

ROUGH SLEEPING

A NATIONAL DISGRACE

What is “rough sleeping”?

“Rough sleeping” is the most visible, though not the most prevalent, form of homelessness. Rough sleeping can refer to anyone who is living on the streets, in doorways, parks, cars, or tents, in derelict buildings, or sleeping in other structures not intended as human habitation (such as skips, corridors, stairwells, or bus or train stations).

How do we know how many people are sleeping rough?

The full picture of rough sleeping across UK is unclear. An annual single-night snapshot of the number of people sleeping rough uses information collected by local authorities in England between 1 October and 30 November each year, either as a count carried out overnight, or an estimate.

Local authorities can choose to do an estimate rather than a count, relying on the knowledge of the agencies working with rough sleepers such as outreach, advice and day centres, supported housing, drug and alcohol services, and mental health agencies. Estimates often provide a higher figure than those given in counts and are more reliable.

In London and a few other areas, a multi-agency database records people who are known to be sleeping rough. The London CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and

Information Network) database, managed by St Mungo's and funded by the Greater London Authority (GLA), has been going for at least 15 years and provides more reliable information than other systems. Reports can be found on the GLA website.

Who is counted?

The Government's definition for use when people are included in the annual counts considers people as sleeping rough if they are seen actually asleep or bedded down in any of those places, or are about to bed down (sitting on/in, or standing, next to their bedding).

Who is excluded?

The definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protest, squatters or travellers, or people spending the night on buses or underground trains / trams, in airports, or in cafés. Also not counted are those who sofa-surf (stay with friends or family for a night or two before moving on once more), or people who agree to sleep with someone in return for a bed for the night. Also excluded are households owed a statutory homelessness duty and placed in households in temporary accommodation, and the hidden homeless.

As a result, it is likely that figures given in counts are under-estimates. In addition, there are many reasons for rough sleepers not wanting to be counted. These include fear of being moved on and losing their sheltered spot outside if they are found, fear of being sent back to their home town or country, unwillingness to be persuaded to go into a hostel, and general mistrust of statutory agencies such as the police and local councils.

What is the source of information?

The key data source is the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government - Rough Sleeping Statistics.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collection/homelessness-statistics#rough-sleeping>

A note of caution about the reliability of these statistics came from the UK Statistics Authority in April 2019, as they said that there may have been some under-reporting for local authorities making use of Rough Sleeping Initiative funding.

How many people are thought to be sleeping rough?

Although it might be argued that there were larger numbers of rough sleepers in earlier times (for example, after the Napoleonic Wars), the current scale of it is shocking. Fifty years ago, older men could be found sleeping rough in our major cities for a range of different reasons but often including mental health problems and alcohol and/or drug dependency.

What is notable now is not only the increased numbers, but the wider range of people sleeping rough, and the greater number of places they can be found.

The number includes many failed asylum seekers and migrant workers who are not

able to use public funding to pay for accommodation (No Recourse to Public Funding), and an increasing number of young people, couples, and even people who are working.

It is important to note that not all those who beg are sleeping rough. A significant number, at least outside London, have somewhere to stay.

An increasing problem

Rough sleeping has increased by 165% since the Coalition Government took power in 2010.

Why do people sleep rough?

The causes are complex, but there is no doubt that the recent increases are a result of Government policies towards migrant workers, insufficient new public housing, cuts in funding for supported housing, lack of provision for people leaving prison, care or the Armed Forces. Increases in mental health needs and the increased prevalence of New Psychoactive Substances (formerly termed “legal highs”) have impact, while welfare “reforms” have left large numbers of people struggling to pay for their accommodation.

Who was sleeping rough in 2018?

Although rough-sleepers are still overwhelmingly males aged 26 and over, women and young people are also worryingly present.

What is being done to improve matters?

There have been many rough sleeping initiatives over the last 20 years, starting with the *Rough Sleeping Initiative* set up in 1990, extended by the Labour Government in 1997, alongside the setting up of the Rough Sleeper Unit. This was tasked with reducing rough

sleeping across England by two thirds within 3 years. By 2002, the target had been exceeded outside London, but in the capital the reduction was more modest.

Local councils were then required under the Homelessness Act 2002 to produce Homelessness Strategies, with an emphasis on prevention of homelessness. Provision of support was funded through the Supporting People programme which started in 2003.

This was followed in 2010 by the establishment of the *No Second Night Out* programme, aiming to respond to new people on the street within 24 hours, including an assessment of the individual's circumstances and an offer of temporary accommodation for the following night where possible. **Overall, homelessness was reduced by 62% between 1998 and 2010.**

In March 2018, the present Tory Government's *Rough Sleepers Initiative* (RSI) came into force and targeted local authorities with the highest levels of rough sleeping recorded in 2017. RSI is part of the Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy which proposes to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027.

Across the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, the East Midlands and the West Midlands, a rise in the number of rough sleepers from 2017 was largely driven by increasing numbers of UK nationals. In London, the increase in the overall number of people sleeping rough was largely driven by increasing numbers of people sleeping rough who were EU (non-UK) nationals.

Sadly, 4 in 10 councils think it is unlikely that they will meet the Strategy's target of eradicating rough sleeping by 2027, and this increases to 6 in 10 Councils in largely urban metropolitan and London councils.

What will the next Labour Government do to tackle rough sleeping?

In his 2017 General Election Mini Manifesto for Housing, John Healey, Shadow Secretary of State for Housing, pledged to set up a *New Deal on Homelessness*, with a new national mission, ground-breaking legislation, comprehensive plan to end rough sleeping within the next Parliament, and action to tackle the root causes of rising homelessness.

This would include tackling the lack of security of tenure in the Private Rented Sector, and the link between Universal Credit and homelessness.

He also committed the Party to transforming the capacity to get people off the streets for good, by making available at least 4,000 new homes for people with a history of rough sleeping.

What does Labour Housing Group think?

Labour Housing Group considers homelessness in general, but rough sleeping in particular, to be a national disgrace. Ending rough sleeping needs to be a priority at all levels of government.

The Tory Government's pledge of **£1.2bn** investment in homelessness and related services pales into insignificance in comparison with the cuts they have made to local authority and supported housing budgets.

The Local Government Association says there is a **£3.9bn** black hole in funding of council services in 2019/20, and **£3.5bn** less will be spent on housing in 2019/20 than in 2010/11.

The National Audit Office says that a **70% cut** in funding for homelessness hostels and other supported housing works out at a loss of **£1bn each year**.

There were at least 449 deaths of homeless people in the UK in the 12 months between October 2017 and October 2018, according to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism.

LHG agrees with John Healey that a truly linked-up plan across several Government departments is needed to reverse the increase in rough sleeping.

Critically, we need to build a large volume public housing across the country, and make sure that homeless people and those at risk of homelessness can access it, and be helped to keep it.

What does Labour Housing Group recommend?

For Central Government:

- Change those parts of the benefit system, such as sanctions and the Bedroom Tax, that cause homelessness
- Bring rents down to a level that people can afford
- Reinstate security of tenure for private tenants
- Increase funding in mental health provision, drug and alcohol treatment, and supported housing
- Require all councils to invest in Housing First, so that homeless people do not get stuck in shared hostels until they can prove they can manage a home
- Stop prisons releasing prisoners to the streets

For local government:

- Make every effort to learn how many rough sleepers there are in the area
- Link rough sleepers to services which can help them move away from the street
- Commission services which help people to tackle problems which may have led to them being on the streets, and which help to prevent homelessness

Where to find out more

<https://labour.org.uk/issues/housing-for-the-many/>

<https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Housing-Mini-Manifesto.pdf>

<https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/rough-sleeping/ending-rough-sleeping/>

<https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/homelessness-in-numbers/rough-sleeping/rough-sleeping-explore-data>

WHAT IS THE LABOUR HOUSING GROUP?

The Labour Housing Group is a lobbying group that is affiliated to the Labour Party and dedicated to the development of a socialist housing policy.

You can contact us at

<http://labourhousing.org/#main-contact-form>

You can join us at

<http://labourhousing.org/account/join>

Read more at Red Brick

<https://redbrickblog.wordpress.com/>

More at <https://tinyurl.com/LHGBriefings>

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