# Boomerang generation reshaping UK family life amid worsening housing crisis



The shifting dynamics of modern family life, particularly in the context of housing, reveal a growing complexity in intergenerational relationships. Increasingly, adult children—termed the "boomerang generation"—are moving back in with their parents, driven by economic pressures such as high property prices, stagnant wages, and insufficient affordable housing options. Recent surveys indicate that a fifth of this demographic in the UK is now in their thirties, with many parents expressing a degree of contentment amidst their offspring’s return, though the latter often view it differently.

This phenomenon occurs against a backdrop of a severe housing crisis, particularly acute in urban areas. Cities like London have seen property values skyrocket at a pace that far exceeds wage growth, rendering home ownership a distant prospect for many. A stark contrast is evident when examining the housing crisis in comparison to other major cities around the globe, such as Dublin, Sydney, and New York, where the same trends of rising prices and stagnant incomes persist. The resulting housing shortage has become intertwined with political discourse, ultimately affecting economic confidence and even birth rates, as couples postpone family formation amid financial insecurity.

Socially, this crisis fosters a "zero-sum" mindset among younger demographics, who are increasingly sceptical about the viability of upward mobility. Research from Harvard suggests that urban residents are more prone to feeling trapped in a competitive societal framework where advancement seems contingent on the misfortune of others. These sentiments have echoed through the political landscape, influencing voting behaviours, such as the rise of populist movements in Canada and Europe that capitalise on housing-related discontent.

The implications of inadequate housing extend beyond immediate economic woes; they reshape societal interactions and family structures. Wealth disparities within generational cohorts have become starkly pronounced. While some millennials have benefitted from familial financial assistance—dubbed the "Bank of Mum and Dad"—to secure property, others find themselves hamstrung without such support. This dynamic not only deepens existing inequalities but also threatens the solidarity that once characterised the millennial generation.

As the housing landscape evolves, so do the potential solutions. Suggestions abound, including liberalising building regulations, repurposing commercial properties for residential use, and promoting higher-density housing developments. The calling for innovative designs has grown louder, with advocates like architect George Clarke highlighting a decline in housing quality over the past century. Clarke champions a well-rounded approach focused on sustainable and aesthetically pleasing homes, reflecting a necessary shift in public sentiment that contrasts sharply with the historical opposition to new housing—often termed “Nimbyism”—which stems from a distrust in the quality of new developments.

Furthermore, easing the downsizing process for older homeowners, who may wish to move to smaller properties, could significantly relieve market pressure. In the UK, approximately 1.4 million over-65s are reportedly interested in downsizing, a move that could release substantial housing stock back into the market. Moreover, the current government's ambition to increase housing supply, with a commitment to building 1.5 million new homes, is noble, but the reality is complicated by bureaucratic delays and evolving safety regulations that slow progress.

Without addressing the root causes of the housing crisis, the generational divide will only deepen, exacerbating feelings of disenfranchisement among the young. The situation underscores the urgency of elevating housing as a critical governmental priority, as its implications extend far beyond simple economic measures; they encompass the very fabric of family life and social equity. If a resolution remains elusive, the consequences will reverberate throughout society, hindering personal aspirations and perpetuating cycles of inequality that threaten the stability and cohesion of future generations.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8
2. Paragraphs 1, 2, 5, 6
3. Paragraph 5
4. Paragraph 4
5. Paragraph 2, 6
6. Paragraphs 4, 5, 7
7. Paragraphs 1, 4, 5

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/4dac2611-6d93-44ce-ab12-036fbc687324> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/4dac2611-6d93-44ce-ab12-036fbc687324> - The UK is facing a severe housing crisis that particularly impacts the younger generations, with many adults in their 30s returning to live with parents due to high property prices, insufficient affordable rental options, and stagnant wages. This shortage is most critical in cities like London, where property prices have risen rapidly over the past decades, far outpacing wages and even surpassing fine art in value appreciation. The housing issue affects economic confidence, birth rates, and political stability, contributing to growing zero-sum thinking among urban dwellers and influencing national elections. Solutions include liberalizing building regulations, encouraging higher density housing, converting empty commercial spaces into residential properties, and facilitating downsizing among older homeowners to free up family homes. Though the UK Labour government has committed to building more homes and reforming planning processes, regulatory delays and safety requirements have stalled progress. Addressing this crisis requires elevating housing as a governmental priority, as inadequate availability threatens generational equity, family formation, and social trust.
3. <https://www.homebuilding.co.uk/news/george-clarke-says-uk-housing-stock-is-worse-than-100-years-ago> - Architect and TV presenter George Clarke has sharply criticized the current state of the UK's housing system, claiming that many new homes today are of lower quality than those built a century ago. He argues that the housing crisis stems not only from a shortage of homes but also from poor construction quality, rushed and uninspiring developments, and unfulfilled political promises. Clarke points to the rise in public opposition to new housing—so-called Nimbyism—as a response to poorly designed and substandard housing, rather than a blanket resistance to development. To counter this, he encourages self-build and custom-build options, empowering individuals to take control of their housing future. Clarke also condemns the short-sightedness of successive governments, which have prioritized ambitious housing targets over meaningful, long-term policy reform. He advocates for a 30-year cross-party plan focused on high-quality, design-led building, much like the successful models in countries such as Denmark. Emphasizing the need for sustainable and energy-efficient homes built with modern technologies and eco-friendly materials, Clarke insists that building better homes is crucial to restoring public confidence and ensuring future generations, including his own children, can afford home ownership.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/46d8bd13-1be1-4c59-8be7-d30f9d756d92> - As millennials grappled with economic adversity in the 2010s, they united against the wealthier, property-owning baby boomer generation. However, as baby boomers' influence wanes, a new conflict may emerge among millennials themselves. Wealth disparities are becoming evident within the millennial generation, where the richest 10% now surpass their boomer counterparts in property wealth. This divide is mainly due to substantial parental financial assistance aiding some millennials in acquiring homes. In both the UK and US, research shows a significant portion of young homeowners receiving familial help, with the top recipients benefitting enormously. These financial gifts not only provide immediate support but also compound over time, deepening the wealth gap. As these disparities grow, so too might tensions within the millennial generation, potentially fracturing the solidarity they once shared.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/535619e8-cb1d-4a2a-9905-9f06b76729bd> - In 2022-23, only the top 10% of households in England could afford to buy a house costing less than five times their household income. Average annual disposable income was £34,569, while the average house price was £298,000, resulting in an affordability ratio of 8.6. This marks an improvement from the record 8.8 in 2021, but a rise from 8.4 in 2022. For the poorest households, the ratio was 18.2. In London, no income group found housing affordable, with costs 35 times the poorest households' income and 5.9 times the richest. Rising house prices and stagnant wages have made it increasingly difficult for many to enter the housing market, especially for younger generations. The government aims to address this by building 1.5 million new homes by 2029. Despite recent price increases, the affordability ratios in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales remained relatively stable. Housing prices have grown at twice the rate of household incomes since 2001.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/4b7e81b3-d0c4-4ef5-9686-1ceee63a6c9b> - The Bank of Mum and Dad (Bomad) has significantly reshaped the British economy and society by providing substantial financial support for their children, particularly in covering university tuition fees and deposits for first homes. Data shows an increasing reliance on this support, with a significant percentage of first-time homebuyers receiving family assistance. This trend underscores a growing economic divide, where children's opportunities are increasingly influenced by their parents' financial status. Rising property prices and insufficient housing supply exacerbate this issue, making it harder for those without parental support to secure homeownership. This dynamic has long-term effects on social mobility, as children from less affluent backgrounds struggle more with educational and financial opportunities. The situation is further complicated by issues such as high rent costs and the growing costs associated with elderly care, potentially diminishing future inheritances. Consequently, the Bomad's importance is unlikely to decline shortly, potentially increasing societal inequalities and influencing political landscapes.
7. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/english-house-prices-grew-more-unaffordable-2023-ons-data-shows-2024-12-09/> - In 2023, English house prices became increasingly unaffordable, with an average price requiring 8.6 years of household income (£298,000), up from 8.4 years in 2022. London saw the worst affordability, with average homes out of reach for all income deciles. In contrast, Northern Ireland remained affordable for average households. Prime Minister Keir Starmer calls for "brave" measures to build 1.5 million new houses in England within five years. Analysts predict house prices in Britain will rise faster than inflation but expect affordability to improve for first-time buyers due to falling interest rates. In London, low-income households face severe affordability challenges, needing nearly 35 years of income to buy an average home. Housing affordability showed a slight improvement in 2024 based on different metrics from Halifax. The most affordable regions in England were the north east and Yorkshire and the Humber.