# Families face record waiting times for social housing in the UK



Families across the UK are facing unprecedented waiting times for social housing, with some regions reporting delays surpassing a century. According to a recent analysis from the National Housing Federation (NHF), Crisis, and Shelter, the waiting list in the London borough of Enfield currently stands at 105 years, while Westminster and Merton report waits of 107 years and 102 years, respectively.

The study highlights that in 32 council areas throughout England, waiting times for a three-bedroom social home extend beyond 18 years, essentially outpacing an entire childhood. Since 2015, the number of families on waiting lists has surged by 37%, underscoring the ongoing housing crisis affecting many communities.

Shelter has reported alarming figures, revealing that there are currently 164,040 homeless children living in temporary accommodation, which represents a 15% increase compared to the previous year. Additionally, there are 4,667 individuals currently sleeping rough on any given night, marking a 20% rise from the prior year. These increases are believed to be exacerbated by government policies, such as the retention of the two-child benefit cap instituted by the Labour government.

The era from 2000 to 2019 saw significant profits for house builders, with an average profit increase of £75,000 per house sold, as noted by research conducted at Brunel University. In 2024 alone, landlords amassed £56.2 billion in rent solely from young people, contributing to the growing concerns over rising living costs.

While the Labour government has made a commitment to construct 1.5 million new homes, only 1.2% of these are designated as affordable, translating to merely 18,000 homes that are realistically within reach for many families. This number starkly contrasts with the net loss of social housing over the past decade, with Crisis reporting a decrease of 180,000 social homes due to sales and demolitions outpacing new constructions.

The societal impact of social housing extends beyond providing shelter; it reportedly contributes at least £77.7 billion annually to the economy through savings generated for the NHS, local councils, and the government, alongside opportunities for residents. According to Shelter, investing in 90,000 new social homes each year could yield over £50 billion in economic benefits, including significant savings in housing benefit and universal credit costs. Currently, a staggering 88% of the UK’s housing budget goes into landlords' pockets for high rents, a stark increase from just 4% in the 1970s.

Angie, a 44-year-old resident of Tower Hamlets, has been on the waiting list for social housing for 16 years, highlighting the personal impact of these statistics. She expressed her frustrations, stating, “We might be on low income, and we might be on benefits, and we might be stuck in a system, but we still have the right to the quality of life that everybody else does.”

Matt Downie, Chief Executive of Crisis, articulated the broader implications of the housing crisis, commenting, “The consequences of failing to build anywhere near enough social homes are tens of thousands of children growing up homeless, restricted life chances and people trapped in poverty across generations. It’s ludicrous that in some areas of the country the wait for a social home is more than average life expectancy."

Mairi MacRae, Director of Policy and Campaigns at Shelter, added that decades of inadequate social housing development have led to a fragmented housing system and ongoing homelessness. She stated, “No child should grow up without a safe, stable home, but today, more than 164,000 children are spending their formative years in damaging and often dangerous temporary accommodation.”

With the next Spending Review on the horizon, both Downie and MacRae called for a comprehensive commitment from the government to substantially increase investment in social housing to secure a safer and more stable future for communities across the UK.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.housing.org.uk/news-and-blogs/news/over-a-hundred-years-wait-for-a-family-sized-social-home/> - This article corroborates the claim that some local authorities in England have social housing waiting lists exceeding a hundred years for family-sized homes, with specific examples from London boroughs like Westminster, Enfield, and Merton. It also highlights the overall surge in waiting list numbers since 2015.
* <https://centreforlondon.org/publication/londons-social-housing-waiting-times/> - This report supports the lengthy waiting times for social housing in London, including significant variations across different boroughs and the challenges associated with providing larger family homes.
* <https://bebeez.eu/2025/02/06/social-housing-waiting-lists-could-hit-two-million-people-in-a-decade/> - This article underscores the growing issue of social housing waiting lists, projecting they could exceed two million people by 2034, and highlights the insufficient current pace of building affordable homes in England.
* <https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/239700/crisis_housing_supply_requirements_across_great_britain_2018.pdf> - This document from Crisis provides depth into the housing supply requirements across Great Britain, emphasizing the need for increased social housing investment to address homelessness and affordability issues.
* <https://www.housing.org.uk/resources/the-economic-impact-of-building-social-housing/> - This resource highlights the economic benefits of investing in social housing, including significant savings and contributions to local economies, which aligns with claims about its broader societal impact.