



A National Statistics publication for Scotland

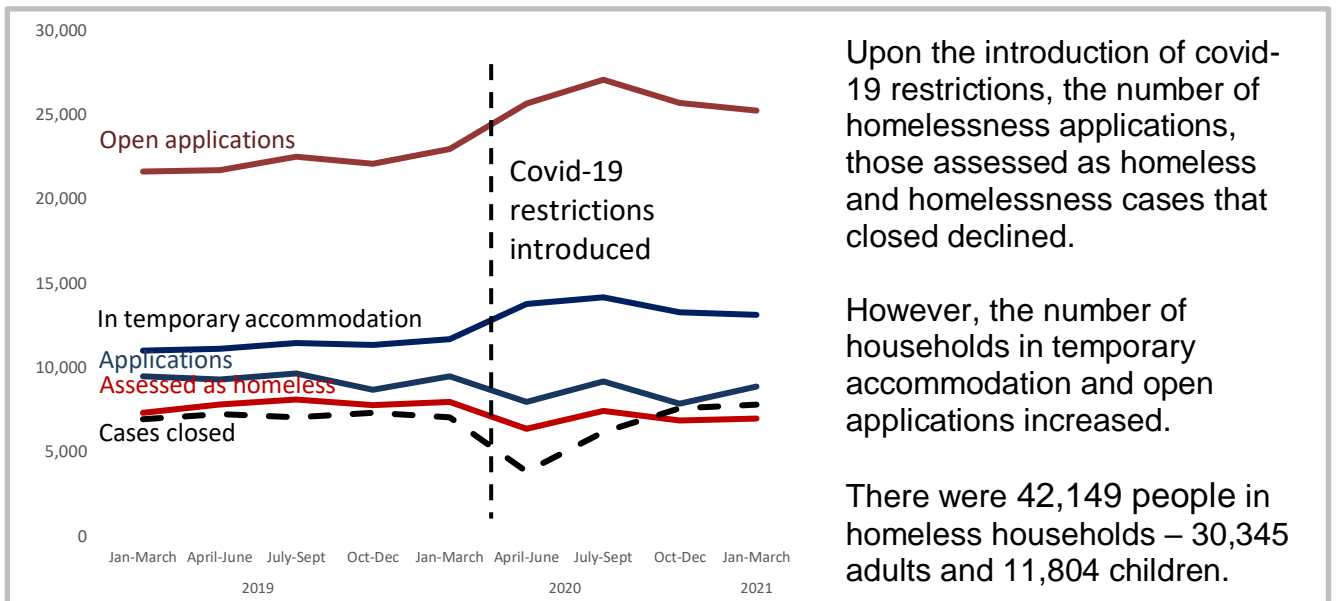
PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES AND PLACES

Homelessness in Scotland: 2020-21

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Main Points for 2020/21



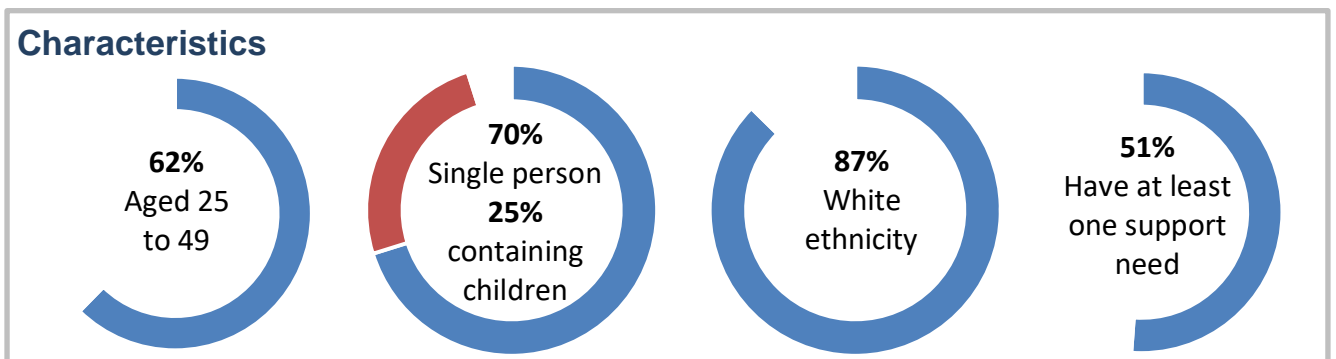
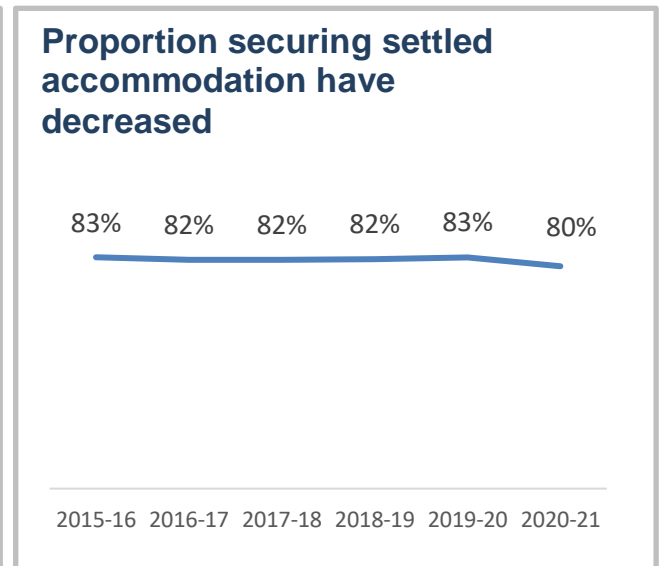
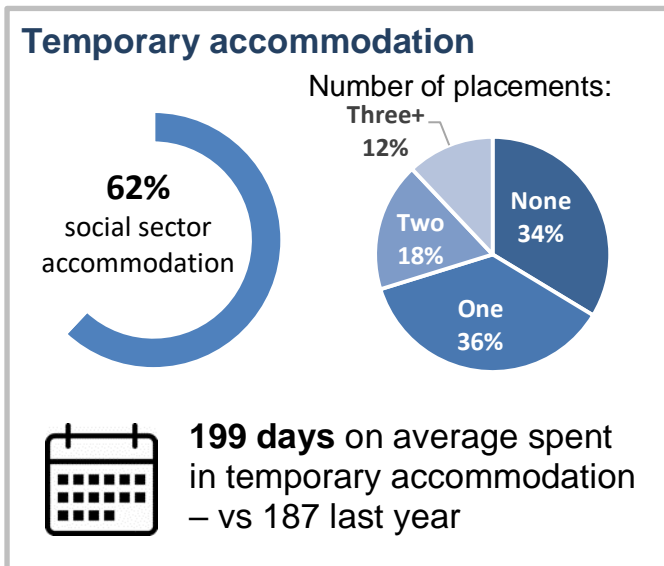
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- reasons of asked to leave and household disputes
- from friends / relatives

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- reasons for loss of accommodation
- from private rented tenancies

2,437 reported sleeping rough 3 months before and 1,471 the night before application



Introduction

This statistics bulletin provides information on homelessness in Scotland in the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, alongside historical data.

It provides statistical information on all stages of the homelessness process, the circumstances from which they became homeless, use of temporary accommodation and the final outcomes of their application.

Characteristics of the homelessness population, including breakdowns by age, gender and ethnicity, which have previously been released separately in a later equalities publication, have also been released as part of this publication.

The statistics in this publication are based on administrative data collected by local authorities in the course of processing homelessness applications. A limitation of this approach is that data is not collected for any households that are homeless but do not engage with their local authority. For this reason the statistics in this publication do not necessarily cover the entire homeless population in Scotland. More detail on the data sources we use are included at the end of this publication.

A Quick Guide to the Homelessness Process

A household is homeless if they have no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere, or have accommodation but cannot reasonably occupy it. A household is threatened with homelessness if it is likely they will become homeless within two months.

There are **three stages involved in a homeless application in Scotland**:

1. The Application stage where the household first presents to the local authority.
2. The Assessment stage which determines:
 - a. If the household is eligible for assistance. Households with no recourse to public funds are not eligible for homelessness assistance, though they may be provided temporary accommodation while their status is assessed.
 - b. whether the household is homeless or threatened with homelessness;
 - c. if the household is homeless, whether this is 'unintentional' or 'intentional'; and
 - d. if unintentionally homeless, whether there is a connection to the local authority to which the application was made and/or to any other (Scottish) local authority.
3. The Outcome stage. A case can be closed only once the local authority has fulfilled its statutory duty or contact has been lost for 28 days.

Excel workbooks containing the tables and charts referenced in this publication are available to download at: <https://www.gov.scot/collections/homelessness-statistics/>

What is the statutory duty of the local authority?

If a household is unintentionally homeless (or threatened with homelessness), the local authority must offer settled accommodation. Until this is available, the local authority must offer temporary accommodation.

If a household is intentionally homeless (or threatened with homelessness), the local authority has no statutory duty to provide settled accommodation (although they may choose to do so). There is a duty to provide temporary accommodation and advice and assistance to help the household secure alternative accommodation.

While previously local authorities had a legal duty to investigate whether a household became intentionally homeless, from November 2019 this became a discretionary power.

Temporary accommodation must be offered while the household is awaiting an assessment decision.

The statutory duty lies with the local authority the household applies to. If a household has no local connection to the one to which it applied, but to another local authority, they may be referred.

A household can accept or refuse offers of accommodation. A local authority's duty to secure accommodation for unintentionally homeless people would be fulfilled by an offer that is refused, provided that the offer is a reasonable one.

More information on the duty local authorities have to assist people who are threatened with or experiencing homelessness can be found in the [Code of Guidance on Homelessness](#).

A note on interpreting the figures

It is not possible to make direct links within a reporting year for the different stages of the homelessness process as different households will be at a different stage at different times.

That is, not all applications made in 2020/21 will have an assessment or temporary accommodation placement that year. Similarly, some assessments made in 2020/21 will relate to applications received prior to this; and some temporary placements in 2020/21 will relate to household applications and assessments prior to this also. Furthermore, there will be households who entered and exited temporary accommodation within the same reporting year, and therefore will not appear in the end of year snapshot.

To also note:

- that it is possible for households to make an application and/or be assessed more than once in the same year
- not all households assessed as homeless enter temporary accommodation

The term 'homeless households' is used throughout the publication to denote households who have been assessed as (unintentionally or intentionally) homeless or threatened with homelessness.

For the gender, age and ethnicity breakdowns, although data is captured for the main applicant and a second applicant where applicable, findings are based on the characteristics of the main applicant only for ease of reporting. Given the majority of homeless households only contain one adult, this only affects 10% of all households where there are two or more adults.

The characteristics of a household are initially collected by the local authority at the application stage. While it is possible for these characteristics to change between application and case closure, it may not be practical for the data collection to be updated to reflect these changes. Therefore, for a small number of households, the characteristics information reported may be out of date. This is most likely to affect household composition.

Care should be taken when interpreting findings based on small numbers. This is particularly the case for the ethnicity breakdowns where there are a small total number within particular categories e.g less than 100 of mixed/multiple ethnicity.

Impact of coronavirus

This is the first annual homelessness statistics release for which covid-19 restrictions and changes in practices were in place for the full reporting period. Where it is believed that covid-19 has had an impact on the data and trends shown in the publication, these have been highlighted with explanations where possible.

In response to the pandemic, local authorities made efforts to house all of those in need (including those who would not otherwise be eligible for homelessness support). This included, but was not restricted to, the accommodating of rough sleepers. Where households housed in response to the pandemic have a formal homelessness application to a local authority and/or have a temporary accommodation placement recorded on management information systems, they will be included in the statistics presented in this publication. If there is no corresponding homelessness application and/or temporary accommodation placement recorded, they will not be included.

Some monthly summary information for homelessness applications and the use of temporary accommodation during the coronavirus period has been collected (from local authorities) by both the [Scottish Housing Regulator](#) and by the [Scottish Government](#) (on behalf of SOLACE¹). They are not subject to the same level of quality assurance processes as the Official Statistics presented in this publication, and are released as management information.

¹ [Home - Solace](#)

The biannual Homelessness in Scotland publication² provides a comparison between the management information and Official Statistics sources. Given the key messages from this have not changed since the biannual publication and the timing of the Official Statistics in this publication are much closer in dates to the monthly management information currently available, comparisons have not been included in this publication.

² [Homelessness in Scotland: update to 30 September 2020 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

The Extent of Homelessness in Scotland

Key Points

- 33,792 homeless applications in 2020/21, a decrease of 9% compared to 2019/20.
- 27,571 households were assessed as homeless in 2020/21, a decrease of 13% compared to 2019/20.
- These households contained 42,149 people, including 30,345 adults and 11,804 children.
- There were 13,097 households in temporary accommodation at 31st March 2021, an increase of 12% compared to March 31st 2020 but a decrease of 7% compared to the recent peak of 14,151 at 30th September 2020.
- 25,226 open homelessness cases in Scotland at 31st March 2021, a 10% increase compared to 31st March 2020 but a decrease of 7% compared to 30th September 2020.

Applications, assessments and households in temporary accommodation

2020/21 saw a number of changing trends in homelessness compared to previous years as a result of the impact of COVID-19.

Table A: Annual differences for homelessness applications, assessments and temporary accommodation, 2019/20 to 2020/21.

Measure	2019/20	2020/21	Change - Number	Change - Percentage
Applications	37,043	33,792	-3,251	-9%
Assessed as homeless	31,581	27,571	-4,010	-13%
Households in temporary accommodation at 31 st March	11,665	13,097	1,432	12%
Open homelessness applications at 31 st March	22,932	25,226	2,294	10%

Table A shows there has been a decrease in the number of applications between 2019/20 and 2020/21 and the number of households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness. At the same time there has been an increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation and in the number of open homelessness cases.

The trends can largely be explained by changes in service use as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some local authorities have reported a reduction in presentations as households were reluctant to approach homelessness services while COVID-19 guidelines advised households to remain at home, meaning households whose housing needs were less urgent opted to remain in their current accommodation. In addition, a reduction in the number of evictions due to emergency coronavirus legislation temporarily extending eviction notice periods likely also reduced the number of households presenting as

homeless from social rented housing, and more noticeably from private rented housing.³ Furthermore, home repossessions were also temporarily banned in this period.⁴

COVID-19 restrictions limited the ability of local authorities to move households in to permanent accommodation, and therefore close cases, explaining the increase in the number of open homelessness cases. This included difficulties in carrying out necessary repairs, challenges conducting viewings due to households shielding or self-isolating, and a lower level of lets due to staff, especially registered social landlords, being furloughed.

There are a couple of reasons for the increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation. First, the rise in the number of open cases increased overall demand for temporary accommodation. In addition, some households who had previously chosen not to take up temporary accommodation provided by the local authority, now required it as the alternative arrangements they had made were no longer viable due to the pandemic.

Chart 1 shows that the number of households assessed as homeless was lower in every quarter for 2020/21, with the biggest decrease being in April to June, when the pandemic first started. The smaller decrease between July and September may be due to fact there were easing of restrictions over this period.

Chart 1: The number of households assessed as homeless was lower in every quarter of 2020/21 compared to previous years

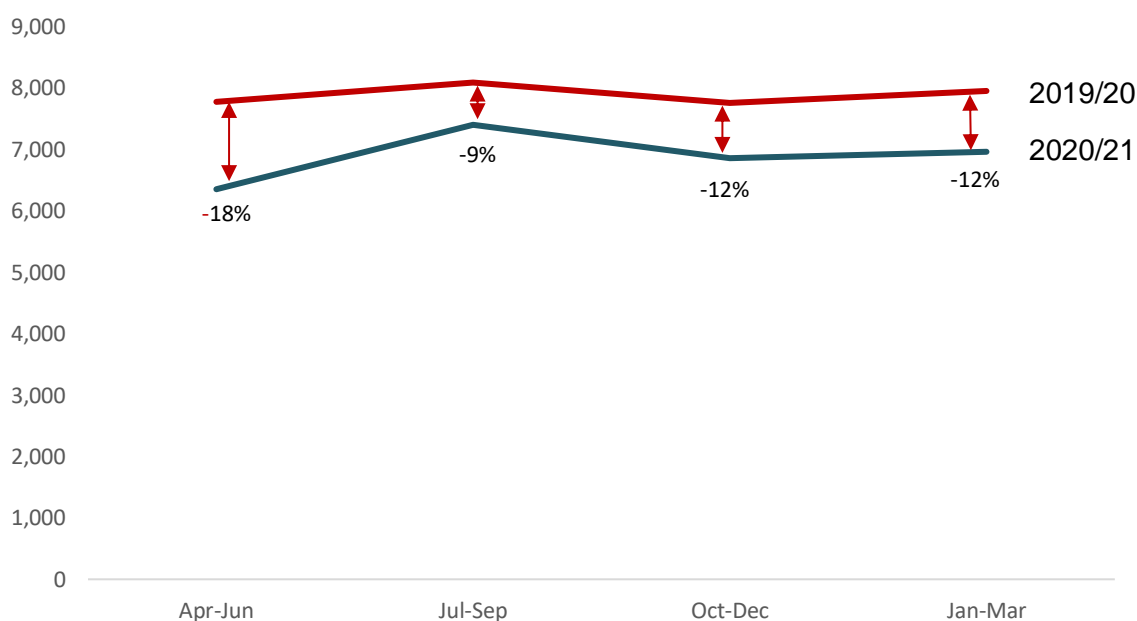


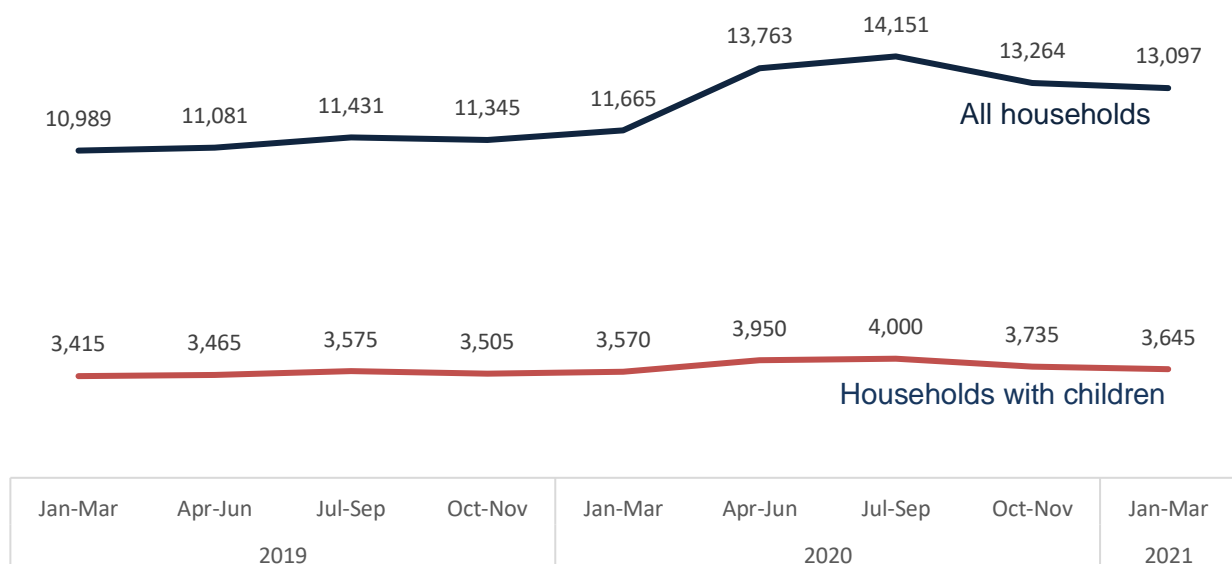
Chart 2 shows that there was a sharp increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation immediately following the onset of the pandemic. This reached a peak in September with numbers in temporary accommodation decreasing since then, although they are still much higher compared to the previous year. This chart also shows that the increase for households with children and/or pregnant women in temporary accommodation isn't as steep as for households overall (12% increase for all vs 2% for

³ Measures providing additional protections for tenants were introduced in the [Coronavirus \(Scotland\) Act 2020](#)

⁴ [Mortgages and coronavirus: information for consumers | FCA](#)

households with children/ pregnant women). There were a total of 7,130 children in temporary accommodation at 31st March – a decrease of 2% (from 7,280) the previous year. (Tables 26-28)

Chart 2: The number of households in temporary accommodation increased as a result of COVID-19



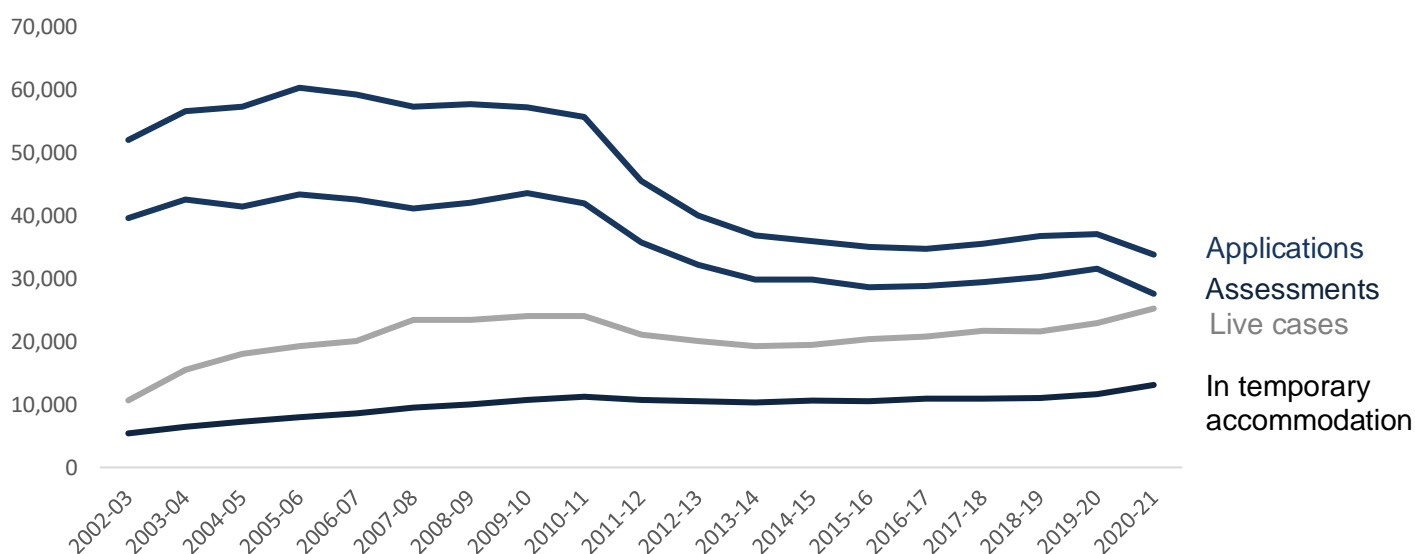
Changes in homelessness assessments

Of the 27,571 homeless households in 2020/21, 27,111 (98%) were assessed as unintentionally homeless, with the remaining 460 assessed as intentionally homeless. The decrease in the proportion assessed as intentionally homeless compared to last year (1% vs 3%) is likely due to changes in legislation which, from November 2019, allows local authorities the choice whether to assess for intentionality rather than it being a legal duty to do so. (Table 8)

Longer-term trends

2020/21 has been an unusual year, and therefore it is difficult to know if the trends seen between this year and last are likely to continue and/or how trends will be affected moving forward as we exit from the COVID-19 pandemic. Chart 3 provides a view of the longer-term trends which have been experienced in homelessness; this shows the impact previous homelessness legislation, policy and practice have had prior to 2020/21.

Chart 3: Trends in homelessness applications, assessments, live cases and temporary accommodation, 2002/03 to 2020/21



In 2001, Scottish homelessness legislation⁵ extended councils’ duties to non-priority need homeless households, with the priority need test being abolished on 31st December 2012⁶. Before 2002, the majority of homeless households in priority need were households with children. Following the 2001 extension duty there was a notable increase in the number of single people applying for homelessness assistance. These single people were also eligible for temporary accommodation. This can, at least in part, explain the increases from 2002/03. The sharper decrease shown from 2009/10 is likely due to the impact of the introduction of Housing Options services in Scottish local authorities, with a focus on prevention.

Number of households vs number of people

While data is provided and reported at a household level, local authorities record the number of people attached to applications, and it is therefore possible to understand how many people are affected by homelessness.

The 27,571 homeless households in 2020/21 contained a total of 42,149 people, comprising 30,345 adults and 11,804 children (Tables 13, 14 & 15). While the number of adults fell by 16% compared to 2019/20, the number of children decreased by 26%. This is due to the greater proportion of households without children assessed as homeless in this period (75% in 2020/21 compared to 71% in 2019/20).

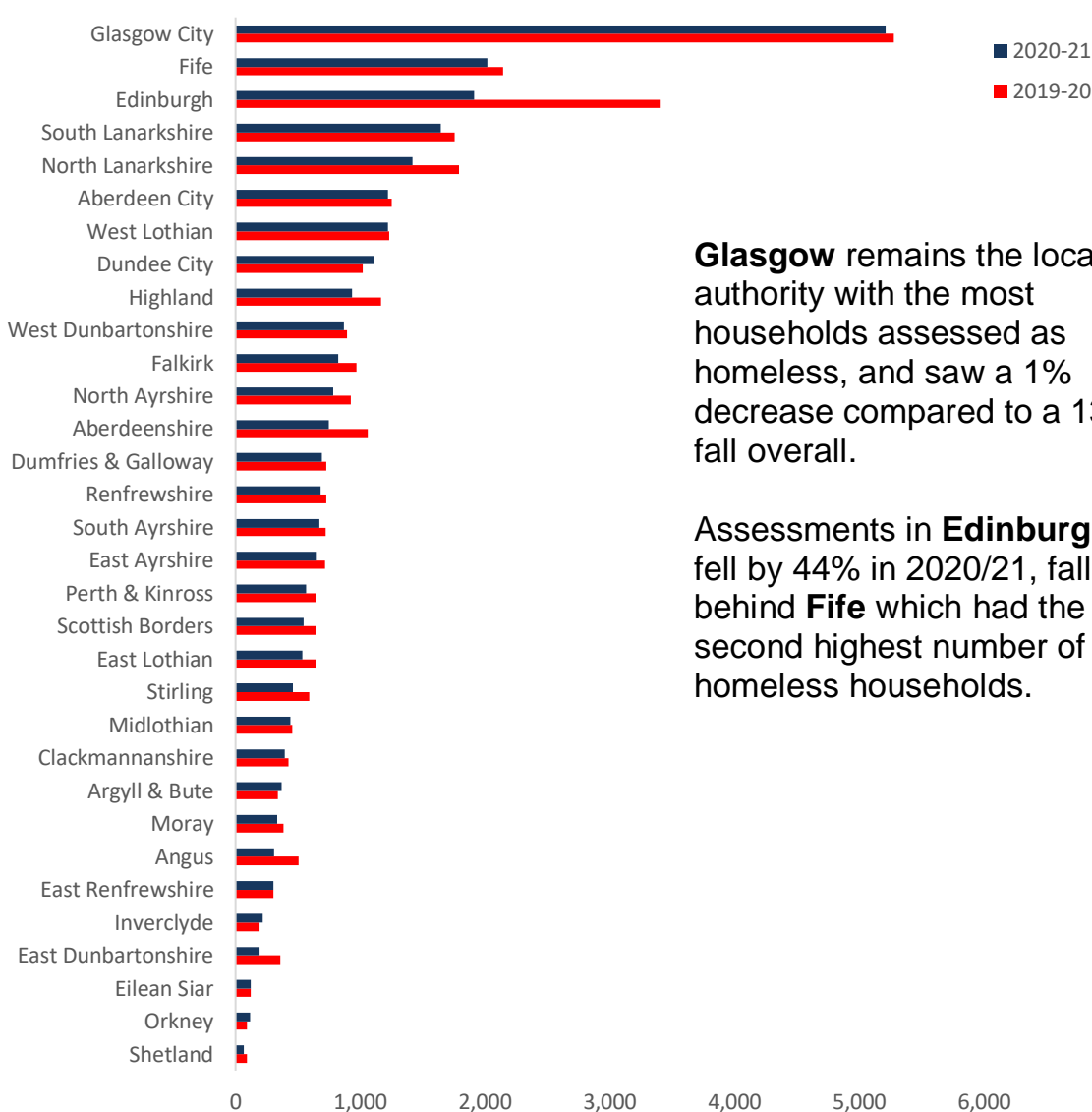
⁵ The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 extended councils’ duties to non-priority homeless people and the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 set the longer term objective of phasing out the distinction between priority and non-priority homeless. See [Summary of Homelessness Legislation](#) for more details.

⁶ In November 2012, the Scottish Parliament approved the Homelessness (Abolition of Priority Need Test) (Scotland) Order 2012.

Data is collected for the number of children in temporary accommodation, but not the number of adults.

How does homelessness vary across Scotland?

Chart 4: Number of homeless households by local authority



Glasgow remains the local authority with the most households assessed as homeless, and saw a 1% decrease compared to a 13% fall overall.

Assessments in **Edinburgh** fell by 44% in 2020/21, falling behind **Fife** which had the second highest number of homeless households.

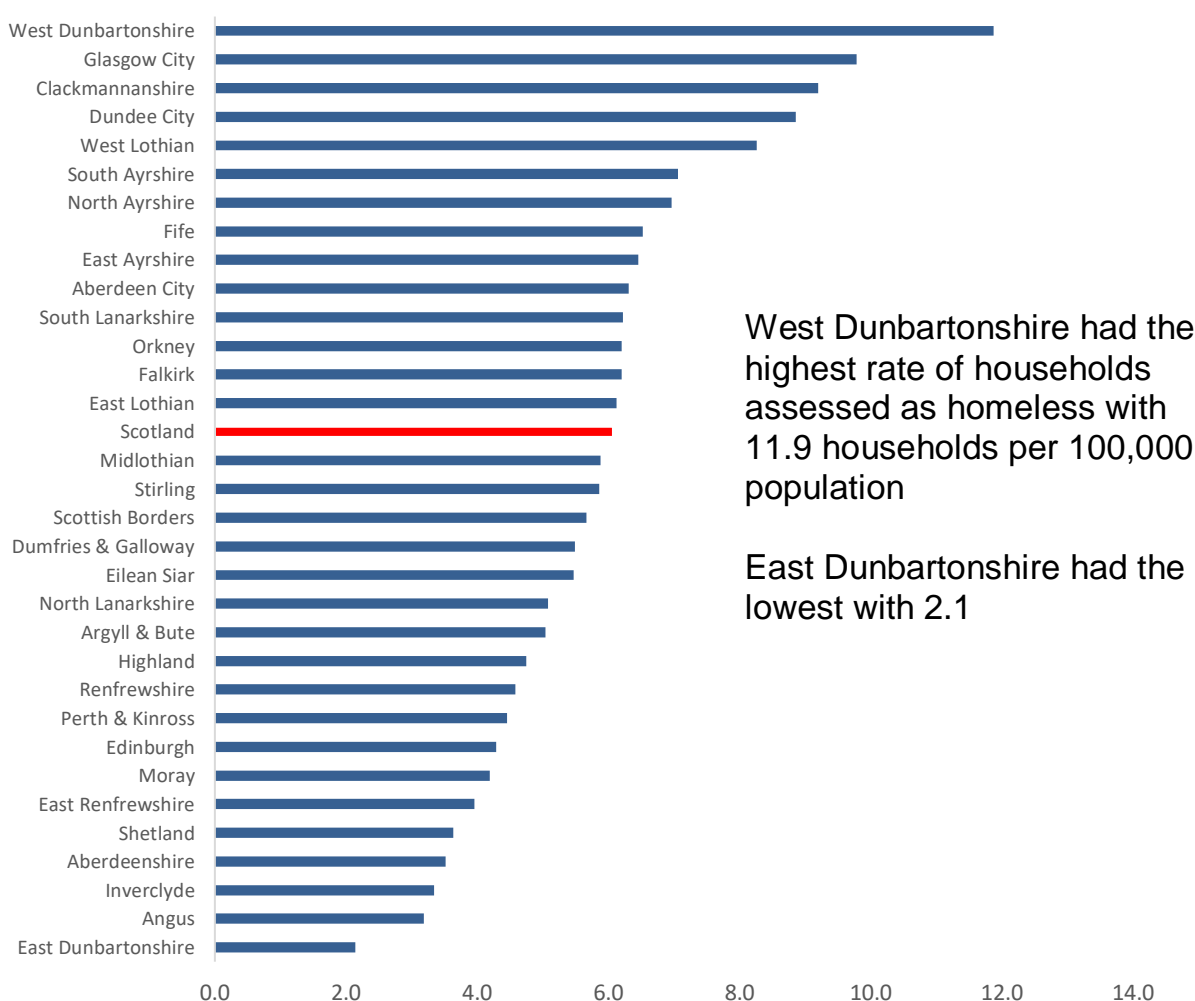
Local authority figures can be found in Table 11 of the accompanying data tables.

The 44% reduction in households (from 3,402 to 1,912) in Edinburgh is largely due to a fall in households becoming homeless from a private rented tenancy and from living with friends or relatives. There was a 67% reduction from a private rented tenancy (264 in 2020/21 compared to 802 in 2019/20) in Edinburgh compared to 42% nationally. Edinburgh also experienced a decrease of those becoming homeless from either 'parental / family home / relatives' or 'friends / partners' of 35% (from 1,532 to 1,002) compared to a national increase of 7%.

Glasgow and Edinburgh had the highest number of households in temporary accommodation, 2,668 and 2,168 respectively, as at 31st March 2021. Note, that there were only a third as many households in temporary accommodation in Fife (708) compared to Edinburgh, despite their numbers of homeless households in Fife being greater. Edinburgh experienced an increase of 300 (16% from 1,868) from 2019/20. Other notable increases were seen in West Lothian (220, 49%), Dundee City (212, 87%) and Fife (183, 35%). (Table 26)

Comparing homelessness figures with the population for each local authority (i.e. rates) provides a useful insight as to how homelessness varies across Scotland.

Chart 5: Homeless households per 1,000 population (aged 16+), 2020/21



Rates for homeless households can be found in Table 12 of the accompanying data tables.

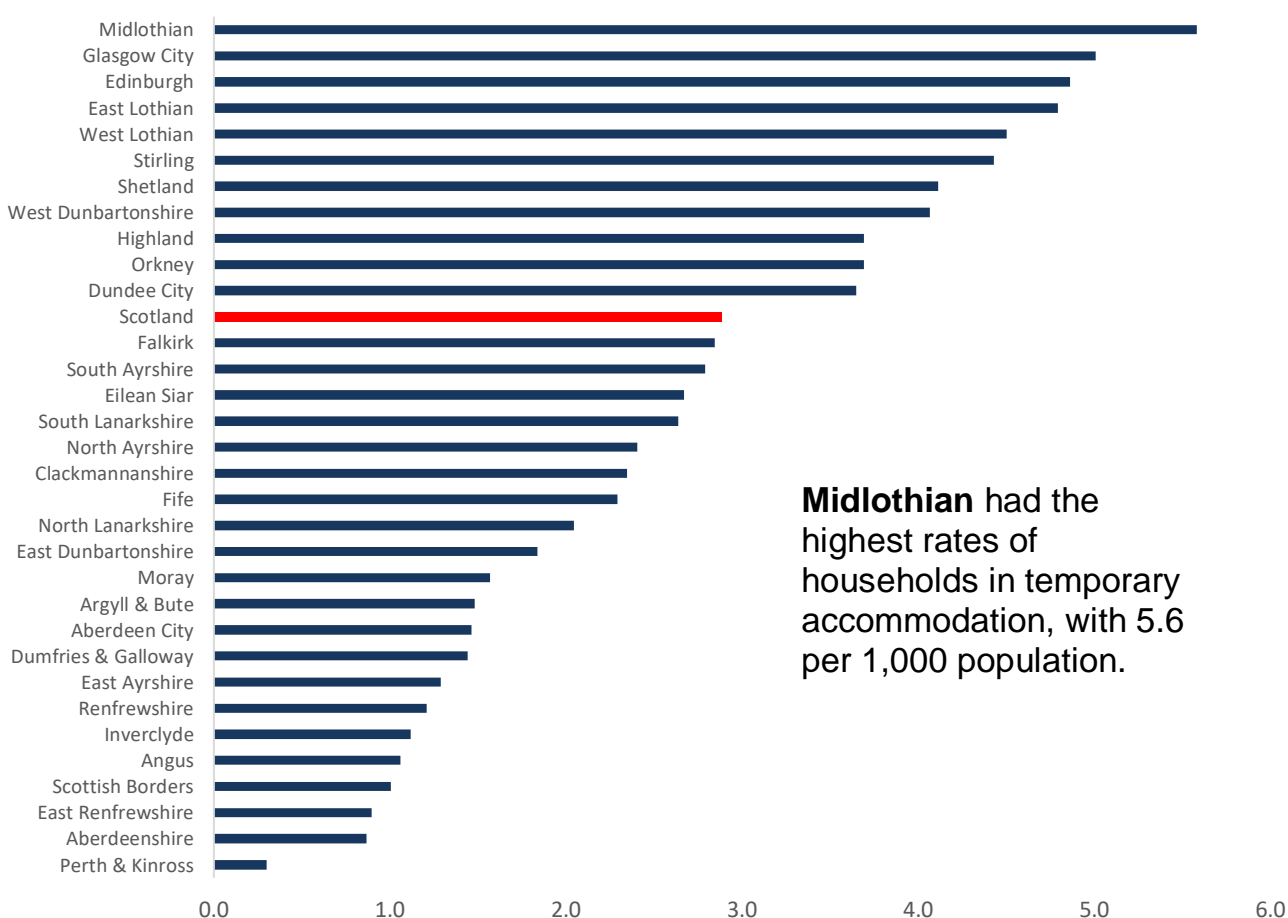
As part of the assessment stage of a homelessness application, local authorities can investigate whether the applicant has a local connection to the authority to which they applied or to another local authority. This can be on the basis of residency, employment, a family connection or another special reason such as health reasons or education. Where a local connection with another local authority exists the local authority may refer the

applicant to that authority, otherwise the duty lies with the authority the application was made to. A local authority may choose not to refer the household e.g. if an application was made for the reason of fleeing from domestic abuse.

In 2020/21, 93% of homeless households had a connection to the local authority to which they made their application. A further 5% had no local connection to any local authority within Scotland. This means, only 2% (605) of homeless households had a connection to another local authority other than the one they made an application to. The majority of these were in Glasgow (415, 69% of total). As Glasgow only referred 15 cases in 2020/21, this helps explain the disproportionately high levels of homelessness in Glasgow, although does not account for it fully. West Dunbartonshire’s high rates of homelessness cannot be explained by those with a local connection elsewhere with 99% of households having a local connection with that authority. (Tables 24 & 52)

Interestingly, the use of temporary accommodation does not follow the same pattern (in terms of rates) as the number of homeless households at a local authority level. This implies some local authorities have a disproportionately high use of temporary accommodation, while others are disproportionately low.

Chart 6: Households in temporary accommodation per 1,000 population (aged 16+), as at 31st March 2021



Midlothian had the highest rates of households in temporary accommodation, with 5.6 per 1,000 population.

Rates for temporary accommodation by local authority are detailed in Table 32 of the accompanying data tables.

Reasons for Homelessness and Prior Circumstances

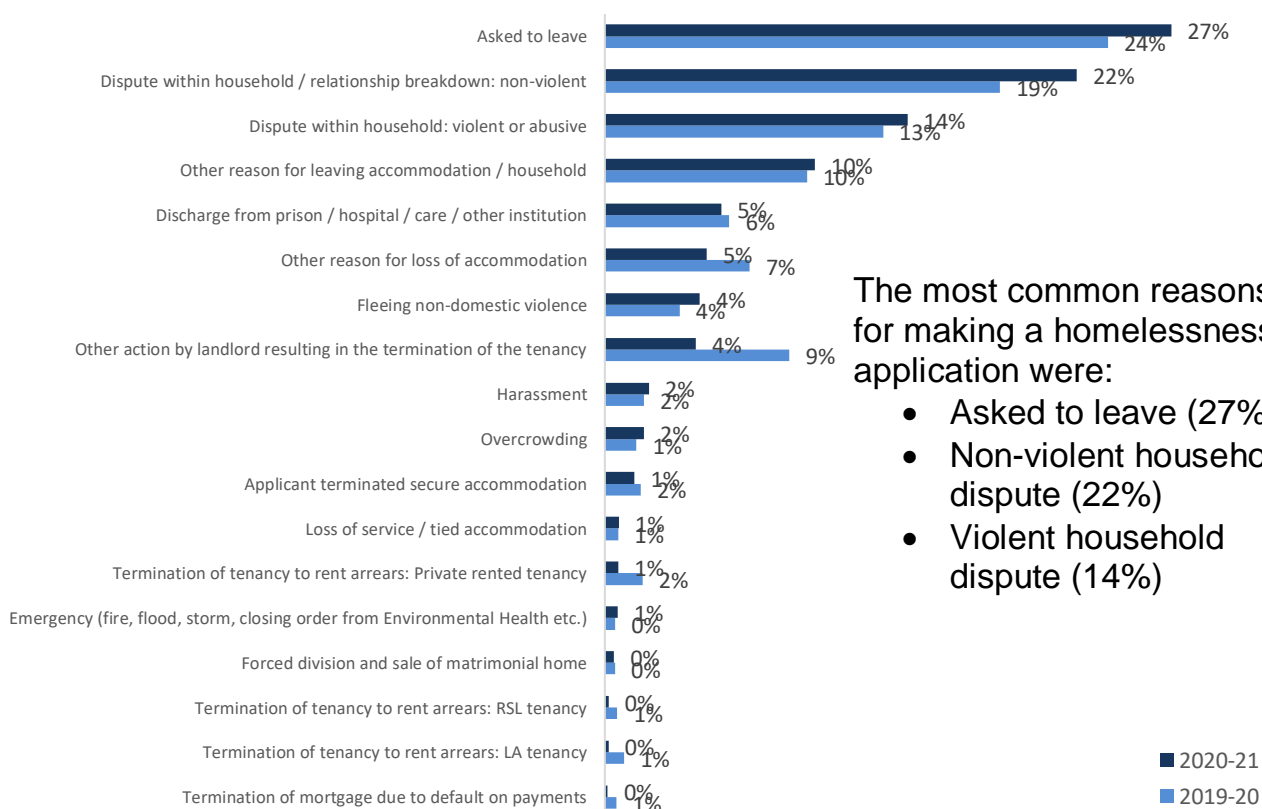
Key Points

- Being 'asked to leave' and was the most common reason for homelessness, increasing to 27% from 24% in 2019/20.
- 22% gave 'Dispute within household / relationship breakdown: non-violent' as the main reason, compared to 19% in 2019/20. 14% gave 'Dispute within household: violent or abusive'.
- The proportion of households giving 'other action by landlord resulting in the termination of the tenancy' fell from 9% to 4%.
- 42% decrease in households becoming homeless from a private rented tenancy. A higher proportion became homeless from accommodation shared with friends, relatives or partners.

Why do households make a homelessness application?

There were notable differences in the main reason given for making a homelessness application during 2020/21 compared to 2019/20.

Chart 7: Main reasons for homelessness, 2020/21



The most common reasons for making a homelessness application were:

- Asked to leave (27%)
- Non-violent household dispute (22%)
- Violent household dispute (14%)

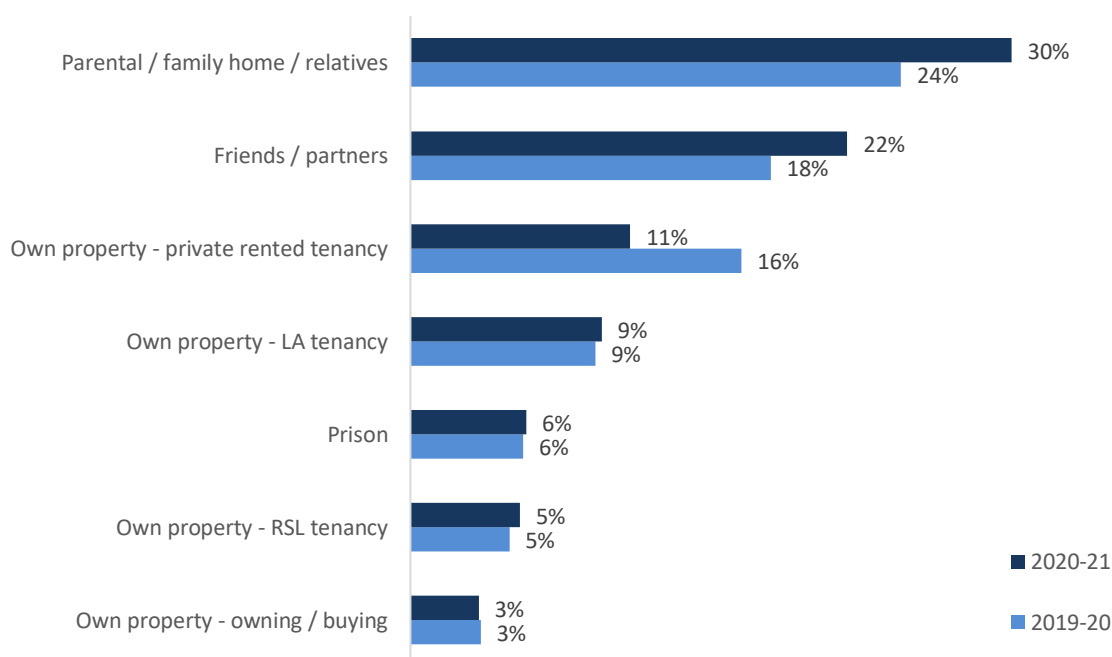
The increases in the proportions presenting as homeless for reasons of ‘being asked to leave’ and household disputes (both violent and non-violent) tie in with the increase in proportion of those noting ‘Lack of support from friends/ family’ as an additional reason (21% to 25%). (Table 6)

The decreases in loss of accommodation reasons are likely due to temporary measures introduced to protect renters over the COVID-19 period, including the use of extended notice periods for eviction proceedings as noted earlier⁷. In addition, mortgage payment deferrals were introduced across the UK in March 2020 to allow customers experiencing issues paying their mortgage during the COVID-19 pandemic to apply for a break in making mortgage payments for a period of up to 6 months, alongside a temporary ban on home repossessions⁸. This also follows in the additional reason of financial difficulties / debt / unemployment dropping from 18% to 14%. (Table 6)

What are the prior circumstances of the homeless population?

As part of the application process information is gathered on where the household became homeless from.

Chart 8: A greater proportion of households became homeless from accommodation shared with relatives, friends or partners



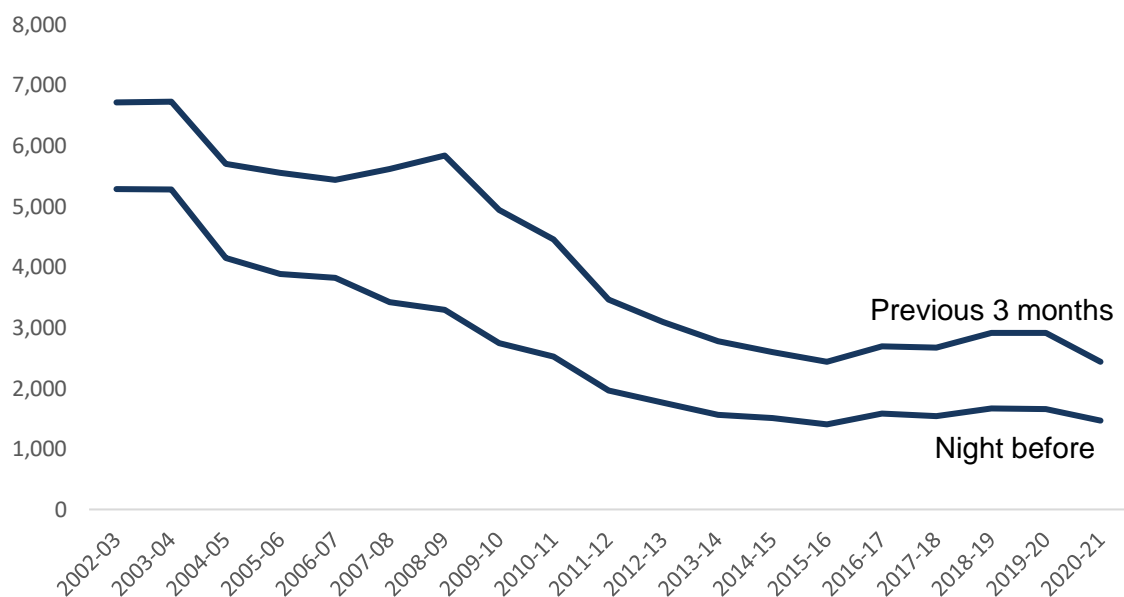
The high proportions of households becoming homeless from friends and family ties in with the high levels of reasons given as dispute within household / relationship breakdown seen previously. Similarly, the decrease in proportion from private rented tenancies are linked to the ban on evictions noted earlier.

⁷ [Coronavirus \(Scotland\) Act 2020 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2020/11/section/1)

⁸ [Mortgages and coronavirus: information for consumers | FCA](https://www.fca.org.uk/consumers/mortgages-and-coronavirus)

Chart 9 shows how many households who made a homelessness application in 2020/21 reported previous experience of rough sleeping.

Chart 9: Households experiencing rough sleeping, 2002/03 to 2020/21



1,471 households (4% of all applications) included a household member who experienced rough sleeping the night before their application, and 2,437 households (7% of all applications) reported a household member experiencing rough sleeping in the three months prior to their application. (Tables 2 & 3). The numbers reporting rough sleeping increase and decrease to reflect the trends in applications, although the proportions reporting rough sleeping have remained fairly constant since 2010/11.

There was a peak in the reporting of rough sleeping in April to June 2020, which may be the result of additional efforts by local authorities to house rough sleepers following the outbreak of COVID-19.

There is notable variation between local authorities, with a high of 15% in Moray compared to a low of 0% in Midlothian and Falkirk reporting rough sleeping in the previous 3 months (Table 4).

670 households assessed as homeless had a household member that was previously a member of the armed forces. This was a 17% fall compared to 2019/20, and accounts for 2% of all homeless households. 1,076 households contained a household member aged under 25 that had been looked after by their local authority as a child. This accounts for 6% of all households with a household member under the age of 25. (Tables 22 & 23)

The proportion of homeless households reporting a support need has increased over time – from 33% in 2007/08 to 51% in 2020/21. The biggest increases have been experienced for mental health (from 12% to 27%) and basic housing management (10% to 26%). (Table 19)

Temporary Accommodation

Key Points

- 62% of temporary accommodation used is in the social sector.
- 34% of homeless households had no temporary accommodation placement and 37% had one; 4% had 5 or more.
- Households spent 199 days in temporary accommodation on average.
- There were 605 cases of households not being offered temporary accommodation in 2020/21, an 87% fall compared to 2019/20.
- There were 490 breaches of the unsuitable accommodation order (to be treated with caution - see notes below)

Sources of temporary accommodation data

Since 2002, local authorities have provided aggregate snapshot information relating to households in temporary accommodation. While this allows trends to be explored over time, understanding around individual placements and how these relate to assessed households is not possible from the snapshot data. Therefore, since 1st April 2016 placement level information on households in temporary accommodation has been provided to enable a more rounded picture of the use of temporary accommodation.

The snapshot data shows 13,097 households in temporary accommodation as at 31st March 2021. The placement level returns show that there were 13,143 temporary accommodation placements open at 31st March 2021 – only very slightly higher (46, 0%) than the snapshot returns. Differences may be explained by the returns including different types of temporary accommodation and the placement level returns experiencing a lag in cases being closed.

Both of these figures show households in temporary accommodation at a point in time and, as such, will include those who have recently entered temporary accommodation as well as those who have been in temporary accommodation for a longer period of time (including prior to the reporting year).

Reporting of temporary accommodation

When considering certain aspects of temporary accommodation such as number of placements, average time spent in temporary accommodation etc., the true extent of this can only be fully understood once a household has exited temporary accommodation. A household is considered to have 'exited' temporary accommodation in a reporting year only if their homelessness case has closed.

How many people entered temporary accommodation? How many exited?

21,020 households entered a first temporary accommodation placement in 2020/21. To note, these will include households who made a homelessness application prior to

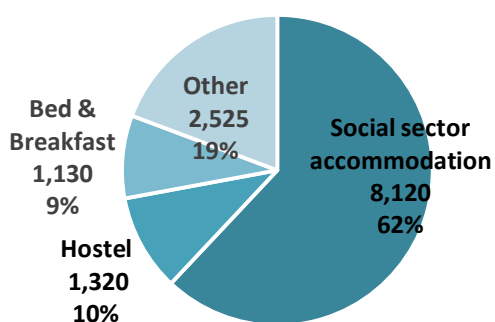
2020/21. 17,665 households exited their final temporary accommodation placement in 2020/21.

These figures give a net difference of 3,355 more households entering temporary accommodation than exiting. This ties in with the increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation which can be seen in the snapshot figures, although the numbers will not match given the differences outlined. (Table 33)

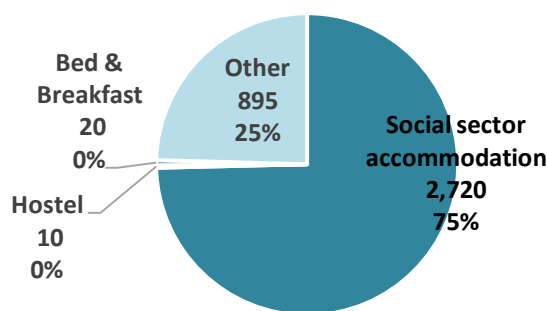
What types of temporary accommodation are used?

Chart 10: Type of temporary accommodation used as at 31st March 2021

a) all households



b) households with children



The above chart shows that social sector accommodation is the majority of temporary accommodation used, with a higher usage of these for households with children. Conversely, there are extremely low levels of use of hostels and bed & breakfast accommodation for households with children.

There was an increase in the use of bed and breakfast accommodation in 2020/21 compared to the previous year (7% to 9%) and a decrease in hostel accommodation (12% to 10%). Again, this is linked to the COVID-19 response with increased availability of bed & breakfast accommodation and additional funding being provided to local authorities to provide temporary accommodation in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Bed and breakfast accommodation was increasingly offered to households in this period as it was easier for households to socially distance in this accommodation type in comparison to other more communal accommodation such as hostels. (Tables 29).

Data from the placement level data collection can provide further insight in to the total use of temporary accommodation over the lifecycle of homelessness cases. However, it is difficult to make direct comparison with the snapshot data as different categories of temporary accommodation are used between the two returns.

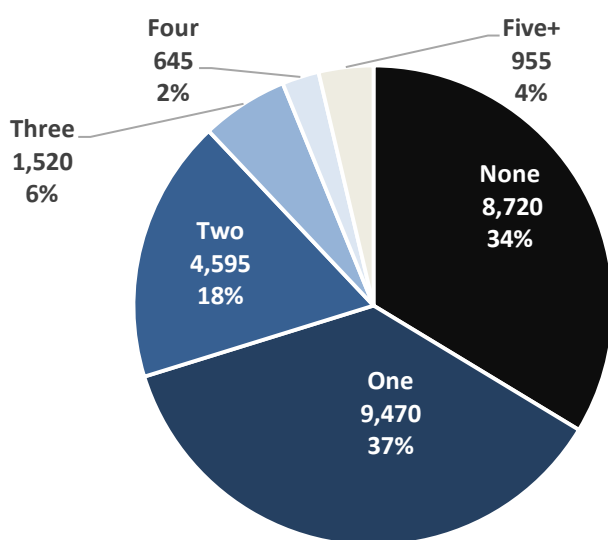
There were 35,660 temporary accommodation placements taken up in 2020/21. 41% of temporary accommodation placements were in local authority ordinary dwellings or housing association/registered social landlord dwellings; 24% of placements were in hostel accommodation; and 24% of placements were in bed and breakfast accommodation. The higher proportions of hostel and bed and breakfast accommodation in the placement level

returns (48% vs 19%) indicates that these types of temporary accommodation are more frequently used than the snapshot data suggests. However, this can be explained by the fact that the average duration for stays in these types of accommodation is much shorter - for example, 34 days in bed and breakfast compared to an average of 106 days for all temporary accommodation – and therefore they account for a much smaller proportion of the overall use of temporary accommodation. (Tables 39 & 40)

Data on the number of placements and average length of time will help improve understanding of the ways in which different types of temporary accommodation are used.

How many temporary accommodation placements do households typically have?

Chart 11: Number of temporary accommodation placements for applications closing in 2020/21

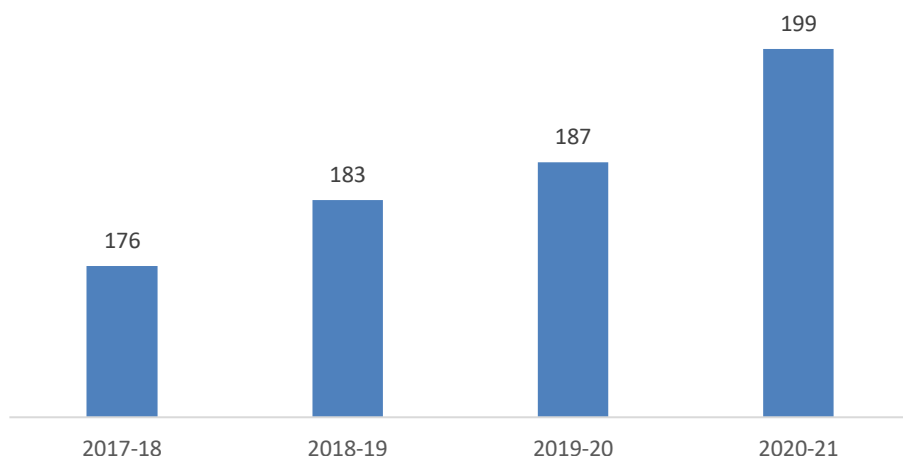


There is variation in the number of placements between local authorities. Only 6% of homeless households in Shetland (5 out of 80) did not have any temporary accommodation placements, compared to 70% (365 out of 520) in Scottish Borders, although caution should be applied for local authorities with small numbers of households. In Edinburgh, 25% (200 out of 815) of homeless households had 5 placements or more (Table 34).

How long do households spend in temporary accommodation?

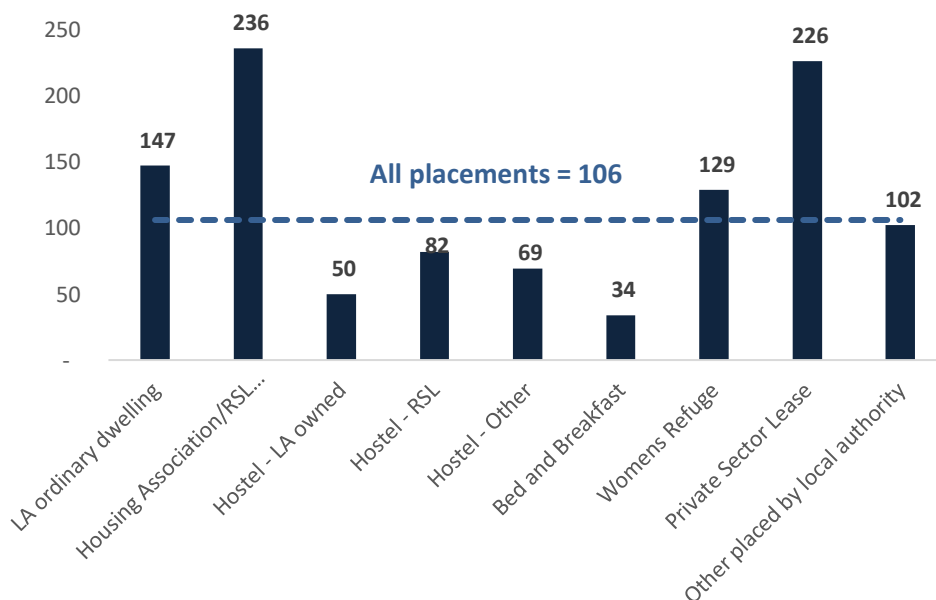
For homelessness applications that closed in 2020/21, that had taken up temporary accommodation, they spent an average of 199 days in temporary accommodation. The increase from last year will be related to the fact more people are staying in temporary accommodation for longer in response to COVID-19. Note that total duration is calculated by summing the time a household spends in individual placements, excluding time between placements when a household is not in temporary accommodation. As a result the time a household spends in temporary accommodation may not be continuous.

Chart 12: The average number of days in temporary accommodation has been increasing



Looking at average duration at a placement level shows duration varies by accommodation type with social sector temporary accommodation having higher durations than other types of accommodation. The average length of stay in housing association accommodation and local authority dwellings was 236 and 147 days respectively, compared to 34 days in bed & breakfast accommodation. This confirms the expected shorter-term use of bed & breakfast and hostel accommodation. (Table 40)

Chart 13: Average length (days) of temporary accommodation placement, 2020/21



How often do applicants refuse temporary accommodation?

A household can choose to refuse an offer of temporary accommodation made by the local authority. In 2020/21 there were 7,102 cases of households refusing offers of temporary accommodation. This was an increase of 1,467 (26%) compared to 2019/20. There was a particularly high increase in Glasgow, which increased by 67% from 1,913 to

3,186. (Table 41) To note, a household that has refused an offer of temporary accommodation may accept a subsequent offer.

Information provided by local authorities suggest that the increase may be the result of households rejecting offers of bed and breakfast accommodation, which were more common as the availability of other accommodation types decreased during the pandemic while the availability of bed and breakfast accommodation increased.

How often do local authorities fail to provide temporary accommodation?

A local authority is required to indicate when they do not offer any temporary accommodation to a household and are therefore acting unlawfully. During 2020/21, there were 605⁹ instances of households not being offered temporary accommodation (Table 40). The majority of these cases (525) were in Edinburgh. This compares with 4,590 cases in 2019/20, an 87% fall. This reflects the increased funding made available to local authorities alongside the increased availability of bed and breakfast accommodation during the COVID period. (Table 42)

How often do local authorities breach unsuitable accommodation legislation?

There were 490 breaches reported across 13 different local authorities in 2020/21. Fife accounted for 135 of these, East Lothian 125 and Renfrewshire 105, all having report no or very few breaches previously. Conversely, Edinburgh who do usually report a relatively high number of breaches reported less than 20. (Table 43)

Important! Over the reporting period i) there was a significant change to legislation and ii) temporary exceptions were put in place at very short notice in response to COVID-19, both of which have had considerable impacts on the data. The urgency of having to adapt to the revised legislation without any specific guidance means that local authorities have reported inconsistencies in the information captured regarding breaches which is likely to affect comparability. For these reasons, these figures should be treated with caution.

Changes in legislation

Prior to 5 May 2020, a breach was encountered when a household with a pregnant woman and/or child is in unsuitable temporary accommodation for more than 7 days. From 5 May 2020, this was extended to all households. Therefore, the total number of breaches across the year 2020/21 will include those based on both old and new legislation.

Covid-19 exceptions

Temporary exceptions were put in place to allow local authorities to provide households with accommodation in response to COVID-19. The legislation noted that a placement was not considered unsuitable if:

⁹ The City of Edinburgh Council have previously been unable to report 'not offered' places via their placement level temporary accommodation return due to technical issues. These technical issues have been resolved and 'not offered' information is now supplied as part of the regular data return from 2019/20. Backdated information for 2018/19 has been provided by the City of Edinburgh Council.

- a person in the household has symptoms of coronavirus and the household requires to isolate; or
- the accommodation is required to provide temporary accommodation to ensure that a distance of 2 metres can be maintained between a member of the household and a person who is not a member of the household in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus; or
- the local authority is unable to place the household in suitable accommodation as a result of the impacts of coronavirus on temporary accommodation supply in the area, provided that where a household includes a child or a pregnant woman the household is not placed in unsuitable accommodation for more than 7 days.

(To note: the third of these only came into effect on 30th September, halfway through the reporting period covered by this publication.)

A household placed in unsuitable accommodation for longer than 7 days where an exception did not apply must still be recorded as a breach.

Outcomes

Key Points

- 80% of households secure settled accommodation, increasing from 64% in 2002/03 but falling from 83% in 2019/20.
- 5% of homeless households had previously been assessed as homeless in the previous 12 months, and 15% in the previous 5 years.

Homelessness cases are closed once the local authority has fulfilled its statutory duty or contact has been lost with the applicant household for 28 days. Local authorities provide information on the circumstances and outcomes of homelessness cases once they have been closed.

Number of cases closed

The number of homelessness applications that were closed declined following the outbreak in COVID-19. As a result, there were 11% fewer homelessness cases closed in 2020/21 for applications assessed as unintentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness (25,331 compared to 28,591). This was due to COVID-19 restrictions at this time limiting the ability of local authority staff to move households into permanent accommodation. Similarly, there were 53% fewer intentionally homelessness cases closed over the same period (from 573 to 1,219). (Table 44)

How often do local authorities lose contact with applicants?

For households assessed in 2020/21, contact was maintained for 92% of those assessed as unintentionally homeless and for 88% assessed as intentionally homeless.¹⁰

The proportion of applicants maintaining contact has increased over time for unintentionally homeless households, from 81% in 2007/08. For intentionally homeless households, the proportion has remained stable in recent years. (Table 44)

What are the outcomes for homeless households?

Of the 22,967 unintentionally homelessness cases that closed in 2020/21 (where contact was maintained and the outcome was known), 80% (18,313) secured settled accommodation as their outcome. Settled accommodation here is defined as a local authority tenancy (which accounted for 42% of outcomes), a tenancy with a registered social landlord (32%) or a private rented tenancy (5%).

¹⁰ An error occurred in previous publications which misclassified a small number of households with whom contact was lost prior to duty discharge, but an outcome was known, as contact maintained. This has been corrected for this publication.

The remaining outcomes were 'Other (known)' (8%), 'Returned to previous/present accommodation' (6%), 'Moved in with friends/relatives' (5%) and 'Hostel' (1%).

The proportion of unintentionally homeless households securing settled accommodation has increased over time, from 64% in 2002/03 to 83% in 2019/20. This fell to 80% however in 2020/21, with reduced proportion of households entering a local authority tenancy (42% compared to 47% in 2019/20). There was a notable fall in the months immediately following the outbreak of Covid-19, with 73% of cases closed in April to June 2020 securing settled accommodation in this period among those assessed as unintentionally homeless. Intentionally homeless households are less likely to secure settled accommodation, with 44% doing so in 2019/20. (Tables 46, 47 & 59)

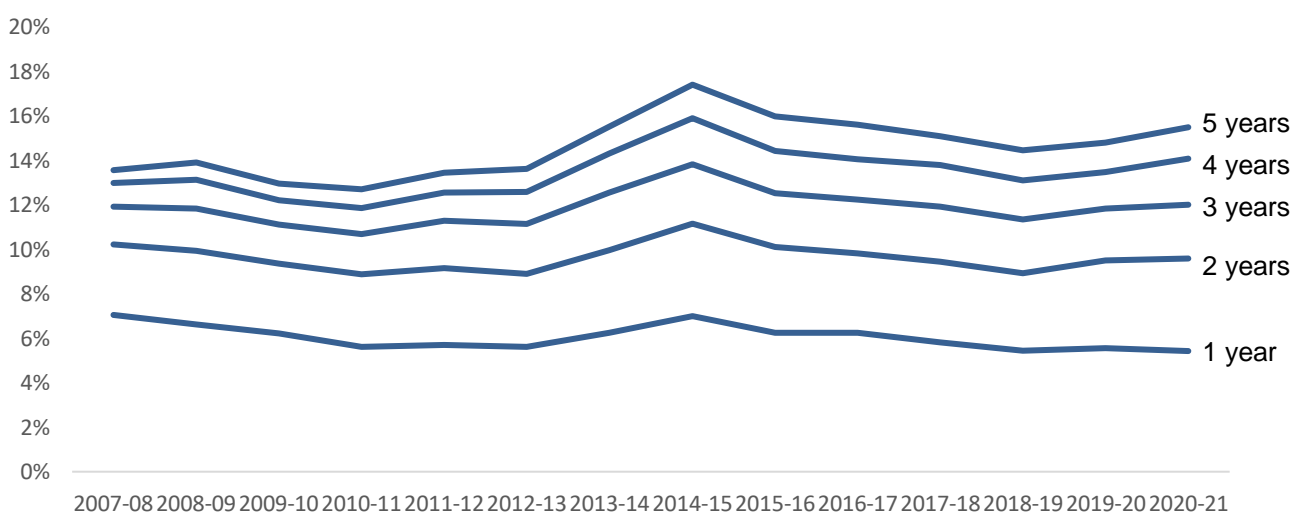
Local connection referrals

In 2020/21, 240 homeless households were referred to another local authority. This number has fallen from 390 in 2005/06, but increased from 175 in 2019/20. This decline has largely been driven by Glasgow, which referred 0 cases in 2019/20 compared to 150 in 2005/06. (Table 52)

Is there a return to homelessness?

In order to understand the longer-term outcomes for homeless households, and whether outcomes upon case closure are sustained, there is interest in 'repeat homelessness' i.e. where households previously assessed as homeless re-enter the homelessness system at a later point in time. Chart 14 shows the proportion of households assessed as homeless that were previously assessed as homeless in the last 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 years¹¹ from 2007-08 to 2020-21. There were 1,495 households (5%) that had previously been assessed as homeless in the 12 months prior to their most recent assessments, increasing to 4,269 (15%) in the previous 5 years. These proportions have decreased since 2014/15. (Table 16)

Chart 14: Households assessed as homeless that have previously been assessed as homeless in the previous 1 to 5 years



There is significant local variation between local authorities with respect to repeat homelessness. For example, 14% of households assessed as homeless in Inverclyde had previously been assessed as homeless in the 12 months prior to their assessment, compared to 0% in Shetland, though all are based on relatively small numbers. (Table 17)

Were Housing Support assessments carried out and housing support provided?

Upon closing a homelessness case, local authorities are required to assess whether any housing support services are required by the household for any cases assessed as unintentionally homeless and where it has reason to believe that support would be beneficial. It also has a duty to provide that support if needed.

Across Scotland, assessments for housing support needs were carried out in 80% of cases where there was a duty to assess in 2020/21. Housing support was provided in 43% of all cases, although support was not provided for 8% of cases where a support need was identified. In 20% of cases where there was a duty to assess, no assessment took place and no support was provided. (Table 53)

How Long Does it Take to Complete the Homeless Application Process?

Key Points

- It takes an average of 16 days for a case to be assessed. This has fallen from 29 days in 2004/05 but was the same as for 2019/20.
- It takes 248 days on average from assessment to closure for cases assessed as homeless, increasing from 225 days in 2019/20.

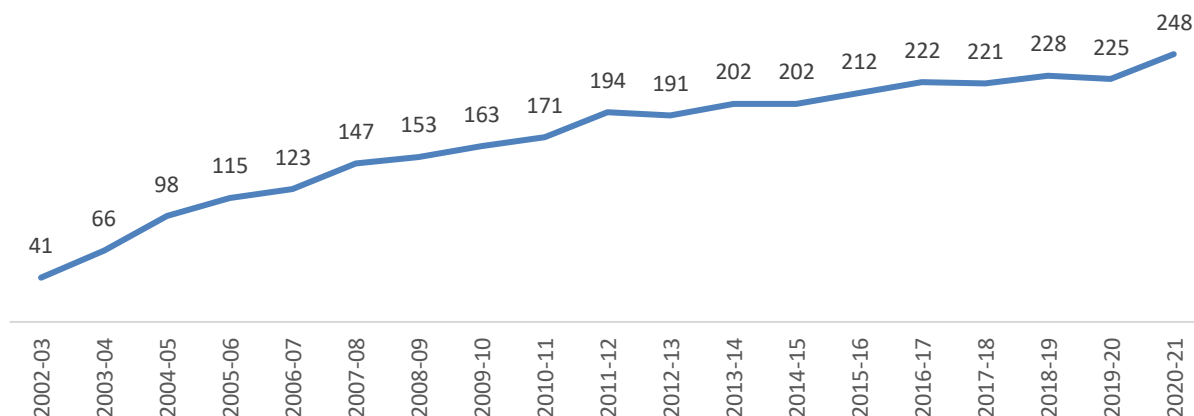
How long does it take for an application to be processed?

In 2020/21, it took 16 days on average for a case to be assessed following an application. This has fallen over time from an average of 29 days in 2004/05. Again there is considerable variation among local authorities, with Glasgow and Aberdeen City taking 9 days on average to assess each case compared to 41 in Inverclyde. (Table 25)

The time taken from assessment to closure varies depending on the outcome of the assessment. For homelessness cases that closed in 2020/21 it took an average of 248 days from assessment to closure. This compares to 225 days in 2019/20 and reflects the difficulties local authorities have reported moving households into settled accommodation in the COVID-19 period, as well as the increase in open cases. For households not assessed as homeless, where the local authority does not have a duty to provide temporary accommodation or permanent settled accommodation, the average was 30 days. (Tables 50 & 51)

The time taken to close homelessness cases has increased significantly over time. In 2002/03 it took 41 days on average for a case to be closed. This is likely due to the extension of duties local authorities have to homeless applicants.

Chart 15: Average number of days taken to close homelessness applications assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness



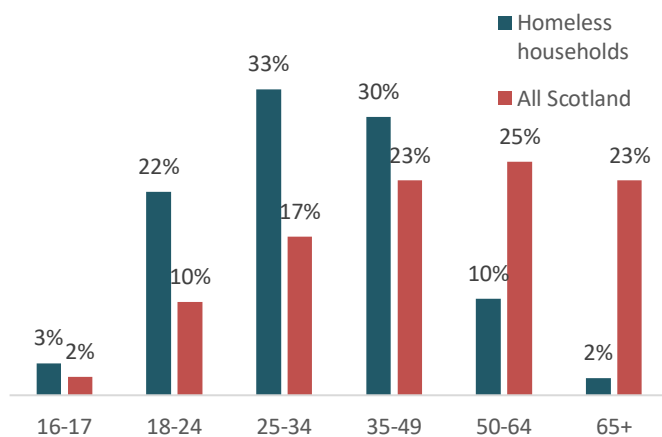
Characteristics of the homeless population

The following findings provide a broad overview of the characteristics of the homeless population and how they compare to the Scottish (adult) population. They highlight key findings where differences exist for aspects of homelessness across the characteristics of age, gender and ethnicity. Characteristics are based on those of the main applicant.

Detailed figures are available in accompanying characteristics tables. Caution should be taken when interpreting results based on small numbers of households. This is particularly true when comparing results for different ethnic groups.

Age

The homeless populations is younger than the overall Scottish population

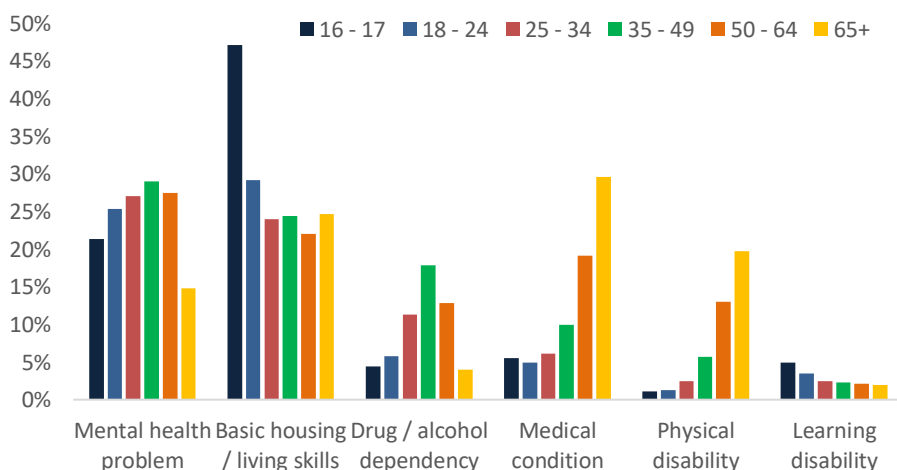


Reasons and prior circumstances

Younger people are more likely to become homeless from the family home and for reasons of being asked to leave.

Older applicants are more likely to become homeless from the private rented sector and fail to maintain accommodation due to physical health.

Support needs



Younger applicants more likely to require basic housing management support.

Older applicants more likely to have a support need related to a physical disability or medical condition.

Drug/alcohol dependency most common amongst 35-49 year olds.



Rough sleeping most common amongst 35-64 year olds.



Repeat homelessness most common amongst 25-49 year olds.

Temporary accommodation

Older applicants were less likely to take up temporary accommodation – 46% of 65+ compared to 71% of 16-17 year olds.

Those **aged 65+** spent the least amount of time in temporary accommodation – 165 days on average compared to 199 overall.

25-49 year olds were most likely to not be offered temporary accommodation, accounting for 430 of the 600 cases.

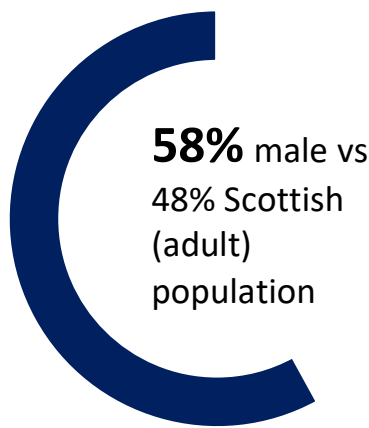
Breaches of the unsuitable accommodation order were also most common for this age group (325 out of 490).

Outcomes

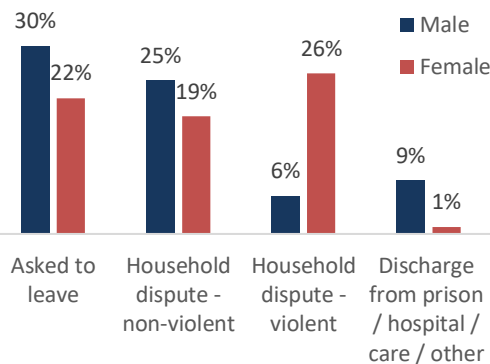
For most age categories, **78-81% secured settled accommodation**.

The exception was 16-17 year olds, where only 70% achieved this, however, a larger proportion of applicants in this age group had an outcome of returning to previous accommodation or moving in with friends/relatives, which are not included within the definition of 'settled accommodation' used for these purposes.

Gender & household type

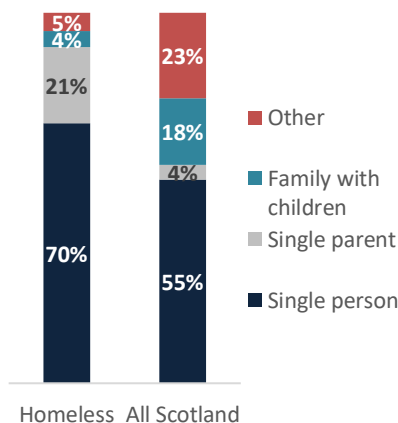


Reasons



Women are more likely to be homeless as a result of a violent household dispute, although a higher proportion of men state a reason of non-violent dispute.

Homeless households are more likely to be single adult and single parent compared to the overall population



Single person households are more likely to be male – 49% vs 21% female.

Single parent households are more likely to be female – 16% vs 5% male.

Rough sleeping and repeat homelessness

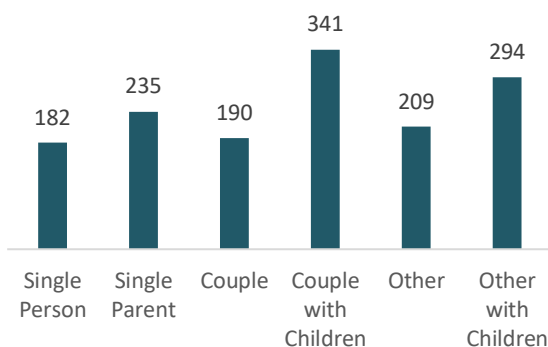
are far more common amongst men. 86% of those reporting rough sleeping in the previous 3 months were men and 72% who had previously been assessed as homeless in the last 12 months were men.

Drug and alcohol dependency

was more common amongst men with 15% having this as a support need vs 7% of women.

Temporary accommodation

Households with children spend longer, on average, in temporary accommodation



Single male households are most likely to take up temporary accommodation – 72% vs 61% single female households and 66% overall.

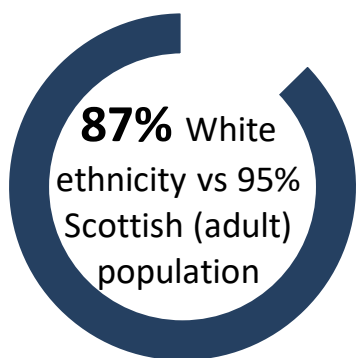
Men are much more likely not to be offered temporary accommodation compared to women.

Outcomes

Women more likely than men to secure settled accommodation – 82% vs 78%.

Single male households are the least likely to secure settled accommodation – 76% vs 79% single female and 80% overall.

Ethnicity

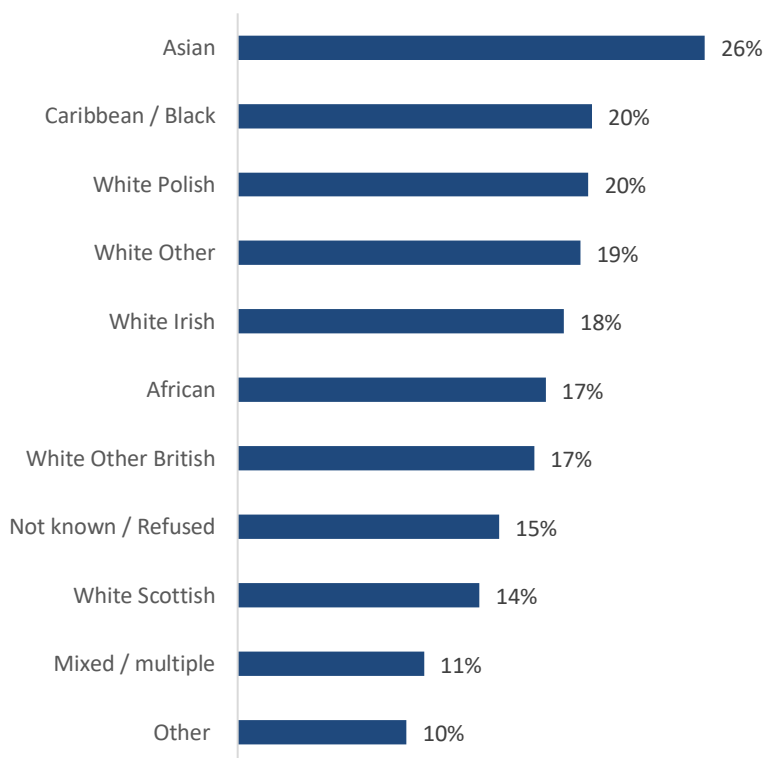


White Scottish and White British most likely to have a **support need** – 53% and 54% respectively.



Rough sleeping most common for White Irish and White Other British.

Asian households most likely to experience homelessness as a result of violent household disputes



White Scottish and White Other British spent less **time in temporary accommodation** than other ethnicities.

Notes on Tables

All of the tables and charts in this publication are available in electronic format at: <https://www.gov.scot/collections/homelessness-statistics/>

The statistics included in this publication are based on administrative data collected by local authorities in the course of carrying out their homelessness activities. This data is collected from local authorities and quality assured by the Scottish Government on a quarterly basis. Details about the data we collect, our quality assurance process, and how we engage with users to improve our statistics are outlined in our quality assurance statement.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/data-protection-impact-assessment-and-quality-assurance-statement-for-hl1-hl2-hl3-and-prevent1-data-collections/>

Updates to previous statistics

The data we use in this publication is collected from local authorities on a quarterly basis. As a result of this figures are updated on an on-going basis and may differ from those previously published. This may be a result of delays in some cases being reported to the Scottish Government due to IT issues, quality assurance processes and delayed entry of data – particularly at the end of the financial year.

For example, this publication estimates that 37,043 homeless applications were made in 2019/20, but the previous 'Homelessness in Scotland: 2019 to 2020' publication gave a figure of 36,855. This is a difference of 313 applications, or approximately 1%. A table comparing the annual number of applications is included in the tables document accompanying this publication.

Characteristic information

Information on the characteristics of the main applicant / household are gathered and recorded as part of the application stage of a homelessness case. This information is linked to the temporary accommodation placements associated with that household to enable reporting by characteristic for temporary accommodation. To note, it is not possible to do the same for the aggregate snapshot temporary accommodation data.

Population comparison data

Comparative data for the the proportion of male adults in the Scottish population was taken from [2019 mid-year population estimates](#) produced by National Records of Scotland.

Data for household types was taken from the [Scottish Household Survey 2019](#).

Data for ethnicity was taken from the [Scottish Surveys Core Questions 2019](#).

Known data quality issues

- Not all temporary accommodation placements have an associated homelessness application, however, this accounts for a very small proportion only (1%).
- There are a small number of temporary accommodation cases on the Scottish Government temporary accommodation placement database that are recorded as open but are linked to homelessness applications that we know to be closed. This occurs when a local authority fails to provide an update for these cases after the placement is closed. In these cases we have taken the approach of using the close date of the homeless application as the exit date of the temporary accommodation placement. This may have the impact of inflating the length of time these households are recorded as using temporary accommodation.
- There were inconsistencies between local authorities in the reporting of breaches of the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2020. This was due to changes in legislation – extending breaches from households with only a pregnant women and/or child(ren) to all households – and exceptions put in place in response to covid-19. The urgency of having to adapt to the revised legislation without any specific guidance means that some local authorities have reported being unclear as to how these related to the covid-19 exceptions in place. Local authorities were able to capture different levels of information regarding breaches around this time (i.e. whether an exception could or could not be applied) which has implications for data comparability.

Comparability with Other UK Homelessness Statistics

Because of the substantial differences in legislative frameworks and data collection methods that exist across the UK care needs to be taken in comparing homelessness statistics across the four countries.

In September 2019 the Office for National Statistics published the [UK homelessness: 2005 to 2018](#) report, which assessed of the comparability and coherence of existing UK government homelessness data sources.

Also published in September 2019, the [GSS Homelessness Interactive Tool](#) allows users to explore the similarities and differences between how key concepts relating to homelessness are defined across the four UK countries. It allows users to explore an applicants' process through each of the different homelessness systems and enables users to visualise the different definitions of homelessness currently being used for official statistics and how these compare.

Summary of Current Legislation

The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, now consolidated into Part II of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, introduced statutory duties on Local Authorities to assist those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness (potentially homeless), including providing accommodation in certain circumstances.

The legislation currently requires Local Authorities to make inquiries into the circumstances of applicants to satisfy themselves whether the applicant is homeless or potentially homeless. Once the authority is satisfied this is the case, prior to 31st December 2012, it also determined whether the applicant had a priority need. However, from 31st December 2012, the priority need test was abolished (see Paragraph 24). The Local Authority then tests whether the applicant became homeless intentionally and, in some cases, whether the applicant has a local connection with another authority in Scotland, England or Wales. A local connection with an authority means that the applicant normally resided in that area from choice, either because he/she was employed in or had family associations with it, or for other special reasons.

Section 24 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended, defines homelessness for the purposes of the Act as follows. A person is homeless if he/ she has no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere. A person is also homeless if he/ she has accommodation but cannot reasonably occupy it, for example because of a threat of violence. A person is potentially homeless (threatened with homelessness) if it is likely that he/ she will become homeless within two months. A person is intentionally homeless if he/ she deliberately did or failed to do anything which led to the loss of accommodation which it was reasonable for him/ her to continue to occupy.

Section 25 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended, defined the categories of household regarded as having a priority need for accommodation. Further details can be found in the Code of Guidance on Homelessness. This is available on-line at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/05/31133334/33366>.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 amends the 1987 Act and requires councils to provide a minimum of temporary accommodation, advice and assistance to all applicants assessed as homeless, regardless of whether they have been assessed as being in priority need.

The Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003 is more long-term in scope, notably introducing a phasing out of the distinction between priority and non-priority applications. The ultimate aim of the Act was to ensure that everyone assessed as being unintentionally homeless was entitled to settled accommodation from 31st December 2012.

In November 2012, the Scottish Parliament approved the Homelessness (Abolition of Priority Need Test) (Scotland) Order 2012 which gave effect to this commitment. From 31st December 2012 the priority need test for homeless households was abolished. As a result, from this date, all unintentionally homeless households are entitled to settled accommodation.

Summary of Local Authority duty to homeless households:

Unintentionally homeless [and in priority need]¹²

Provide temporary accommodation until settled accommodation has been secured.

Settled accommodation is defined as:

- A Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST)
- A Private Residential Tenancy

If the applicants have previously been evicted for anti-social behaviour in the last 3 years, or if they are subject to an anti-social behaviour order - a short Scottish Secure Tenancy can be offered.

In some circumstances, the Local Authority can provide non-permanent accommodation. These circumstances are laid out in the Homeless Persons (Provision of Non-permanent Accommodation) (Scotland) Regulations 2010.

Under certain circumstances, a Local Authority may apply a local connection test and refer the applicant to another Local Authority. However, the receiving Local Authority must then secure settled accommodation for the applicant.

Intentionally Homeless [and in Priority Need / Homeless and not in Priority Need]:

Provide temporary accommodation for a reasonable period of time, advice and assistance.

Potentially homeless, unintentionally so [and in Priority Need]:

Take reasonable steps to ensure that accommodation does not cease to be available.

Potentially homeless, intentionally so [and in Priority Need / Potentially Homeless and not in Priority Need]:

Provide advice and assistance to help retain accommodation.

The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2004 came into force on 6 December 2004, and is intended to prevent the routine use of unsuitable temporary accommodation for households with family commitments. Under this Order, Local Authorities cannot put households with children and pregnant women into temporary accommodation which is not suitable, unless exceptional circumstances apply. Unsuitable accommodation is defined in the Order as accommodation which does not meet standards relating to the physical properties of the accommodation (the physical standard), its proximity to health and education services (the proximity standard) and its suitability for use by children (the safety standard).

The 2004 order was revoked by [The Homeless Persons \(Unsuitable Accommodation\) \(Scotland\) Order 2014](#), which came into force on the 21st November 2014. The 2014 order adds the additional requirement that the accommodation must be wind and watertight.

¹² If before 31st December 2012.

While the Order provides for exceptional circumstances, in which accommodation which does not meet the physical and/or proximity standards may be used, the safety standard must always be met. Further details can be found in the Code of Guidance available online at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/05/31133334/33366>

The 2014 Order specifies that the local authority may provide an applicant with temporary accommodation which does not meet the requirements set out by Article 5 of the Order, but for no longer than 14 days in total in respect of that person's application. The [Homeless Persons \(Unsuitable Accommodation\) \(Scotland\) Amendment Order 2017](#), which came into force in October 2017, reduces the number of days from 14 to 7 days before a 'breach' is recorded for the applicant remaining in such unsuitable accommodation.

The [Homeless Persons \(Unsuitable Accommodation\) \(Scotland\) Amendment Order 2020](#) extended the order to include all households, rather than just those containing children or a pregnant woman.

The Housing Support Services (Homelessness)(Scotland) Regulations 2012 came into force on 1st June 2013. These Regulations make provision in relation to the duty of Local Authorities to assess whether some persons found to be homeless or threatened with homelessness ("an applicant") need housing support services.

Regulation 2 prescribes four types of housing support services which apply for the purposes of that duty. If a Local Authority has reason to believe that an applicant may be in need of one or more of these services, it must assess whether the applicant, or any person residing with the applicant, is in need of such support. If so, the Local Authority must ensure that the service is provided to the person who needs it. Further information on these regulations can be found at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/06/3279/2>.

A National Statistics Publication for Scotland

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

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Office of the Chief Statistician, Telephone: 0131 244 0442

E-mail: statistics.enquiries@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this statistical bulletin:

are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
 are available via an alternative route [Homelessness statistics - gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot)
(www.gov.scot)

may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors.

cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.

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