

ROUGH SLEEPING TRACKER

A plan to restore control, order, and hope to British streets

4,793

The number of people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn 2025. The number of people sleeping rough on a single night has soared by 171 per cent since 2010, and increased by 96 per cent since 2021, and by three per cent since 2024. 2025 was the highest year on record for the number of people sleeping rough on a single night.

8,010

The number of people sleeping rough over the course of December 2025, a record high for this time of year. This figure has increased by 73 per cent since 2021.

1,168

The number of non-UK nationals sleeping rough on a single night in autumn 2025. This figure has fallen by seven per cent since 2024, but is an increase of 92 per cent since 2021. Nearly one in four (24 per cent) people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn 2025 held non-UK nationalities.

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About the Centre for Social Justice

Established in 2004, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) is an independent think-tank that studies the root causes of Britain's social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions.

The CSJ's vision is to give people in the United Kingdom (UK) who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantages and injustice every possible opportunity to reach their full potential. The majority of the CSJ's work is organised around five 'pathways to poverty', first identified in our ground-breaking 2007 report, *Breakthrough Britain*. These are: educational failure; family breakdown; economic dependency and worklessness; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and severe personal debt.

Since its inception, the CSJ has changed the landscape of our political discourse by putting social justice at the heart of British politics. This has led to a transformation in government thinking and policy. For instance, in March 2013, the CSJ report *It Happens Here* shone a light on the horrific reality of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK. As a direct result of this report, the government passed the *Modern Slavery Act 2015*, one of the first pieces of legislation in the world to address slavery and trafficking in the 21st century.

Our research is informed by experts including prominent academics, practitioners and policymakers. We also draw upon our CSJ Alliance, a unique group of charities, social enterprises, and other grassroots organisations that have a proven track-record of reversing social breakdown across the UK.

The social challenges facing Britain remain serious. In 2026 and beyond, we will continue to advance the cause of social justice so that more people can continue to fulfil their potential.

Foreword

The levels of rough sleeping revealed today are a national disgrace and undermine any ambition this government might have to end rough sleeping for good. The analysis in this report shows a system trapped in crisis and a state unable to keep pace with the pressures it faces.

In 2020, the Conservative government's 'Everyone In' initiative demonstrated that we *can* reduce rough sleeping quickly, delivering the largest year-on-year fall in a decade. Tragically, rather than serving as a springboard to end rough sleeping for good, that year became a baseline from which numbers have steadily risen ever since.

I have twice changed the law on homelessness. Both changes extended meaningful support to some of the most vulnerable people in our society, but legislation alone is not enough. Without services and interventions that are proven to end homelessness, the system will remain overwhelmed by demand.

This report by the CSJ comes at a critical time, just two months after the publication of the long-awaited homelessness strategy. The strategy was widely seen as lacking ambition, with its pledge to halve long-term rough sleeping underpowered. Having watched successive governments fail to deliver on bold promises to end rough sleeping, I know how easily such commitments fade away.

This report outlines a blueprint for strengthening the homelessness strategy, avoiding the mistakes of the past, and putting the government on track to meet its pledge to halve long-term rough sleeping.

This begins with a targeted scaling up of Housing First. Starting with a permanent home, individuals are given access to the tailored, wraparound support they need to address deep-seated challenges. It is an approach rooted in common sense, recognising that no one can rebuild their life while trapped between crisis services and temporary accommodation.

Crucially, this report takes a fresh look at how rough sleeping has changed this decade, with non-UK nationals now the fastest-growing cohort on the streets. The public expect that those with no right to be in the UK, or those who would be better supported by returning home, are not left to languish across our town and city centres. Greater collaboration between councils and the Home Office, coupled with a renewed emphasis on voluntary return and reconnection, would help restore fairness and order to the system, while ensuring that those who are eligible for support are able to access it.

With ambition and leadership, local and national government can work together to repair a homelessness system full of good intentions but lacking in proven solutions. I welcome this report by the CSJ, which sets out a clear path forward for delivering the control, order, and hope that the British public expect.



Bob Blackman MP

Conservative MP for Harrow East and Co-Chairman of the APPG for Ending Homelessness

Executive Summary

Rough sleeping has hit a record high in England.

CSJ analysis of official data shows that for the fourth consecutive year, the number of people sleeping rough on England's streets has increased, by 96 per cent since 2021, and by 171 per cent since 2010.¹

Across our towns and cities, rough sleeping has become increasingly visible, a symbol of national decline, and a symptom of a broken social fabric. But while rough sleeping remains sadly familiar, it is also fundamentally changing, becoming entangled with record levels of immigration and the ongoing asylum crisis.

CSJ analysis shows that almost one in four (24 per cent) rough sleepers are not from the UK, rising to nearly one in two in London (47 per cent).² Over the four years since 2021, the number of non-UK nationals sleeping rough has risen by 92 per cent.³ Among those with non-European Union (EU) nationalities, the increase has been even higher, a rise of 396 per cent since 2021.⁴

These figures pose a serious challenge for the government, which has pledged to halve long-term rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament. While last year's homelessness strategy, *A National Plan to End Homelessness*, includes positive measures on homelessness prevention, new duties for public services to collaborate, and nearly £3.5 billion of investment,⁵ its approach to long-term rough sleeping is underpowered, with no commitment to expand the most effective intervention – Housing First. Moreover, beyond a pilot in four council areas, improvements to data sharing, and a new training package for frontline staff,⁶ there is scant detail on how the government plans to reduce, and ultimately end, rough sleeping among non-UK nationals.

In this report, we identify how the government can strengthen its homelessness strategy and meet its ambition to halve long-term rough sleeping. This should begin with a targeted expansion of Housing First in England, a new approach to tackling non-UK national rough sleeping, and a stronger commitment to prevention by tackling the root causes of poverty.

Scale up Housing First

The government should launch a targeted expansion of Housing First in England, to deliver 5,571 places by 2029/30. Housing First is the most effective and well-evidenced intervention at ending homelessness for Britain's most disadvantaged and entrenched rough sleepers.

1 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), *Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2025*, February 2026.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 MHCLG, *A National Plan to End Homelessness*, December 2025, pp. 11-13.

6 Ibid, pp. 45-56.

Across city-region pilots in England, 84 per cent of service users sustained a stable home after three years,⁷ and it has been shown to be 3.5 times more effective than conventional interventions.⁸ Without a commitment to scale it up further, the government will struggle to meet its commitment to halve long-term rough sleeping.

Our plan to provide 5,571 Housing First places would more than double current capacity and take thousands of long-term rough sleepers off the streets by the end of the Parliament – a visible example of the national renewal this government has promised.

CSJ analysis suggests that this would cost £103 million over four years, providing a 2:1 return on investment in savings to public services, through reduced spending on homelessness outreach, criminal justice costs and the NHS.⁹ We propose funding this roll-out through a ringfence in the new Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant (HRSDAG), mirroring the way that certain funding is reserved for prevention. The government should fund Housing First by removing relocation expenses for civil servants, cutting the costs of the programme that moves officials to the regions, and redirecting a small proportion of the existing homelessness grant.¹⁰

Enforce immigration law

The government must restore control over non-UK national rough sleeping, by being willing to enforce immigration law, and by meeting its legal obligations to those owed support. Our plan draws on a successful pilot in the Netherlands, where municipalities have successfully supported migrant rough sleepers back into work, or to return to their country of origin.¹¹

We propose the government tackle non-UK national rough sleeping and enforce immigration law by:

- a. **Resolving the immigration status of non-UK nationals sleeping rough** by setting a new legal duty on local authorities and frontline homelessness services to work with the Home Office.
- b. **Enforcing immigration law** by ensuring every frontline homelessness service has a working relationship and dedicated point of contact within the Home Office's voluntary returns service.
- c. **Setting a preferential option for voluntary return** by introducing a new priority outcome metric for local government on reconnecting non-UK nationals sleeping rough to their home countries.

Tackle the root causes of poverty

Preventing rough sleeping from occurring in the first place requires cross-government action to tackle the root causes of poverty. *A National Plan to End Homelessness* recognises the relationship between the root causes of poverty - family breakdown, educational failure, worklessness, addiction, and problem debt – as causes and risk factors for rough sleeping.¹² In this report we draw from recent CSJ publications to outline 15 recommendations that would strengthen the government's ambition to better prevent homelessness.

7 MHCLG, Evaluation of the Housing First Pilots: Final synthesis report, October 2024, p. 31.

8 Campbell Tickell, LCRC Housing First Pilot: Local Evaluation, April 2022, p. 9.

9 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), No Place Like Home: Scaling up Housing First in England, July 2025, p. 55.

10 Ibid, p. 56.

11 Significant Public, Evaluatie Kortdurende Opvang Dakloze EU-Burgers: Eindmeting, June 2024.

12 MHCLG, A National Plan to End Homelessness, December 2025, p. 43, 76.

Rough sleeping data review

Rough sleeping is a specific type of homelessness where someone is bedded down in the open air, or in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, sheds, and stations). Rough sleeping is the most dangerous and visible form of homelessness.

Rough sleeping is associated with other complex needs. The Rough Sleeping Questionnaire 2025 found that 93 per cent of respondents had more than one support need, with over one in three (36 per cent) experiencing a current mental health issue, an adverse school experience, and a substance misuse need in the past 12 months.¹³

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) publish a rough sleeping annual snapshot, which is collected from local authority counts and estimates. The snapshot estimates the number of people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn. Furthermore, MHCLG also publishes a regular Rough Sleeping Data Framework (RSDF), which provides more regular data on the number and profile of rough sleepers, including a monthly estimate, albeit this is less robust than the annual snapshot release.

It is important to note that both the rough sleeping annual snapshot and RSDF underestimate the likely size of England's rough sleeping population. Crisis estimate that over 15,000 people experienced rough sleeping in 2024, up from 12,000 in 2022.¹⁴ This is significantly higher than the total number of people seen sleeping rough on a single night, or over the course of a month.

Total number of people sleeping rough

Single night trends

In autumn 2025, the estimated number of people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn was 4,793, an increase of three per cent since 2024, 96 per cent since 2021, and 171 per cent since 2010. 2025 marks the fourth year in a row that rough sleeping has increased. The rate of people sleeping rough in England has increased to 8.2 people per 100,000 in 2025, from 8.0 people per 100,000 in 2024.¹⁵

¹³ MHCLG, Rough sleeping questionnaire 2025: Headline findings, November 2025.

¹⁴ Crisis, The homelessness monitor: England 2025, November 2025, p. 20.

¹⁵ MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2025, February 2026.

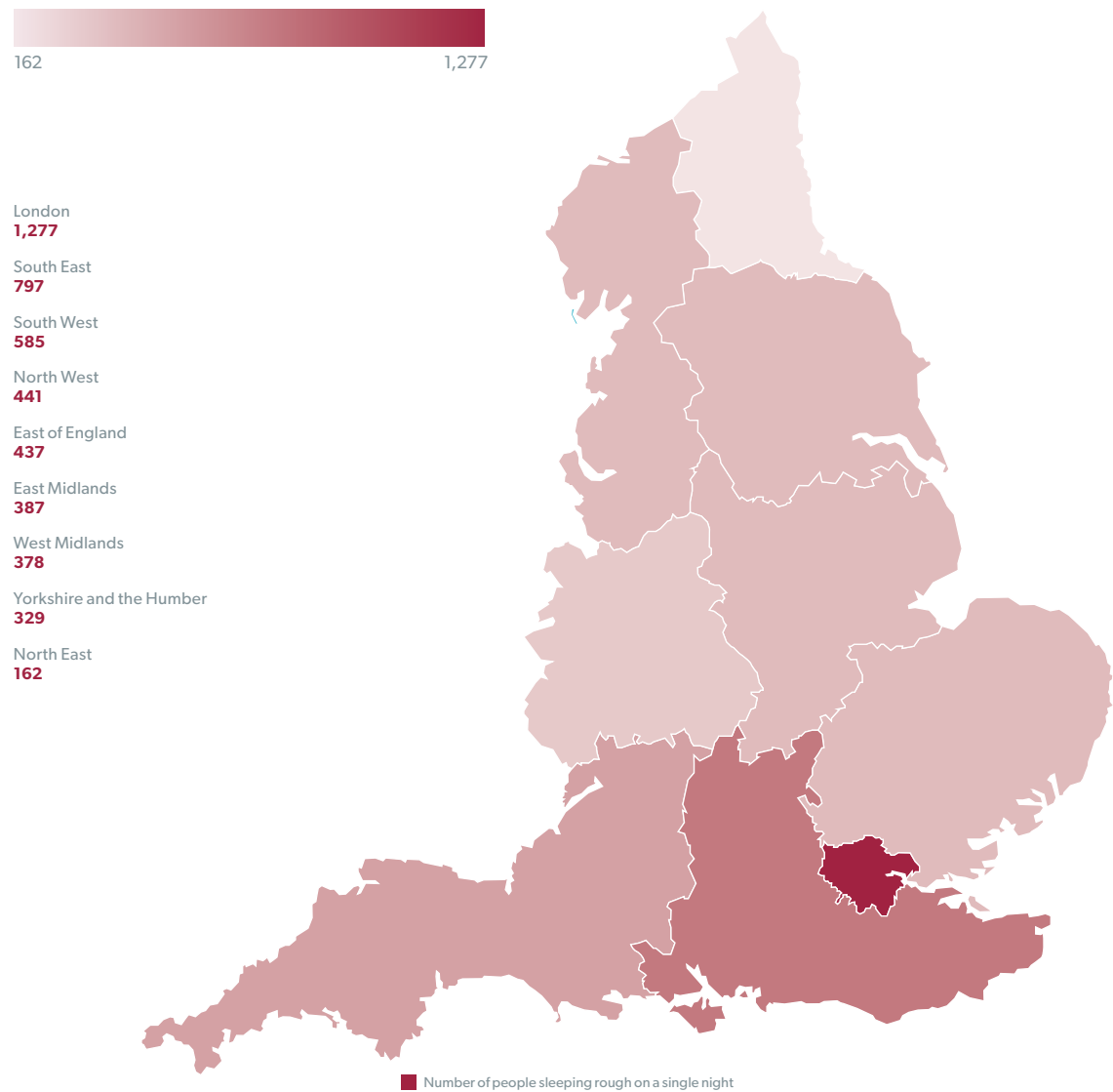
Figure 1: The number of people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn



Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England, autumn 2025, February 2026.

27 per cent of all people seen sleeping rough on a single night were in London. Rough sleeping increased in every region but London, the East Midlands, and Yorkshire and the Humber from the previous year. The region with the largest increase in the number of people estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night was the North East, with a 31 per cent increase from 2024.

Figure 2: The number of people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn, by region



Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England, autumn 2025, February 2026.

The local authority with the highest number of people sleeping rough on a single night was Westminster (360 people).

Table 1: Local authorities with the highest number of people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn

Local authority	Number of people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn
Westminster	360
Camden	134
Somerset	103
City of London	83
Bristol, City of	70
Birmingham	68
Cornwall	65
Leeds	65
Nottingham	59
Brighton and Hove	57

Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England, autumn 2025, February 2026.

Monthly trends

The RSDF provides more regular data on the number of people sleeping rough in England. In addition to single night estimates, the RSDF provides a monthly estimate of the number of people sleeping rough.

The latest release of the RSDF covers 2025 Q4. In October, 9,165 people were estimated to be sleeping rough over the month, rising to 9,194 in November, and falling to 8,010 in December. Each month in 2025 Q4, besides November, was higher than the same period in 2024. Rough sleeping is at a record high for the time of year; however, the rate of increase is slowing.

The Rough Sleeping Data Framework indicators

The RSDF has eight indicators, grouped under the headings below. This is to understand how far rough sleeping is prevented wherever possible, and where it does occur, whether it is rare, brief and non-recurring.

Rare

- The number of people sleeping rough (on a single night and over the course of the month).
- The number of people sleeping rough over the course of the month who have moved into accommodation over the course of the month.

Prevented

- The number of new people sleeping rough (on a single night and over the course of the month).
- The number of people sleeping rough over the month who have been discharged from institutions.

Brief

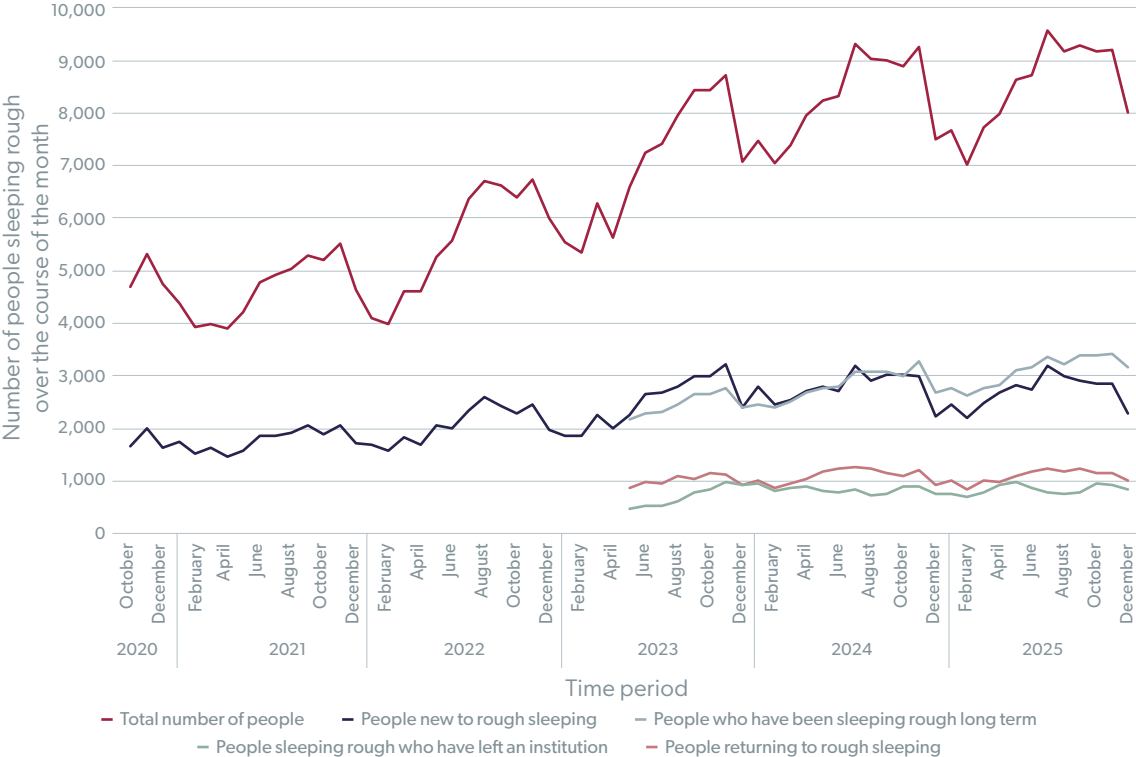
- The number of people sleeping rough over the course of the month who have been sleeping rough long-term.
- The number of nights on which people were seen sleeping rough.

Non-recurring

- The number of people sleeping rough over the course of a month who are returning to sleeping rough.
- The number of people sleeping rough over the course of the month who are returning to sleeping rough, who had previously moved into settled accommodation.

In Figure 3, we show the estimated number of people sleeping rough over the course of a month, those who are new to rough sleeping, those who have been sleeping rough long-term, people returning to rough sleeping, and people sleeping rough who have left an institution.¹⁶

Figure 3: The estimated number of people sleeping rough over the course of a month



Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, October to December 2025 – release, February 2026.

Figure 3 shows:

- › A seven per cent increase in the number of people sleeping rough over the course of the month in December 2025 compared to the same period in 2024, and a 73 per cent increase since 2021.
- › A two per cent increase in the number of people sleeping rough over the course of the month who are new to rough sleeping in December 2025, compared to the same period in 2024, and a 33 per cent increase since 2021.
- › An 18 per cent increase in the number of people sleeping rough long-term over the course of the month in December 2025, compared to the same period in 2024, and a 32 per cent increase since 2023.
- › An eight per cent increase in the number of people returning to rough sleeping over the course of the month in December 2025 compared to the same period in 2024, and a 10 per cent increase since 2023.
- › A 12 per cent increase in the number of people sleeping rough who have left an institution in December 2025, compared to the same period in 2024, and a nine per cent decrease since 2023.

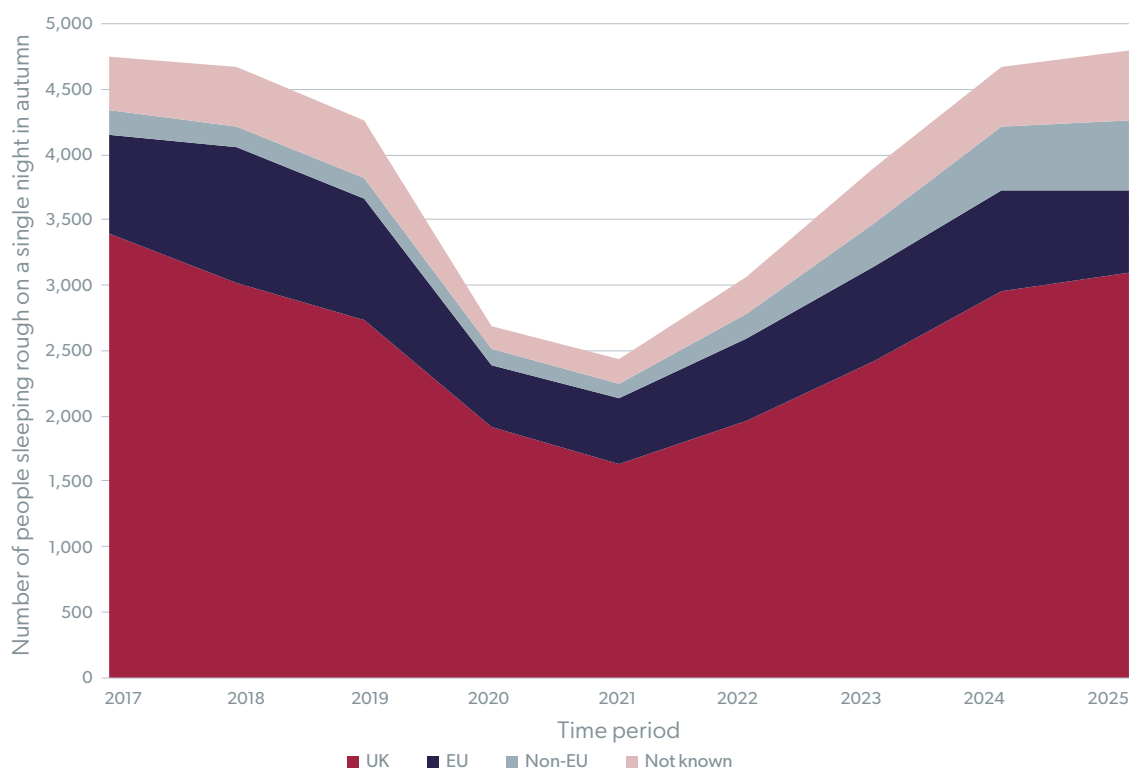
16 For definitions see: MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, October to December 2025 – release, February 2026.

Demographics of people sleeping rough

Nationality and immigration status

Non-UK nationals make up a significant proportion of the total number of people seen sleeping rough. 1,168 people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn 2025 were non-UK nationals. 13 per cent of all people sleeping rough were EU nationals, and 11 per cent were non-EU nationals. Out of the total rough sleeping population, 11 per cent had unknown nationalities. Overall, 35 per cent of people seen sleeping rough had non-UK or not known nationalities.

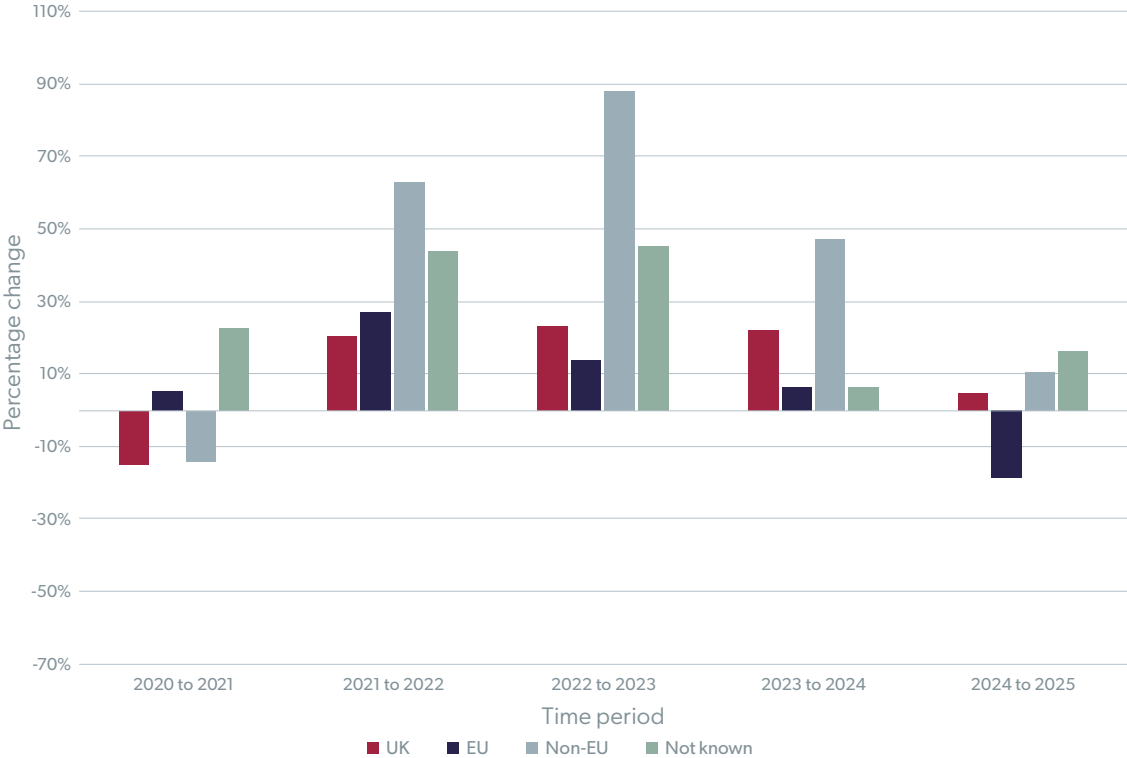
Figure 4: Nationality of people seen sleeping rough on a single night



Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England, autumn 2025, February 2026.

Since 2021, the percentage change in the number of non-UK nationals sleeping rough has been higher among non-EU nationals, compared to those from the UK and EU. It is notable how rapid the increase has been among non-EU nationals sleeping rough, which reflects broader changes to immigration trends since the UK left the EU. While the number of UK nationals sleeping rough has fallen by nine per cent since 2017, the number of non-UK nationals sleeping rough on a single night has increased by 23 per cent. This means that the entirety of the difference in rough sleeping between the previous high in 2017 and 2025, comes from non-UK national rough sleeping. Since 2021, there has been a 396 per cent increase in the number of non-EU nationals sleeping rough on a single night.

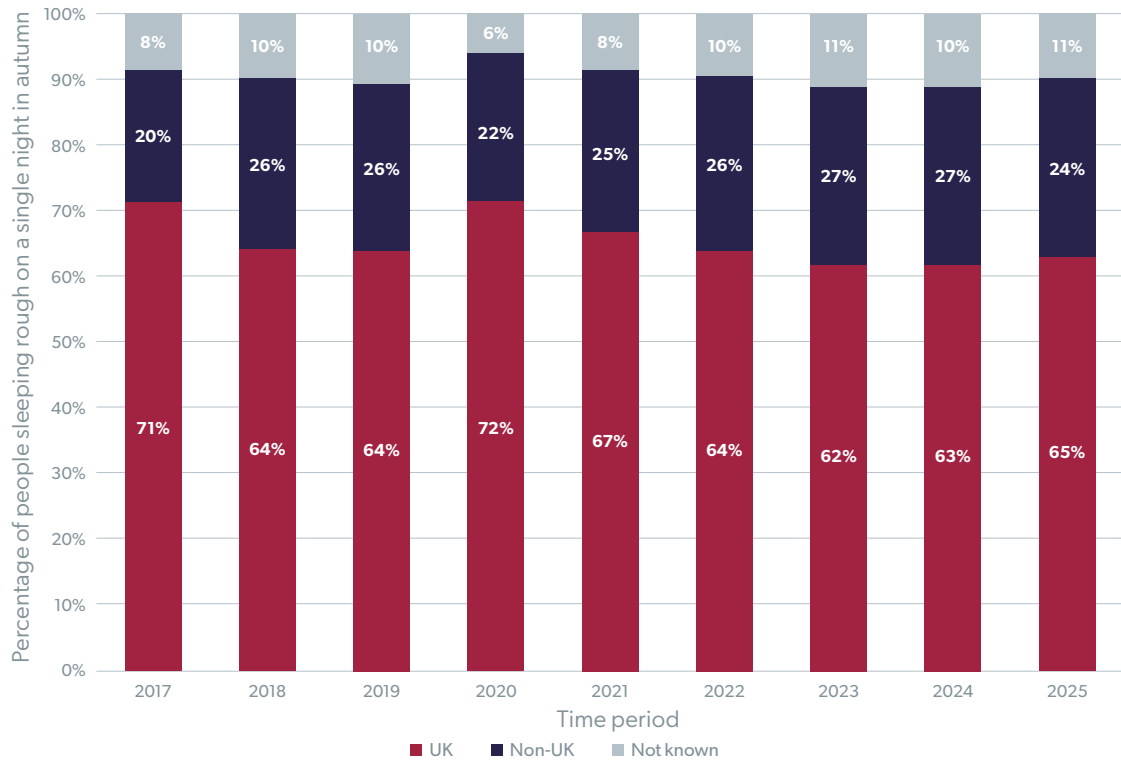
Figure 5: Percentage change in UK, EU, non-EU, and not known nationalities sleeping rough on a single night



Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England, autumn 2025, February 2026.

Non-UK nationals make up nearly one in four (24 per cent) of those seen sleeping rough in autumn 2025. While this is a decrease from 2024, there has been an increase in those with not known nationalities as a proportion of the total, from 10 per cent in 2024 to 11 per cent in 2025.

Figure 6: Proportion of UK, non-UK, and not known nationalities as a percentage of total seen sleeping rough on a single night



Source: CSJ analysis. MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England, autumn 2025, February 2026.

Age and Sex

There were 4,108 people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn who were over the age of 26, reflecting the majority of rough sleepers, 212 were aged between 18 and 25, while 0 people under the age of 18 were seen sleeping rough.¹⁷

The majority of people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn 2025 were men, representing 82 per cent of the total and 3,938 in number. 733 women were seen sleeping rough, 15 per cent of the total, while 122 had an unknown gender, three per cent of the total.¹⁸

MHCLG state that sleeping patterns of females experiencing rough sleeping is more hidden, transient and intermittent, and therefore may not be fully captured by the rough sleeping snapshot.¹⁹

¹⁷ MHCLG, Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2025, February 2026.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The government's plan to end homelessness

In December 2025, the government published its homelessness strategy, *A National Plan to End Homelessness*, the first every cross-government strategy to address homelessness in all its forms.²⁰ The strategy marked a pivot towards prevention, while also containing a headline commitment to halve long-term rough sleeping. This is the government's key target regarding rough sleeping and will be measured by the number of people sleeping rough over the month-long term.²¹

The homelessness strategy is structured under five pillars:

Pillar One: Universal Prevention - tackling the root causes of homelessness such as poverty, low income, and lack of affordable housing across the whole population.

Pillar Two: Targeted Prevention – providing tailored support to groups at higher risk (for example prison leavers, care leavers, hospital discharges, and survivors of domestic abuse).

Pillar Three: Preventing Crisis – intervening early when people are at risk of losing their home, to help them stay where they are, or move straight into suitable settled housing.

Pillar Four: Improving Emergency Responses – improving the safety, quality and use of temporary accommodation, and how people are supported when they do become homeless.

Pillar Five: Recovery and Preventing Repeat Homelessness – supporting people to recover, address complex needs and sustain long-term housing, so homelessness does not happen more than once, and long-term rough sleeping is halved.

The emphasis on preventing homelessness and rough sleeping is welcome. In particular, the strategy's recognition of the importance of tackling the holistic and root causes of homelessness, which include family breakdown, worklessness, educational failure, addiction and problem debt, in addition to housing insecurity.

Despite a welcome pivot to prevention, the government's pledge to halve the number of long-term rough sleepers by the end of this Parliament is underpowered; and there is little explanation of how the government will meet its long-term ambition to end rough sleeping entirely.

A homelessness strategy that does not meaningfully and visibly reduce rough sleeping will be judged a failure. To ensure success, the government should commit to scaling up the most proven and evidenced intervention to end homelessness for those with multiple and complex problems: Housing First. The strategy's acknowledgement of Housing First's effectiveness is not enough to secure its long-term future. A lack of ambition to see Housing First scaled up risks the future of vital services, and leaves many without the housing security and long-term support needed to recover from long-term rough sleeping.

²⁰ MHCLG, *A National Plan to End Homelessness*, December 2025.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

The role of Housing First

Housing First provides ordinary settled housing alongside intensive, person-centred support for people whose homelessness is compounded by multiple and complex support needs. Housing First is different from conventional interventions as it offers permanent housing from the start, dependent on an individual's willingness to maintain a tenancy. Housing is sustained by intensive support, with staff having low caseloads of four to six service users, rather than between the usual 20-40.

In July 2025, the CSJ published *No Place Like Home*, a blueprint for scaling-up Housing First in England to provide 5,571 places by the end of the Parliament.²² Drawing on evidence from city-region pilots in Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region and the West Midlands, the research found impressive outcomes from English services, with 84 per cent of service users retaining their tenancies after three years.²³

Housing First is also good value for money, offering the government a two-pound return on investment for every pound spent.²⁴ This includes financial savings to public services and enhanced personal wellbeing. Housing First delivers significant savings for homelessness services, the NHS, criminal justice, and the police.²⁵

Despite the success of Housing First at ending homelessness for the majority of its service user cohort, England has been slower to develop Housing First than other European countries.²⁶ The homelessness strategy, while supporting the model in principle, abdicates responsibility for national stewardship. In countries where Housing First has been scaled up successfully, central governments have taken responsibility for providing a degree of national stewardship and setting clear expectations for local areas. Without a commitment from central government to support localities to run Housing First services, there is a risk that services will start to decline from their already small starting point. Homeless Link research identified that in 2024, Housing First was the only support service to have declined in England from the previous year.²⁷

The homelessness strategy's lack of commitment to scaling-up Housing First comes despite government research, published on the same day as the homelessness strategy, highlighting that the evidence on Housing First "is growing, and existing evidence clearly demonstrates impressively high housing retention outcomes", alongside the "pressing need for further testing in the UK context to add more weight to the evidence base".²⁸

The Co-Chairs of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness have said that by not rolling out Housing First nationally, the strategy risks being an "exercise in managing homelessness rather than ending it."²⁹

In the next chapter we set out our plan for reform, which would double Housing First provision in England, marking the first stage of a national rollout, and fulfilling the need for further testing in the UK context. Our plan for reform also addresses the surge in non-UK national rough sleeping and ensures the government's focus on prevention adequately tackles the root causes of rough sleeping.

22 Centre for Social Justice, *No Place Like Home: Scaling up Housing First in England*, July 2025, p. 52.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

24 MHCLG, *Housing First Pilots: Cost Benefit Analysis – Final Report*, October 2024, p. 45.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

26 MHCLG, *Tenancy sustainment and complex needs: A rapid evidence assessment*, December 2025.

27 Homeless Link, *Support to End Homelessness 2024*, June 2025, p. 42.

28 MHCLG, *Tenancy sustainment and complex needs: A rapid evidence assessment*, December 2025.

29 Crisis, *Co-Chairs Respond to National Plan to End Homelessness*, December 2025. Accessed: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/appg-for-ending-homelessness/appg-bulletins/response-to-national-plan-to-end-homelessness/>.

The CSJ's plan for reform

The CSJ has a plan to reverse the increase in rough sleeping and restore control, order, and hope to British streets. This plan draws upon our blueprint for how to scale-up Housing First in England, *No Place Like Home*, developed in partnership with frontline charities and leading Housing First services in Greater Manchester and the Liverpool City Region.

Scale up Housing First to halve long-term rough sleeping

Halving, and then ending, long-term rough sleeping requires the scaling up of interventions that are proven to end homelessness. A *National Plan to End Homelessness* contains ambitious commitments to put Britain back on track to ending rough sleeping, but its ambitions risk being unmet without a commitment to scaling-up Housing First in England.

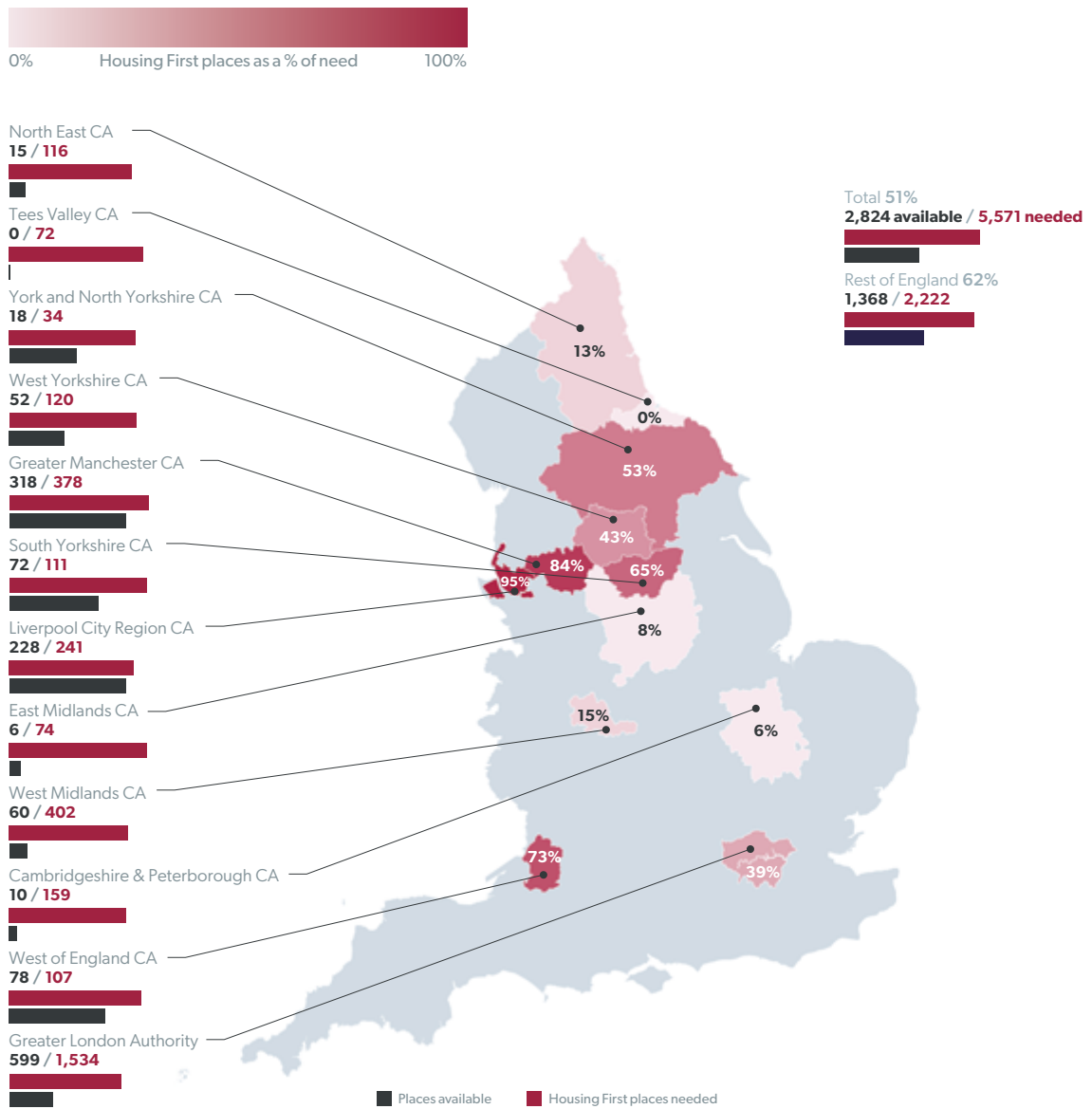
As noted above, Housing First services have declined across England, and the absence of a commitment to scale-up the service risks the erasure of gains won in recent years through the national pilots. The CSJ recommends that the government commit to doubling Housing First places within the implementation of the homelessness strategy. This could operate as a ringfence within the new Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant (HRSDAG), ensuring that a locally designed Housing First service is available in every locality in receipt of funding, in the same way that funding is now ringfenced for prevention.³⁰

In *No Place Like Home*, the CSJ estimated that there were 2,824 Housing First places available across England, with 37 per cent of localities running or commissioning a Housing First service.³¹ Our analysis estimates that approximately 5,571 places are needed across England to replicate the scale of the pilot services in Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, and the West Midlands, a doubling of existing capacity.

³⁰ MHCLG, *A National Plan to End Homelessness*, December 2025, p. 49.

³¹ CSJ, *No Place Like Home: Scaling up Housing First in England*, July 2025, p. 52.

Figure 7: Regional distribution of need and places for Housing First



Source: Centre for Social Justice, No Place Like Home: Scaling up Housing First in England, July 2025, p. 51.

Over four years, we predict that a national Housing First programme would cost £103 million (£131 million including housing benefit), as shown below in Table 2. Our full methodology for estimating the number of Housing First places required and corresponding costs can be found in *No Place Like Home: Scaling up Housing First in England*.³²

32 Ibid, p. 52.

Table 2: Scaling up Housing First over four years

Region	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
Greater Manchester	378	378	378	378
Liverpool City Region	241	241	241	241
West Midlands	402	402	402	402
York and North Yorkshire	1	14	30	34
West Yorkshire	3	49	107	120
South Yorkshire	3	46	98	111
Tees Valley	2	30	64	72
North East	3	48	103	116
East Midlands	2	30	65	74
Cambridge & Peterborough	4	66	141	159
West of England	2	44	95	107
Greater London Authority	35	631	1,360	1,534
Rest of England	51	914	1,970	2,222
Total number of places	1,125	2,893	5,054	5,571
Cost per year	£7,916,291	£20,355,268	£35,558,478	£39,199,698

Source: Centre for Social Justice, No Place Like Home: Scaling up Housing First in England, July 2025, p. 54.

A four-year national Housing First programme to provide 5,571 places across England by 2029/30 would cost £103 million. By 2029/30, this would cost £39.2 million per year in revenue funding, assuming all existing Housing First services were rolled into the ringfenced fund.

The government could fund an expansion of Housing First within existing homelessness expenditure. However, to raise additional funds, we propose scaling back the Places for Growth programme, including scrapping relocation expenses for civil servants.

The Places for Growth programme was set up to relocate government jobs, allowing departments to provide up to £14,000 per London-based civil servant for relocation expenses.³³ Spending on these expenses alone is estimated to cost the taxpayer £10.4 million from 2026 to 2030. Recruitment, training, and programme costs alone within the programme are estimated to cost £171 million over the same period.³⁴

By redirecting relocation expenses for civil servants, and a 20 per cent reduction in recruitment, training, and programme costs, the government would release £44.6 million to scale up Housing First.³⁵ Given the extraordinary rise in rough sleeping, we believe the government's priority should be to invest in Housing First, rather than the Places for Growth programme.

33 The Cabinet Office, Places for Growth Formative Evaluation Report, October 2024

34 Ibid.

35 CSJ, No Place Like Home: Scaling up Housing First in England, July 2025, p. 57.

RECOMMENDATION

MHCLG should establish a cross-government, national Housing First programme, consisting of a £103 million four-year ringfenced fund, delivered annually as part of the HRSDAG. This would deliver 5,571 Housing First places by 2029/30 for people whose homelessness is compounded by multiple and complex challenges, and who have not been able to access permanent housing through conventional pathways.

A national Housing First programme should:

- a. Support the commissioning of multi-agency Housing First services within local and combined authorities.
- b. Be backed by an outcomes monitoring framework reflecting the objectives of all contributing departments.

The government should hold primary responsibility for developing a national implementation and evaluation plan for Housing First in England, alongside a shared approach to monitoring outcomes and fidelity. This should be led by a Housing First programme director within MHCLG. The programme director should be supported by a cross-government steering group, managed by senior civil servants from all relevant departments. Oversight of a national Housing First programme should also include representation from local government and the homelessness and affordable housing sector.

A Housing First programme should be supported by a robust monitoring framework which embeds a shared understanding and vision for Housing First in England. This should continue the commitment made during the national pilots to high-fidelity Housing First.

Eligibility for a Housing First place should be determined by a UK and local connection test. To be eligible for Housing First, the test would require that a person shows either:

- a. That they are a British citizen, Irish citizen, Commonwealth citizen with a right of abode, or EEA or Swiss citizen with equal treatment rights.
- b. Have recourse to public funds and have been lawfully resident (including rough sleeping or temporary accommodation) in the UK for a continuous period of ten years.
- c. Arrived in the UK on a safe and legal resettlement or relocation scheme.
- d. Have had a connection with a local or regional area for at least two years, including being, or in the past, resident (including rough sleeping or temporary accommodation) there, employed there, have family associations or because of special circumstances.

Those who do not meet the UK or local connection test should still be supported through other services but would not be prioritised for Housing First. Members and veterans of the UK armed forces should be exempt from the test.

Enforce immigration law to restore control

The increase in non-UK national rough sleeping has constituted one of the most significant changes to the demographics of those sleeping rough in England. Without addressing the growing number of non-UK nationals sleeping rough, the government will be unable to meet its long-term ambition to end rough sleeping, and risks growing public discontent over issues regarding immigration and asylum.

While many of the drivers of rough sleeping are the same for UK and non-UK nationals, and a foreign national may have lived in the UK for years before sleeping rough, there are systemic problems within the UK's immigration and asylum system that exacerbates the problem, and has led to a growing number of new arrivals to the UK, often asylum seekers, sleeping rough on British streets.

In December 2025, 233 people were sleeping rough over the month who had left asylum support in the last 85 days. This figure only counts individuals who had left Home Office accommodation in the last 85 days. The total number of refugees or rejected asylum seekers sleeping rough is likely higher. The No Accommodation Network (NACCOM), a network of 130 organisations supporting people seeking asylum, identified 829 people sleeping rough at the point of accessing services, while 912 people were supported after having been refused asylum.³⁶

Furthermore, many non-UK nationals sleeping rough do not have access to public funds. This is known as having restricted or no recourse to public funds (NRPF). One in three (33 per cent) of the total number of non-UK nationals sleeping rough in December 2025 had either a restriction or no recourse to public funds.³⁷ As a result of this, supporting non-UK nationals through conventional services is more challenging.

By definition, a migrant with NRPF who is sleeping rough has been unable to sustain or accommodate themselves without public assistance. This exposes a gap in UK immigration policy, running counter to the Home Office's expectation that migrants who come to the UK should be able to maintain and support themselves without public assistance.³⁸ In this respect, the immigration system is not achieving the very outcomes it is designed to prioritise.

The government's approach to migrant rough sleeping

The homelessness strategy's approach to migrant rough sleeping echoes the overall emphasis on prevention. This includes a headline commitment from the Home Office to share information about refugees at risk of homelessness in advance of a discontinuation of support notification, a "homeless migrants capability training package for councils and voluntary sector organisations" and "a pilot in four council areas on access to immigration advice, short term accommodation and a named point of contact within the Home Office."³⁹

Beyond prevention, there is reference to supporting "trusted and willing civil society organisations" to work with the voluntary returns service, the Home Office's central support mechanism to help migrants return to their home countries.⁴⁰

36 The No Accommodation Network, A Data Briefing From The NACCOM Network: Understanding destitution and homelessness in the asylum and immigration system, n.d., pp. 5-6.

37 MHCLG, Rough sleeping data framework, October to December 2025 – release, February 2026.

38 Home Office, Suitability: Grounds for refusal/cancellation – Rough sleeping in the UK (version 3.0), November 2025, p. 14.

39 MHCLG, A National Plan to End Homelessness, December 2025, pp. 45-46.

40 Ibid, p. 46.

Better collaboration between the Home Office and local authorities is essential to prevent unnecessary rough sleeping and homelessness, and it is right that government extends support to those entitled to it. Too often, one arm of government has attempted to end homelessness, while another inadvertently caused it. The release of refugees and asylum seekers from Home Office accommodation, without having secured accommodation on exit, is one example of this.

However, the homelessness strategy falls short of the comprehensive package of reforms needed to restore control over non-UK national rough sleeping. While pilots and new duties to collaborate are welcome, they fall far short of the sustained and large-scale action required to address a challenge of this magnitude on the country's streets.

Without further action, the government risks entrenching rough sleeping among non-UK nationals. Furthermore, as Crisis recognised in 2025, funding will continue to be required for temporary responses to non-UK nationals sleeping rough, particularly those with limited or no recourse to public funds.⁴¹ There is also a political risk for the government, as inaction threatens to fuel public anger over visible rough sleeping in local communities, while simultaneously signalling a failure to maintain effective control of the immigration system.

To solve this problem, some have called for an extension of statutory support to a greater number of non-UK nationals sleeping rough, and reforms to, or even the abolition, of NRPF status.⁴² We believe this would be the wrong approach for the government to take. Leaving aside the financial cost of such a policy, or the ability of statutory services to respond in this way, this approach would be in direct conflict with the government's policy to restore order and control to the UK's immigration system and, at worst, would provide a significant pull factor to migrants and asylum seekers, risking greater numbers of people attempting to enter the UK and overwhelming the homelessness system.

Instead, to restore control, the government must be willing to enforce immigration law, to ensure that those with no permission to stay in the UK are removed, either voluntary or by an enforced return. A lack of effective immigration enforcement has allowed non-UK national rough sleeping to proliferate, both by creating strong pull factors, and by undermining the government's ability to remove those with no permission to remain.

Analysis by The Migration Observatory has identified that, of all refused asylum applications submitted between 2010 and 2020, just under half (48 per cent) had resulted in a return from the UK by June 2024. This falls to just 26 per cent of refused asylum applications from individuals who applied in 2020.⁴³ A 2025 paper identified that most high-quality studies generally support the idea that welfare generosity influences migration decisions.⁴⁴

Generous welfare entitlements, combined with low risk of removal, make the UK an attractive destination for migrants. This is one reason as to why such high numbers of people are seeking to enter the UK, putting further strain on a system that is unable to cope, resulting in destitution and homelessness for some.

While failings within the wider immigration and asylum system create pull factors, it remains unclear whether, and in what circumstances, the specific powers to refuse or cancel permission on the grounds of rough sleeping have been used in practice.

41 Crisis, *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2025*, November 2025, p. 76.

42 Centre for Social Policy, *No reason for no recourse: Why reform of 'No Recourse to Public Funds' conditions would be good for London and the UK*, November 2024.

43 The Migration Observatory, *Returns of unauthorised migrants from the UK*, August 2025. Accessed: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/returns-of-unauthorised-migrants-from-the-uk/>.

44 Allen, William, L., et-al., "Immigration and the welfare state", *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* (41:1), Spring 2025, pp. 64-86.

A lack of enforcement is in large part due to the UK's legal framework, which places substantive barriers in the way of applying immigration law. For example, prior to the UK's withdrawal from the EU, the government was found to have acted unlawfully in removing EU nationals on the basis of rough sleeping, on the grounds that this breached EU free movement law. This was reported by the BBC, which noted that the Home Office stated it had ceased all enforcement action against European Economic Area nationals for rough sleeping.⁴⁵

Post-Brexit, the government's new immigration system contained grounds whereby a non-UK national rough sleeper could be removed from the country. Paragraphs SUI 27.1 and SUI 27.2 of *Part Suitability of the Immigration Rules* set out a basis for refusing a permission to stay on the grounds of rough sleeping. In 2021, these rules were significantly narrowed, and as of guidance issued by the Home Office in November 2025, they state that a non-UK national can only be removed after repeated refusal of support, and engagement in persistent anti-social behaviour.⁴⁶

In February 2026, Bob Blackman MP asked the government how many non-UK nationals had been removed via the route above. The government refused to answer, stating that the information could only be collected and verified at disproportionate cost.⁴⁷ This raises serious questions about the monitoring of such returns within the Home Office, or if this is even happening at all.

Below, we outline the principles of a new approach, which while extending support to non-UK nationals rough sleeping, upholds the integrity of the UK border and immigration system, and protects the homelessness system from overwhelming levels of need.

Restoring control: The principles of a new approach to tackling non-UK national rough sleeping

To restore control, the government must be willing to enforce immigration law, as well as meet its legal obligations to non-UK nationals who are eligible for support and accommodation. We believe that such an approach is most conducive to the common good of UK society and the interests of the British taxpayer, while also adopting a right humanitarian concern for non-UK nationals who are sleeping rough. Enforcing the law will ensure the system can respond and administer support in the most effective way possible.

There are three principles that we recommend government adopts in its response to non-UK national rough sleeping.

1. Non-UK nationals sleeping rough should be able to access emergency support and accommodation, alongside an expectation that their immigration status will be resolved.
2. Those who have had their asylum claim rejected, have overstayed their visa, or who are in the UK unlawfully should be required to return to their country of origin.
3. In doing the above, the government should adopt an explicit presumption in favour of voluntary return in its policy toward non-UK nationals sleeping rough.

To implement this approach, MHCLG and the Home Office should create a Migrant Rough Sleeping Unit (MRSU) to coordinate activity across government and to support local authorities in administering support to non-UK nationals sleeping rough.

⁴⁵ BBC News, EU rough sleepers win damages for illegal deportations, May 2018. Accessed: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-44093868>.

⁴⁶ Home Office, Suitability: Grounds for refusal/cancellation – Rough sleeping in the UK (version 3.0), November 2025, p. 4.

⁴⁷ House of Commons, Written Question 110752, answered on 13th February 2026. Accessed: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2026-02-04/110752#>.

Extending support to non-UK nationals sleeping rough

The government should ensure that non-UK nationals sleeping rough are able to resolve their immigration status, to determine both their permission to stay in the UK, and options for support. This is a crucial first step in helping people to move from homelessness to long-term recovery and housing. Otherwise, individuals will continue to find themselves trapped between the streets and a mixture of temporary support and accommodation.

The Homelessness Escalations Service (HES) exists within the Home Office to identify non-UK nationals sleeping rough who qualify for public funding. It helps to quickly prove the immigration status of rough sleepers, ensuring services are able to distinguish between those eligible to receive support, and those who are not.⁴⁸ The HES was identified as a positive programme in a recent systems-wide evaluation of homelessness and rough sleeping.⁴⁹ We recommend that this becomes the first point of contact for all homelessness services when they identify a non-UK national sleeping rough. It should be used as a triage service to help present an individual with a range of options relevant to their case.

The use of HES by local authorities and frontline homelessness organisations is currently voluntary, and interaction between homelessness services and the Home Office has been marred by difficulty and controversy in recent years. Previously, some metro-mayors have refused to collaborate with the Home Office regarding information sharing about rough sleepers.⁵⁰

We recommend that use of the HES is embedded across all local authority and frontline responses to rough sleeping. As the HES is part of the Home Office, this will require mandatory engagement and collaboration on the part of local authorities and frontline homelessness services.

To mandate engagement with the Home Office, the government should create a new statutory duty on local authorities and frontline homelessness services to work with and share information with the Home Office in all cases of non-UK national rough sleeping. When a non-UK national sleeping rough is identified, services should be legally required to refer their case to the Home Office to obtain a clarification of immigration status.

Obtaining a clarification of immigration status will enable service providers to provide individuals with the most appropriate options for support. For those with permission to remain, this should include housing options, but also support with looking for work, accessing benefits, referrals to services for alcohol, substance misuse or mental health issues, the National Referral Mechanism for potential victims of modern slavery, as well as access to the voluntary returns service.

It is important to state that every person sleeping rough, regardless of nationality or status, should be able to access immediate safe accommodation and basic support prior to having their immigration status checked via the HES. Immigration status checks should be used to unlock further support and routes home, not to deny emergency assistance.

48 Home Office, User agreement: Homelessness Escalations Service, December 2024. Accessed: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-escalations-service-hes/user-agreement-homelessness-escalations-service-accessible>.

49 MHCLG, Systems-wide evaluation of homelessness and rough sleeping: preliminary findings, February 2025.

50 Inside Housing, London and Greater Manchester vow not to co-operate with plan to deport rough sleepers, December 2020. Accessed: <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/london-and-greater-manchester-vow-not-to-co-operate-with-plan-to-deport-rough-sleepers-68984>.

Enforcing immigration law

To restore control, the government must enforce immigration law, so that those with no permission to remain in the UK, including people sleeping rough, are swiftly removed.

A fundamental principle of a functioning immigration and asylum system is that when an individual is residing illegally, they will be removed. The government has recognised this point in *Restoring Order and Control*: “Once a failed asylum seeker has had their claim rejected, the public reasonably expect they will be removed from the country”.⁵¹ As shown above, and as recognised by the government, current practice falls far short of this ambition. Enforcing immigration law to restore control over non-UK national rough sleeping is therefore dependent on the success of the government’s broader reforms to the immigration and asylum system.

Those who have had their asylum claim rejected, have overstayed their visa, or who are in the UK unlawfully should be required to return to their country of origin. This approach is not only fair to taxpayers and essential to maintaining trust in the immigration and asylum system, but also vital to sustaining public support for efforts to end rough sleeping and homelessness.

To achieve this, the Home Office should strengthen the HES to hold a clear paper trail on individual cases. For example, when the HES finds that an individual has no permission to remain in the UK, the Home Office should issue that person, alongside any support services working with them, a clear resolution plan for their case (for example, appeals routes and options for voluntary return). This approach supports the government’s ambition to accelerate removals, while also ensuring that those who have a lawful right to be in the UK can regularise their status and access support.

The government should strengthen the relationship between local authorities, frontline homelessness services and the voluntary returns service. While the strategy states that the voluntary returns service will work in partnership with “willing civil society organisations” collaboration should be strengthened and made a legal obligation, with an expectation set that by the end of the Parliament every local authority and frontline homelessness organisation has a working relationship and dedicated point of contact within the voluntary returns service.

Where an individual with no permission to remain refuses a voluntary return, they should be subject to an enforced return or deportation. The government is right to emphasise the importance of legal reform to making this policy a success.

Setting a preferential option for voluntary return

In doing the above, the government should set a preferential option for voluntary return, both in how it responds to non-UK nationals sleeping rough who have permission to remain in the UK, and those who do not. This would mean that a goal of government policy regarding non-UK national rough sleeping would be to support individuals to make a voluntary return to their home country.

Voluntary returns are an established part of England’s response to rough sleeping. Access to a voluntary return is mentioned in the homelessness strategy as one response to non-UK national rough sleeping,⁵² and the voluntary returns service lists those sleeping rough as being eligible for up to £3,000 in financial support after a person leaves the UK.⁵³

51 Ibid, p. 18.

52 MHCLG, A National Plan to End Homelessness, December 2025, p. 46.

53 Gov.UK, Get help to return home if you’re a migrant in the UK: Who can get help, n.d. Accessed: <https://www.gov.uk/return-home-voluntarily/who>.

The interaction between the voluntary returns service and frontline homelessness support services should be strengthened. While not mandated for those with permission to remain in the UK, we recommend that every non-UK national is given the option of a voluntary return to their country of origin, working in partnership with the third sector and support services in the UK and abroad.

Increasing the number of voluntary returns would save the taxpayer money and relieve pressure on the homelessness system. It is also right that, in principle, a person's home country takes primary responsibility for alleviating their homelessness and addressing their additional needs, rather than the British state.

The government's data estimates that the annual cost per rough sleeper to public services equates to £14,204.⁵⁴ This does not include the cost of subsidised housing, or support provided after a person is housed. By this metric, a voluntary return where an individual is supported with up to £3,000 to rehabilitate in their home country offers significant value for money in comparison to them remaining in the UK.

In addition to financial savings, voluntary returns are often in the best interests of an individual sleeping rough. Several charities and frontline homelessness organisations in the UK work in this area to help facilitate a return to a person's country of origin. One of these is the charity Barka.

Case study: Barka

Barka UK's Voluntary Reconnections project offers assisted return for Central and Eastern European (CEE) migrants who are sleeping rough. The aim is not simply to 'send people back', but to provide a humane reconnection and reintegration route for those who cannot or do not want to remain in the UK, so they are supported into stable accommodation, treatment, or work on return rather than cycling back into homelessness. Since 2007, Barka UK reports that it has helped more than 5,000 CEE migrants to return voluntarily to their countries of origin, while also working with UK public services and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to secure any support or benefits to which people are entitled before they leave.⁵⁵

A distinctive feature of Barka's model is who delivers it. Outreach teams are made up of people who speak migrants' languages, understand their cultures and, crucially, often have firsthand experience of life on the streets and of their own reconnection journeys. Barka attributes much of its success to employing ex-service users and to its close links with a network of homelessness and rehabilitation services across European countries. This means that, when someone agrees to return, they are not simply put on a plane, but they can be met at the other end and supported into rehabilitation and stable housing, with the explicit aim of preventing a return to rough sleeping or to the UK.

Local authorities have commissioned Barka to run specialist support for migrant rough sleepers in parts of the UK, including Westminster.⁵⁶ However, there is no nationally funded network. In Westminster, Barka workers engaged people in their own language to understand their histories, helped them navigate legal systems in both the UK and their home countries, and, where appropriate, supported return.

54 MHCLG, Rough sleeping questionnaire 2025: Headline findings, November 2025.

55 Barka UK, Barka UK Reconnections Project, n.d. Accessed: <https://barkauk.org/our-services/reconnections-project/>.

56 MHCLG, Systems change learning: A practical guide from the Changing Futures programme, December 2025, p. 83.

The Netherlands is also a case study of how a comparable country is tackling high levels of migrant rough sleeping. The Dutch government funded a pilot in six municipalities with the aim of supporting rough sleepers from other EU countries who had limited or no access to Dutch support services. The pilot has been successful at helping EU nationals back into work, or to return to their home country.

Case study: The Netherlands

The Dutch government has funded a dedicated programme of short-term accommodation and support for homeless EU citizens who are ineligible for regular social services and support. Funding was provided to six municipalities – Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, Eindhoven and Venlo – which were given freedom to design services specifically for this target group, working in partnership with specialist charities such as Barka to help people either move back into work and housing in the Netherlands, or return to their home country.⁵⁷

Across the pilots, municipalities used this funding to create tailored shelters and outreach services for EU migrants, with some cities setting up separate shelters for migrants and others using hotel places or dedicated beds within existing services. In the first six months, 875 people were accommodated, with 62 per cent achieving a positive move on, either securing employment with accommodation in the Netherlands, or returning to their country of origin.⁵⁸ Four of the municipalities ran separate shelters exclusively for EU migrants and highlighted the importance of providing support in people’s native languages to build trust and engagement.⁵⁹

Respondents to the Dutch evaluation stressed the need to give homeless EU citizens a clear and honest explanation of their realistic options in the Netherlands, with three main outcomes identified: (1) a route back into work and housing in the Netherlands; (2) voluntary return to their country of origin; or (3) forced return for those with no lawful basis to remain.⁶⁰ The evaluation concluded that establishing a clear assessment point or centre for homeless EU nationals would be beneficial, so that people receive upfront guidance on their prospects and rights and are not passed between multiple services without a plan.⁶¹

Reporting in 2025 indicated that Amsterdam had supported 386 homeless migrant workers to return to their home countries in a single year, while across six participating cities around 700 people had accepted offers of help to go home, with Barka playing a central role in preparation and follow-up.⁶²

In the UK, previous government policy has incentivised voluntary return as a preferential option, providing a basis for the government to make this a cornerstone of their response to non-UK national rough sleeping.

The London Homelessness Social Impact Bond (SIB), a four-year payment by results programme launched in 2012, had explicit targets concerning the reconnection of non-UK nationals rough sleeping with their country of origin. 25 per cent of the allocated funding was reserved for reconnection, providing a tangible financial incentive for providers to reconnect migrant rough sleepers to their home countries.⁶³

57 Significant Public, Evaluatie Kortdurende Opvang Dakloze EU-Burgers: Eindmeting, June 2024, p. 3.

58 Ibid, p. 3.

59 Ibid, p. 29.

60 Ibid, p. 30.

61 Ibid, p. 33.

62 Trouw, Hundreds of homeless migrant workers have been returned to Eastern Europe. “They’re not happy about it, but it’s their salvation”, February 2025. Accessed: <https://www.trouw.nl/binenland/honderden-dakloze-arbeidsmigranten-zijn-teruggebracht-naar-oost-europa-ze-worden-er-niet-blij-van-maar-het-is-hun-red-ding~b17d348e/>.

63 Department for Communities and Local Government, Qualitative Evaluation of the London Homelessness Social Impact Bond (SIB), November 2017, p. 16.

83 individuals achieved sustained reconnection in their home countries, and the impact evaluation identified that the London SIB had a significant positive impact on non-UK national reconnections when compared to a comparison group.⁶⁴ This demonstrates how payment by results targets can have a positive impact on service delivery and outcomes achieved, providing a potential commissioning blueprint for local authorities.

The London SIB contains the basis for how the government might set a preferential option for voluntary return within its response to non-UK national rough sleeping. The SIB is an example of how to prioritise certain outcomes, and the government should build upon this, and the learnings from partner charities, St Mungo's and Thames Reach, to operationalise a preference for voluntary return.

Setting a preference for voluntary return within the government's response to rough sleeping could be achieved by amending the Outcomes Framework set for local government. The Outcomes Framework sets out the national priority outcomes for local government across a range of different policy areas, including homelessness. At present the homelessness priority outcome is: "To prevent and reduce homelessness and rough sleeping", with the following priority outcome metrics:⁶⁵

- › Households with children in temporary accommodation.
- › Families in bed and breakfast (B&B) over six weeks.
- › Success at preventing and relieving homelessness.
- › People sleeping rough on a single night.
- › People sleeping rough over the month who are long-term.

Local authorities are expected to set action plans with local targets which improve performance against each of the Outcomes Framework metrics above. To incentivise local authorities to prioritise voluntary returns of non-UK nationals rough sleeping, we propose that a new priority metric is added to the above: "Success at reconnecting non-UK nationals sleeping rough to their home countries", measured by the number of people with a confirmed reconnection outside of the UK, as modelled in the London SIB.⁶⁶

Voluntary returns, or reconnections, should be accompanied by advice and guidance on how to successfully commission and deliver services, building on the best practice of third sector organisations like Barka. The government should set an explicit expectation that reconnection services operate based on the learnings of existing services and the London Homelessness SIB. This should be supported by the new MRSU. The London Homelessness SIB recommended that reconnection services include:⁶⁷

- › Personalised support: the importance of developing long-term trusting relationships with the migrant cohort, including support staff that can speak native languages, and adapting support on a case-by-case basis.
- › Partnerships and support in home countries: this includes partnerships with the Home Office and UK services, as well as those in home countries. For example, when delivering the London Homelessness SIB, St Mungo's travelled to Poland to make links with services there. Providers reinforced the importance of ensuring support services were in place when a client returned, which was considered important in sustaining a reconnection, and preventing a return to the UK.

64 Department for Communities and Local Government, *The impact evaluation of the London Homelessness Social Impact Bond*, November 2017, p. 33.

65 MHCLG, *A National Plan to End Homelessness*, December 2025, pp. 80-81.

66 Department for Communities and Local Government, *Qualitative Evaluation of the London Homelessness Social Impact Bond (SIB)*, November 2017, p. 16.

67 *Ibid*, pp. 60-61.

To further strengthen support during a voluntary return, the government could consider measuring success not just by the sustained reconnection of a person after six months, but also by their safety, stability, and connection with support in their home country.

RECOMMENDATION

MHCLG and the Home Office should create a joint departmental MRSU, as part of a new approach to restoring control over rising levels of non-UK national rough sleeping.

We recommend that the following principles underpin a new approach to non-UK national rough sleeping.

Principle One: Resolve immigration status and extend support.

The government should ensure that every non-UK national sleeping rough is able to resolve their immigration status to determine their right to remain in the UK and, following that, their options for support. The MRSU should oversee a new statutory duty requiring all local authorities and frontline homelessness services working with people experiencing rough sleeping to collaborate with the Home Office and Immigration Enforcement teams in all cases involving non-UK nationals. In practice, this would mean that whenever a non-UK national is identified sleeping rough, services would be required to obtain an immigration status check. It is important that rough sleepers can access immediate safe shelter prior to an immigration check, with initial support not being predicated on a status check via the HES.

The HES, which identifies non-UK rough sleepers who qualify for public support, should become a key touchpoint for all homelessness services whenever a non-UK national rough sleeper is identified. HES should be the default triage mechanism used by local authorities and frontline services to confirm immigration status, clarify eligibility for public funds, and identify appropriate support options.

For those with permission to remain, support should include housing options, but also help with looking for work, accessing benefits, referrals to services for alcohol, substance misuse or mental health issues, the National Referral Mechanism for potential victims of modern slavery, as well as access to the voluntary returns service. This will help ensure that people with a lawful right to be in the UK can regularise their status and move away from the street.

Principle Two: Enforce immigration law.

The government must be willing to enforce immigration law to accelerate the return of non-UK nationals sleeping rough who have no permission to remain in the UK. To operationalise this principle, the MRSU should ensure that there is a clear and consistent process for progressing cases from initial check via the HES through to resolution. Building upon the existing HES, the government should require that when an individual is found to have no permission to remain, the Home Office issues a clear resolution plan for their case. This plan should be shared with the individual, with any support workers, and relevant agencies involved, setting out appeals routes, options for voluntary return, and the consequences of refusing to engage.

This resolution plan should give the opportunity for voluntary return, with the expectation that individuals are offered meaningful assistance to return to, and reintegrate in, their home country. This should build upon best practice models of support and partnership with services in a person's country of origin. To ensure quick progression of cases, the voluntary returns service should have a dedicated point of contact for rough sleeping cases, and the government should expect that, by the end of the Parliament, every local authority and frontline homelessness organisation has an active working relationship with the voluntary returns service.

Where voluntary return is refused, the plan should move to an enforced return. This principle is essential for maintaining the integrity of the UK immigration system.

Principle Three: Set a preferential option for voluntary return.

The government should set a preferential option for voluntary return, making clear that a core policy aim for non-UK nationals sleeping rough is a humane reconnection with their home country. The MRSU should work with MHCLG to embed this preference within the Outcomes Framework for local government by introducing a new homelessness priority metric for the reconnection of non-UK nationals rough sleeping, measured by the number of people with a confirmed reconnection outside the UK. As with existing metrics, local authorities would be required to create action plans with local targets to improve performance against this measure, ensuring that reconnection becomes a core outcome rather than an optional extra.

Alongside this, the MRSU should issue detailed guidance on how to commission and deliver high quality reconnection services, drawing on best practice from organisations such as Barka and programmes like the London Homelessness SIB. This guidance should emphasise personalised support, the importance of staff who speak migrants' languages and understand their cultures, and strong partnerships with services in countries of origin so that people are met, accommodated, and supported on arrival rather than being left at risk of returning to homelessness. The government could strengthen this aspect by assessing the safety, stability, and wellbeing of people after reconnection, rather than treating the act of return alone as a successful outcome.

By embedding a preferential option for voluntary return in this way, the government can relieve pressure on the homelessness system, ensure good value for money for the taxpayer, and ensure that non-UK nationals sleeping rough are offered long-term pathways out of homelessness.

Tackle the root causes of poverty

The government has made a welcome commitment to prevention within *A National Plan to End Homelessness*. Only by addressing the root causes of poverty can the government make a long-term change to homelessness and rough sleeping trends.

The homelessness strategy recognises family breakdown, educational failure, worklessness, addiction and problem debt as causes and risk factors for homelessness. Below, we consider how the government can strengthen its plan to prevent homelessness.

Family breakdown

The homelessness strategy recognises Family Hubs as critical in identifying emerging problems among families.⁶⁸ The government should strengthen its commitment to Family Hubs in the homelessness strategy by:

1. Moving birth registrations onto these premises to connect families with support from the start; giving parenting advice, not just birthing advice; ensuring fathers are named on birth certificates; and practising more father-inclusive approaches to engaging dads by changing opening hours and more visibly approaching and supporting men as they become fathers.
2. Deliver relationship support services in partnership with Family Hubs.
3. Ensure Family Hubs have more flexible opening hours, particularly after work and on weekends to widen access to parents.

Learn more about these recommendations by reading the CSJ's *Lost Boys: Boyhood* report from December 2025.⁶⁹

Educational failure

The homelessness strategy references school absence as a risk factor for homelessness. To turbo-charge government efforts to end the crisis of school absence effecting over 1.4 million children in Spring 2025,⁷⁰ the government should commit to the following.

1. Scale up attendance mentors nationally. The government's expansion of attendance mentors so that they will reach 5,300 children a year is welcome but still only covers just three per cent of severely absent pupils.
2. Introduce a new mandatory Attendance Awareness Course at the beginning of the legal intervention process for unauthorised absence. Non-attendance or refusal should result in receipt of an increased fine of £200, or £100 if paid within 21 days.
3. Expand access to sport at school which is proven to increase attendance, grades, and engagement. The government should introduce an enrichment guarantee for young people, providing up to five hours a week of extracurricular activities like sport.

Learn more about these recommendations by reading the CSJ's *Absent Ambition: Addressing the root causes of school absence* report from September 2025.⁷¹

Worklessness

The homelessness strategy recognises the importance of helping people to afford their housing by increasing their income and explicitly recognises the problem of economic inactivity as undermining this aim.⁷² To take their reforms to tackle economic inactivity further, the government should introduce the following.

1. A Future Workforce Credit to incentivise employers to recruit and upskill NEETs aged 16-24. The Credit would be set at 30 per cent of an employee's salary. It would be worth approximately £5,850 for a 19-year-old employee working full-time (37.5 hours), more than the apprenticeship incentive and NICs relief combined.

68 MHCLG, *A National Plan to End Homelessness*, December 2025, p. 43.

69 CSJ, *Lost Boys: Boyhood*, December 2025.

70 CSJ, *School Absence Tracker: A termly analysis of official data relating to absence from schools*, October 2025.

71 CSJ, *Absent Ambition: Addressing the root causes of school absence*, September 2025.

72 MHCLG, *A National Plan to End Homelessness*, December 2025, p. 36.

2. Reforms to Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Universal Credit (UC) to reinvest one billion pounds in front-line support for people with mental health conditions.
3. A new National Work and Health Service to provide timely, early intervention to support those struggling with their mental health and require support to find and keep employment.

Learn more about these recommendations by reading the CSJ's *Wasted Youth: Helping Britain's young adults into work* report from August 2025.⁷³

Addiction

The 2025 Rough Sleeping Questionnaire found that 54 per cent of people sleeping rough reported a substance misuse need within the past year.⁷⁴ A tragic 44 per cent of homelessness deaths are attributed to drug and alcohol causes.⁷⁵ The homelessness strategy states that drug dependency is a particular risk factor for repeat homelessness.⁷⁶ To tackle the hidden crisis of drug addiction in the UK, the government should:

1. Resist moves to liberalise laws on drug possession at a central, devolved, and localised level, and instead invest in treatment and recovery.
2. Re-commit to long-term, ring-fenced funding for drug treatment services. This should include a three-to-five-year funding plan to allow for better service planning and expansion of treatment options for those in community settings.
3. Recognise and fund the growing need for supporting those with cannabis induced psychosis.

Learn more about these recommendations by reading the CSJ's *Still Ambitious for Recovery: How to address illegal drug addiction and strengthen law enforcement's role* published in December 2024.⁷⁷

Problem debt

The homelessness strategy rightly recognises support with debt as a key area for recovery, thus helping to prevent repeat homelessness.⁷⁸ However, its plans for policy reform are limited, so to strengthen this critical area of prevention, the CSJ recommends that the government do the following.

1. Reduce the proportion of UC standard allowance that can be clawed back in debt repayments to 10 per cent.
2. Introduce affordability assessments into the benefits deductions process.
3. Reverse the transfer of legacy tax credit debt from His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) to the DWP.

Learn more about these recommendations by reading the CSJ's *A United Nation: How to fix broken Britain* published in September 2024.⁷⁹

73 CSJ, *Wasted Youth: Helping Britain's young adults into work*, August 2025.

74 MHCLG, *Rough sleeping questionnaire 2025: Headline findings*, November 2025.

75 MHCLG, *A National Plan to End Homelessness*, December 2025, p. 71.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

77 CSJ, *Still Ambitious for Recovery: How to address illegal drug addiction and strengthen law enforcement's role*, December 2024.

78 MHCLG, *A National Plan to End Homelessness*, December 2025, p. 76.

79 CSJ, *A United Nation: How to fix broken Britain*, September 2024.

Conclusion

This report has tracked the latest trends in rough sleeping in England, drawing on the government's rough sleeping snapshot in England 2025. We show that rough sleeping has hit a new record high in England.

To tackle this crisis, we build upon our 2025 report, *No Place Like Home*, to show how the government can strengthen its commitment to halve long-term rough sleeping. Our plan outlines a targeted scaling-up of Housing First, to provide 5,571 places by 2029/30, which would give thousands of people sleeping rough the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

We also show how the government can restore control and order over surging non-UK national rough sleeping. Only by enforcing immigration law, and extending support to those entitled, can the government meaningfully tackle this problem.

In addition to the above, we show how the government can strengthen its 'Universal Prevention' priority, with 15 recommendations on tackling the root causes of poverty: family breakdown, educational failure, worklessness, addiction and problem debt.



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