

WHY EU CITIZENS ARE MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS IN BRITAIN

EU citizens living in Britain are overrepresented in the homeless population and, on top of this, often barred from accessing mainstream support because of where they are from. The response to the pandemic offered a glimpse of what is possible when barriers are unlocked and everyone can access accommodation and support to move out of homelessness. Crisis argue that there is an opportunity, coming out of the pandemic, to make sure that protection from homelessness is there for everyone who has made their home in Britain.

By **Francesca Albanese**, Head of Research and Evaluation, Crisis and **Laura Payne**, Senior Media Officer, Crisis

TEMPORARY POLICY MEASURES DURING THE PANDEMIC

Over the past decade, the scale of homelessness and housing difficulties among EU citizens across Britain has become a growing concern. These concerns have been exacerbated by the twin challenges of Covid-19 and the end of EU free movement rules.

As part of the response to the pandemic we have seen an unprecedented and immediate transformation in national governments' approaches to homelessness across England, Scotland and Wales. At the start of the pandemic governments announced emergency accommodation (known as 'Everyone In' in England) would be provided for people sleeping rough or in unsafe accommodation where self-isolation wasn't possible. Temporary protective measures were put in place which saved lives and temporarily stopped homelessness going up.¹ These included the pause on evictions, raising the Local Housing Allowance (LHA)², £20 per month uplift in Universal Credit and the furlough scheme.

Importantly for people experiencing homelessness and the dangers of the virus, the emergency response did not apply eligibility criteria or impose further barriers because of where they were from. People who had previously been locked out of most support were able to get vital help to move out of homelessness.

1 Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wood, J., Watts, B., Stephens, M. & Blenkinsopp, J. (2021) The Homelessness Monitor: England 2021. London: Crisis. <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/england/the-homelessness-monitor-england-2021/>

2 Local Housing Allowance is the name for Housing Benefit in the private rented sector

However, as the pandemic has continued the 'Everyone In' message has become less clear and we have seen increasing numbers of people struggling to access this support. Research conducted by Heriot-Watt University and IPPR for Crisis³ has uncovered the scale, causes and impact of homelessness amongst EU citizens both before and during the pandemic. It highlights some stark trends and new evidence to make the case for why protection from losing your home should be there for everyone.

SCALE AND CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS AMONGST EU CITIZENS

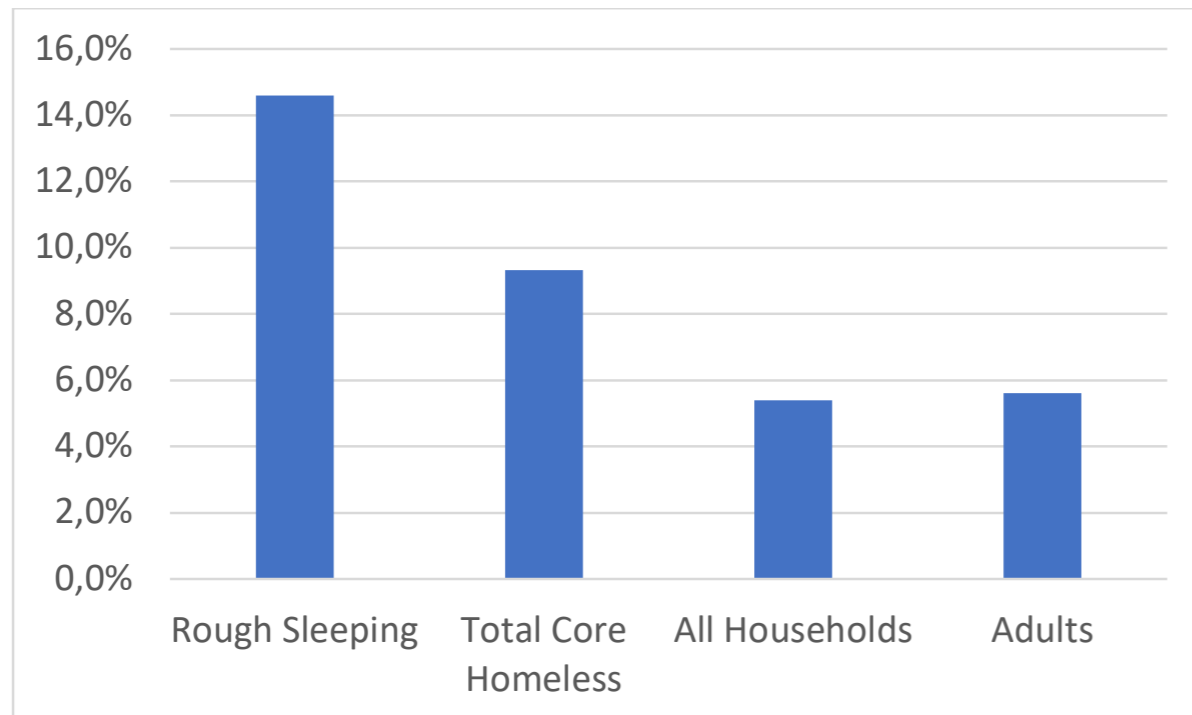
EU citizens living in Britain are disproportionately affected by homelessness and housing insecurity. They are almost twice as likely to experience the worst forms of homelessness and almost three times as likely to experience rough sleeping in comparison to the general adult population in Britain. Restrictions in place before the pandemic have contributed to this trend but EU citizens have been especially hard-hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

On any given night in Britain in 2019 around 22,000 EEA national households were experiencing the worst forms of homelessness (rough sleeping, living in unconventional accommodation - including cars, sheds and garages - living in hostels, night shelters, unsuitable temporary accommodation such as B&Bs and sofa surfing). This represents about 9% of the total number of people experiencing

3 Bramley, G., Morris, M., Mort, L., Netto, G., Sosenko, F., and Webb, J. (2021) The scale, causes, and impacts of homelessness among EEA Citizens, Heriot-Watt University and IPPR <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/types-of-homelessness/the-scale-causes-and-impacts-of-homelessness-among-eea-citizens/>

homelessness across Britain. Indicative modelling during the pandemic shows a slight decrease in scale of EU citizens to an estimated 20,500 households on any given night in 2021, following the trends of core homelessness overall.

Proportion of EU citizens experiencing types of homelessness, total adults and all households across GB



Job loss is one of the key drivers of homelessness amongst EU citizens and people have been disproportionately affected by unemployment during the pandemic. In March 2020, our research showed 25% of people recently experiencing homelessness who are originally from EEA countries, were unemployed. This increased to 52% by winter 2020. For those recently experiencing rough sleeping, job loss and financial difficulties were cited as the most frequent adverse experiences (51%

and 49%). This was over other common pressures that can push people into homelessness, regardless of their background, such as health problems or a relationship breakdown. Many people we spoke to also had experiences of insecure and exploitative work and reported not being paid enough to live on or, in some cases, not being paid at all.

While job loss and individual factors such as health concerns partially mirror causes of homelessness experienced by the general population, they are compounded by the barriers people face because of where they are from. In many cases people who faced a loss of employment and challenging financial circumstances were left without anywhere to turn which worsened and prolonged their housing difficulties.

Sometimes this was due to language or cultural barriers that made it harder for EU citizens to access mainstream support that should have been available to them, while others were unable to get help for their housing situation – in particular, through welfare benefits – as a result of rules restricting EU citizens’ access to support. This left people in extended periods of limbo while they tried to resolve their accommodation and employment issues, without any support to help them in the interim.

A significant number of EU citizens are at greater risk of homelessness and are at risk of losing their rights to live and work in the UK, because they have not successfully secured status under the EU Settlement Scheme. Of those who have got status, many only have pre-settled status, so in the next five years they will need to make a new application for settled status before their temporary leave runs out. At a point 3-6 months before the deadline for registering under the EU Settlement Scheme, less than half of people we spoke to who had recently experienced homelessness had obtained settled or pre-settled status.



Coming out of the pandemic there is an opportunity to make sure that protection from homelessness is there for everyone who has made their home in Britain.”

A HOME FOR ALL?

Coming out of the pandemic there is an opportunity to make sure that protection from homelessness is there for everyone who has made their home in Britain. Extending eligibility to benefits and homelessness assistance for EU citizens with pre-settled status would ensure that support is there for people if they experience life events that put them at risk of losing their home, whether that is a loss of employment, bereavement or a relationship breakdown. This would strengthen the safety net and ensure that people can get help when they face difficult times, so that fewer people end up being pushed into homelessness.

In the short-term, there are actions that can be taken now to provide immediate support for EU citizens who are struggling to access mainstream support in Britain and are currently sleeping rough or in temporary accommodation and facing returning to the streets. We are recommending that the Westminster Government bring forward

funding for a bespoke package of housing and employment support for EU citizens whose needs are not being met by current programmes. This will make a real difference for people who are sleeping rough now.

The pandemic emergency response gave us a glimpse of what is possible when barriers are unlocked and everyone can access accommodation and support to move out of homelessness. We need to go further to ensure everyone experiencing homelessness has a route to move into safe and stable housing.

This article draws on two reports; Jacob, R. (2021) Home For All: Why EU citizens are more likely to experience homelessness - and why it matters, Crisis and Bramley, G., Morris, M., Mort, L., Netto, G., Sosenko, F., and Webb, J. (2021) and The Scale, Causes, and Impacts of Homelessness Among EEA Citizens, Heriot-Watt University and IPPR.