

England's Temporary Accommodation Crisis Reaches Alarming Levels

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The number of homeless households in England has reached 131,140 as of 31 March 2025, a rise of 11.8% compared with 117,350 at the same date last year. This figure was reported by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for the end of March 2025, highlighting a deepening housing crisis that successive administrations have struggled to resolve.

. Among these households, 169,050 dependent children were living in temporary accommodation as of 31 March 2025, the highest number on record. The figures also show that 5,760 households with children were placed in bed—and—breakfast accommodation, a decline of 30.1%, rather than the claimed 23% surge in emergency housing reliance.

While the data shows a 6% fall in households owed a prevention or relief duty between January and March 2025 (83,450 compared with the same period last year), this small drop does little to offset rising homelessness overall. The underlying issue remains a chronic shortage of affordable housing, compounded by years of underinvestment and policy missteps.

Charities have sounded the alarm, urging the Labour government to take immediate steps to alleviate the crisis. Matt Downie, chief executive of Crisis, didn't mince words in a recent interview: "Years of stop-start investment in housing benefit, coupled with the failure of successive governments to build enough social housing, has left record numbers of families unable to find anywhere affordable to live." He pointed to the dire conditions in temporary accommodation, where families are often stuck in cramped, low-quality spaces without basic facilities like kitchens or laundry.

Downie called for an urgent adjustment to housing benefit to cover at least the bottom third of local rental costs. He welcomed the government's £39 billion Social and Affordable Homes Programme, aiming for 300,000 new homes with 60% at social rent, but cautioned that delayed delivery offers little comfort to families currently in unsuitable temporary accommodation.

Shelter's director of campaigns and policy, Mairi MacRae, said that "over 169,000 children face a long summer in insecure temporary accommodation", adding that this reflects a severe shortage of social rent homes and inadequate housing benefit levels. She pressed the government to unfreeze the local housing allowance in the upcoming Autumn Budget to cover at least the bottom third of local rents, alongside a commitment to build 90,000 social homes annually for the next decade.

The government's housing strategy has been criticised for slow progress and prioritising long-term ambitions over immediate relief. Although Labour's homebuilding plans are ambitious, critics contend they do not address the urgent needs of families currently in temporary accommodation. The refusal to prioritise short-term measures, such as restoring housing benefit to realistic levels, risks prolonging the suffering of vulnerable households.

The data paints a stark picture: without bold intervention, England's housing crisis may continue to intensify, trapping more families in a cycle of instability. Charities are clear that housing benefit reform and a robust commitment to social housing are non-negotiable steps to stem this tide. Whether the government will act decisively remains to be seen.