

Addressing Housing Insecurity

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Housing insecurity was highlighted within [The Promise](#) as adversely impacting the wellbeing of children and families, and has been shown to increase risk of coming into conflict with the law.

The [United Nations Special Rapporteur on adequate housing](#) last visited the United Kingdom in 2013 where they highlighted several concerns over the availability of appropriate housing provision describing it as a 'critical situation' that required immediate attention. Since then rates of homelessness have increased, with [Scottish Government data](#) showing that over 32,000 households – each potentially consisting of several people – were assessed as being homeless in 2022/23, a 9% increase on the year before. An estimated [1.5 million people face overcrowded, dangerous or unsuitable or unaffordable housing in Scotland](#), with a [three Local Authorities](#) declaring a housing emergency in recent months.

Finances within Scotland's homes is in a precarious state. [Recent research](#) has pointed to some 10% of children accessing foodbanks in the past year, 40% of homes facing unaffordable energy costs and increasing rent and mortgage payments. Meanwhile, the real terms value of [government support has fallen](#), despite the introduction of the [Scottish Child Payment](#) for eligible families. [Data published in January 2024](#) shows that rates of child poverty have steadily risen over the past 20 years, with 'deep poverty' now more prominent than other less acute degree of financial pressures. Rent in some parts of the country have [increased 14% in the last year](#) alone and buying a home in the UK is now [more expensive than at any time since 1876](#). Housing charities estimate that [by 2026 some 202,000 households will lack secure accommodation across the UK](#), with rates within Scotland [increasing by one third](#).

Whilst [there is some doubt](#) as to the accuracy of data pertaining to the housing security of children and young people, evidence suggests that the 16-24 year old cohort account for some [22% of all homeless households in Scotland](#), despite equating to just 12% of the population. Over 8,000 homelessness applications were made by young people aged 16-24, with an 11% increase in homeless applications from young people experiencing mental ill-health. Scholars in England have recently argued that those from minority ethnic groups with care and justice experience [face greater exposure](#) to this issue. Young people who are LGBT+ similarly face [heightened rates of housing insecurity](#), with this cohort [facing particular challenges](#) that may place them at increased risk.

Moreover, households with families wait longer to secure accommodation when they reach crisis. The relationship between housing insecurity and adverse circumstances is extensive. It has been linked to [increased involvement in crime](#), to [complex mental health problems and repeat offending](#), and to [substance abuse](#). It has been shown to increase the risk of children being [exposed to four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#), whilst [10% of children](#) within secure care have experienced housing insecurity. Young people with recent experience of the custodial estate are at [increased risk](#). Indeed, [recent research](#) has highlighted that lack of suitable accommodation is often the most significant factor in unsatisfactory transitions from custody, alongside [other challenges](#). Common reasons for [housing insecurity amongst the 16-24 age group](#) include; friends or family no longer willing or able to accommodate; domestic abuse; eviction from private, social, or supported housing tenancy; landlords selling the property; and an end to a partnership or relationship. As such the pathways into homelessness are both structural and interpersonal, thus requiring a multi-systemic response.

Scotland's Youth Homelessness [Prevention Pathway](#) - cited within the [National Youth Justice Vision and Action Plan](#) – outlines the importance of such responses. It recommends that:

“No young person should be discharged from public services (Justice, Health or Care) into homelessness. Systems for discharge planning should be created which take account of housing availability and waiting times and ensure that they have a person to support the transition”.

Preventing housing insecurity is therefore a significant priority for those supporting children and young people; not only in reducing episodes of harm but in order to respect their human rights and secure positive outcomes, avoiding conflict with the law. It is particularly prevalent amongst those with care experience, leading to the creation of a [dedicated policy](#) for this cohort.

Scotland has seen significant success through the [‘housing first’ approach](#) which provides accommodation alongside addiction counselling, mental health support and other services, whilst [Finland has seen homelessness reduce dramatically](#) by adopting a similar policy.

Existing literature points to a number of steps that should be considered when supporting those who encounter housing insecurity or at risk of being homeless.

- **Identify and address underlying factors:** a comprehensive assessment of, and attention to, the factors driving housing insecurity may enable homelessness to be avoided.
- **Diversion:** unstable housing ought not be a preclusion to access to diversion measures from the justice systems, and indeed could form the basis of any such intervention. Given the challenges of navigating the justice system diversionary approaches should be maximised wherever possible. Indeed, the Special Rapporteur to the United Nations Human Rights Council [has explicitly called](#) on alternative, less punitive approaches to those facing housing insecurity who come into conflict with the law.
- **Family reconciliation:** there may be a benefit in attempting to restore any fractured relationships. However, practitioners should be mindful that abuse and neglect may have played a factor in the child or young person leaving the home and may not be a suitable location to return to.
- **Financial support and advice:** given the impact of limited finances upon housing security, attention should be given to maximising income and [supporting financial literacy](#).
- **Signpost:** providing information and advice regarding housing rights, how to navigate the housing system and routes into support at the earliest possible stage will provide options and choice for the individual.
- **Corporate parenting duties and powers:** as outlined within the [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#), there are responsibilities and powers incumbent upon the state that should be exercised fully, including provision of accommodation. For those who qualify for leaving care support, utilisation of aftercare support is essential. [The Care Leavers Covenant](#) sets out a range of support that should be offered, including [exploring housing options](#).
- **Structural change:** At macro, structural level there is unambiguous evidence that homelessness can be reduced through measures such as Housing First, whilst greater provision of public housing, rent controls and adoption of anti-poverty strategies and mitigate against housing insecurity.

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