# Private rental homes in Scotland unfit for habitation surge nearly sixfold in five years



Across Scotland, a disturbing number of homes within the private rental sector are failing to meet even the most basic habitable standards. The recent findings reveal that nearly 100,000 privately rented homes are classified as not fit for human habitation, a category determined by a "tolerable standard" that emphasises the necessity for basic living conditions. This standard is seen as crucial since it aims to protect tenants from unsafe and unhealthy housing situations.

The statistics are stark: the number of privately rented homes falling below this standard has surged nearly sixfold between 2018 and 2023, escalating from approximately 7,020 to 94,770 dwellings. This crisis comes despite the fact that the vast majority of Scotland's 2.7 million homes are categorised as socially rented, accounting for around 23% of the housing stock, aimed predominantly at low-income families. Comparatively, only 13% of homes are privately let, yet the private rental market is now facing significant disrepair challenges.

A recent survey by Living Rent, a tenants' rights organisation, underscores these alarming trends, revealing that one in three tenants in the private sector is living with mould and damp — symptoms of a broader "disrepair endemic." Almost two-thirds of respondents reported existing disrepair, with an overwhelming 82% admitting to experiencing issues since beginning their tenancies. Health concerns among tenants are also magnified; the survey highlights that 62% of tenants feel their physical health has been negatively affected by living conditions, while an unsettling 86% cited impacts on their mental health.

The Scottish Government's proposed legislative measures appear to focus heavily on the social housing sector, leaving private renters vulnerable. Following public outcry and a petition for "Leighton's Law," named after a toddler whose health was severely compromised due to unsafe living conditions, advocates are calling for a more stringent approach to disrepair in all rented sectors. The petition aims to ensure that all landlords, both public and private, are obligated to address serious issues such as damp and mould within specified timeframes.

While the government has acknowledged the need for reform, it has so far been slow to adopt targeted measures for the private rental sector. A spokesperson stated intentions to improve accountability and repair timelines for social landlords; however, similar regulations for private landlords remain under consideration. Campaigners argue that holding landlords to account for persistent disrepair in private homes is equally, if not more, essential given the alarming statistics.

Further complicating the issue is a newly published report by the Scottish Housing Regulator, revealing that 59% of tenants in social rented properties have reported safety issues akin to those seen in the private sector, particularly concerning damp and mould. Such findings highlight a systemic issue across both sectors that requires immediate attention and action.

Beyond the immediate welfare of tenants, the implications of disrepair extend to public health, as poor housing conditions are closely associated with a range of adverse health outcomes, including respiratory illnesses and increased stress levels, as highlighted by the Marmot review. The need for urgent reforms is clear; there is growing momentum calling for comprehensive legislation akin to "Awaab’s Law" in England and Wales, which enforces strict remediation standards for damp and mould in rental properties.

Scotland's housing market is at a crucial crossroads. As alarming reports of disrepair continue to surface, the call for robust legislative frameworks protecting tenants in both sectors grows ever louder. To truly address the crisis of disrepair, the Scottish Government must act decisively to ensure that no tenant, regardless of their housing circumstance, is left to endure substandard living conditions.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2
2. Paragraph 3
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7. Paragraph 8

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25175301.100-000-scots-private-rented-homes-not-fit-human-habitation/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-house-condition-survey-2023-key-findings/pages/5-housing-conditions/> - The Scottish House Condition Survey 2023 reveals that 59% of private rented sector dwellings have disrepair to critical elements, with 37% experiencing critical and urgent disrepair. The most common issues include wall finishes, gutters, roof coverings, and chimney stacks, each affecting approximately 24% to 21% of dwellings. The average extent of disrepair is around 2.5% of the relevant area. These findings highlight significant maintenance challenges within Scotland's private rented housing sector.
3. <https://www.livingrent.org/pushed_to_the_edge> - Living Rent's survey indicates that 61% of private tenants have outstanding disrepair issues, with 33.7% facing structural problems and 31.7% dealing with damp and mould. The survey also highlights that 99.1% of tenants with disrepair report negative impacts on their mental health, and 62.2% experience adverse effects on their physical health. These findings underscore the widespread and severe nature of disrepair in Scotland's private rented sector.
4. <https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/repairs/private/tribunal/> - Shelter Scotland provides guidance for tenants whose landlords fail to carry out necessary repairs. Tenants are advised to report issues in writing and allow a reasonable time for repairs. If unresolved, they can apply to the First-tier Tribunal (Housing and Property Chamber) for enforcement. The tribunal can order landlords to perform repairs and may award compensation. This process empowers tenants to ensure their homes meet the required standards.
5. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/homenews/23630897.safety-concerns-600-000-rented-homes-scots-regulator-study/> - A study by the Scottish Housing Regulator reveals that 59% of tenants in social rented properties experienced safety issues, with 44% citing dampness or mould as the most common concern. Approximately 46% of tenants were unsure if their landlord would resolve these issues effectively. The findings highlight significant safety and maintenance challenges within Scotland's social housing sector, emphasizing the need for improved landlord responsiveness and property upkeep.
6. <https://glasgowstandard.com/2023/12/14/scottish-landlords-ignoring-the-law-required-repairs-ignored-say-citizens-advice/> - Citizens Advice Scotland reports that between 2021 and 2023, advisors issued repair advice on over 5,600 occasions, indicating a widespread issue of landlords neglecting their legal obligations to maintain properties. Common problems include damp, mould, infestations, and broken boilers. These issues can adversely affect tenants' health, leading to conditions like respiratory problems. The report calls for better enforcement and support for tenants to ensure landlords fulfill their maintenance duties.
7. <https://www.gov.scot/news/improving-the-quality-of-private-rented-homes/> - The Scottish Government has updated the Repairing Standard for private rented properties, effective from 1 March 2024. New requirements include central heating, adequate kitchen facilities, safe common areas, and circuit breaker devices to reduce electrocution and fire risks. Landlords are also mandated to prevent damp and mould. These measures aim to enhance the safety and quality of private rented homes, aligning standards with those in the social rented sector.