 16-24 owed a homelessness duty).

As in previous years, family no longer willing or being able to accommodate the young person remains the most mentioned reason for being homeless or at risk. It has, however, experienced a slight decrease compared to the financial year 2020/2021 (49%). Among the regions in England, London presented the highest proportion with more than a half of the young people who lost or were threatened to lose their last settled home due to the family not willing or able to accommodate them.

Since the pandemic, domestic abuse is an even bigger driver of homelessness. For the second year in a row, young people who were homeless or threatened with the loss of their home due to domestic abuse increased and it now involves more than one in ten young people (11% compared to 9% in 2020/2021 and 8% in 2019/2020). Yorkshire and the Humber, London and the East Midlands were the regions with the highest proportion of homeless young people or at risk due to domestic abuse.

<sup>9</sup> Information obtained through Freedom of Information request in October 2022.

<sup>10</sup> You can find more details here: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/50/section/21>

**Young women are five times more likely than young men to be homeless or at risk due to domestic abuse** (15% compared to 3%). In particular, 87 per cent of the homelessness cases of young people due to domestic abuse involved young women aged 18 to 24 years old.

## Rising homelessness due to evictions

Between April 2021 and March 2022, a total of 3,674 young people aged 16-24 owed a prevention or relief duty lost or were threatened with loss of their last settled home due to evictions from private, social or supported housing, compared with 2,870 in 2020/2021. **The number of young people facing homelessness due to evictions increased by almost a third compared to the previous financial year.**

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

Despite representing only 39 per cent of the total number of young people being owed a duty, **62 per cent of the eviction-related homelessness cases involved young men.** Evictions from a private, social or supported housing represent a reason for homelessness for 12 per cent of young men, while it only concerns five per cent of the young women owed a prevention or relief duty.

This rise in homelessness due to evictions is likely to be connected to the lifting of the eviction ban introduced by the government during the pandemic. 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 regulated by Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988<sup>10</sup> allows private landlords to evict tenants on an assured tenancy agreement or rolling contract, without having to establish that the tenant is at fault.

## 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 we recorded an increase in the number of homeless young people in England. In addition, England also has the highest youth homelessness rate among the four nations: almost one in 53 young people aged 16-24 is homeless or at risk of homelessness in England.

With the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) in its fourth year, it is really concerning that the assessment rates and positive outcomes for homeless young people have not substantially improved since the HRA has been in force. A third of young people approaching their local authority for support are not even assessed, let alone receive any kind of assistance. Moreover, only 38 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. It is clearly visible an alarming situation for local authorities in rural areas, which present a significant gap in assessment rates and positive outcomes, despite seeing, on average, only half of the number of 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, an increasing proportion of young people are forced out of their home due to domestic violence, especially young women. Domestic abuse represents the main cause of homelessness for more than one in ten young people and has steadily increased since the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, a higher number of young people were evicted in the last financial year, due to the lifting of the eviction ban in June 2021.

What is most worrying is that behind these numbers there are thousands of distressed young people and in need of support. Not having a place to sleep affects their education outcomes and their work productivity, their physical and mental well-being. It affects our society as a whole in terms of costs for the social security system and lost benefits due to missed education and job opportunities. While many of these young people will receive the support they are entitled to, our data shows that far too many are not. It is therefore crucial that national government, local authorities and the homelessness sector work together to ensure that all young people presenting as homeless in the future get the assistance they need in order to 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 Centrepont 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.

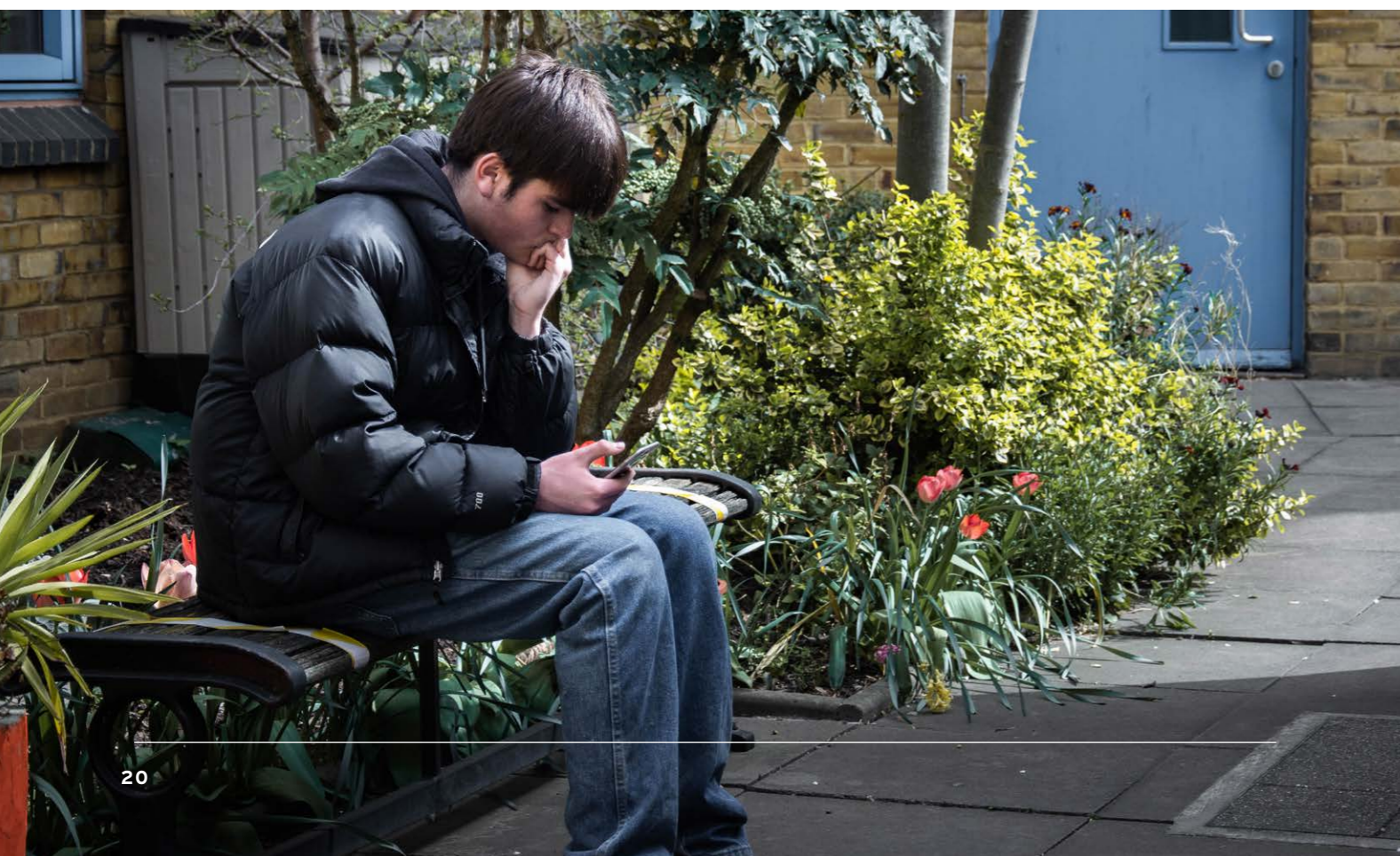
This year saw a good response rate to Centrepont's Freedom of Information request, with 87 per cent of local authorities responding, compared to 84 per cent last year. Additionally, the majority of those councils that responded to our request were able to provide some or all of the data requested, helping 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 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 309 local authorities in England with responsibility for homelessness support.

### % of local authorities # responses Data provided

84%	260	presented themselves as homeless or at risk of homelessness, as main applicant
42%	130	were included as part of any household presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness, including as main applicant
81%	249	were assessed under the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017
82%	253	received an initial assessment of being owed a prevention duty
81%	250	received an initial assessment of being owed a relief duty
80%	248	had a successful prevention duty outcome
77%	239	had a prevention duty end leading to a relief duty
78%	241	had a prevention duty end for any other reason
79%	243	had a relief duty end successfully
78%	240	had a relief duty end for any other reason
80%	246	assessed under the Housing Act 1996
80%	247	accepted as statutorily homeless and owed a housing duty by their council
<b>37%</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>provided data for all parts of the Freedom of Information request</b>



## Estimating the scale of youth homelessness

Centrepoin'ts 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 87 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 multiple 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	standard error	t-stat
(Intercept)	3.735***	(0.179)	20.849
Waiting_list	5.121e-05 ***	(1.143e-05)	4.482
child_low_income_AHC	4.591***	(0.742)	6.190
alcohol	6.832e-04 **	(2.219e-04)	3.079
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.42</b>		
<b>Num. obs.</b>	<b>238</b>		

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

**Waiting\_list:** total number of households on the waiting list for social housing (Source: Local Authority Housing Statistics data returns, England 2020-21)

**Child\_low\_income\_AHC:** Child poverty rate estimates, after housing costs (Source: Loughborough University, 2019-20)

**Alcohol:** alcohol-related hospital admissions (per 100,000 population) (Source: NHS, Statistics on Alcohol, England 2021)

Other variables that were highly correlated with presentations, but were not included in the final model, were: the number of Universal Credit claimants aged 16-24; child poverty before housing costs; 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'ts 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 129,000 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 from 2018/19 and 2019/20, and 2020/21 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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