

# Housing and gender

## Briefing for a new government



# Housing and gender

A briefing from the UK Women's Budget Group – 2024

## Summary

- **Women's housing situation differs from that of men**, and is generally **worse**, in terms of affordability, ownership, safety and overcrowding.
- Housing is a known public health issue. Prior to the Covid-19 crisis, **poor housing cost the NHS upwards of £1.4bn** per year. Housing inequalities contributed to inequalities in Covid infections and deaths<sup>1</sup>.
- **Private renters spend 32% of their income on rent** on average. Partly due to the gender pay gap, there is a distinctly gendered difference; **average rents in England use up 36% of a woman's median earnings** and only 26% of men's. The average cost of renting a two-bedroom property in England swallows 40% of women's earnings and 28% of men's. In London it is 62% of women's earnings and 49% of men's.
- In terms of home ownership, the median home in England costs over 11 times women's median wages (eight times for men).
- Successive initiatives to support home buyers, such as the Help to Buy scheme, have benefitted the relatively privileged: in March 2021 average household income for those using the Help to Buy scheme was £63,229.
- The treatment of housing assets, rental income, and imputed rents (the flow of benefits homeowners get from their homes) in the taxation system is generous, will tend to favour men over women, and has been an overlooked option for fiscal and housing policy goals given tight budgets.
- Although men are the vast majority of those sleeping rough (84%), women are the majority of people statutorily homeless (60%) and are more likely to experience hidden homeless.
- Lone mothers make up two-thirds of homeless families with children (they are just one quarter of all families with children).
- Housing will be a key site of working towards an environmentally sustainable economy. Greenhouse gas emissions from **housing contribute 22% to the UK's carbon footprint**; 15% comes from heating and hot water.

---

<sup>1</sup>Tunstall, R (2023) Stay home: Housing and home in the UK during the Covid-19 pandemic Bristol: Policy Press

## Introduction

Women have lost more from recent high energy prices and stand to gain more from (affordable) retrofitting and lower energy costs because on average they have lower incomes, spend more time at home, are more likely to be Disabled, and therefore have greater need for heat for comfort.

Housing is central to people's daily lives. It can contribute to living standards, opportunities, and wellbeing and so it has an impact on poverty risk, disadvantage, and poor health. It is also a key site for tackling climate change and moving towards a zero-carbon economy.

There are structural weaknesses in the UK housing system which impact vulnerable and poorer households. Problems of affordability have got worse. Prices have increased, partly due to the stamp duty holiday and Help to Buy.

Overcrowding has increased sharply, and the number of households accepted as homeless and in temporary accommodation has increased<sup>2</sup>.

This briefing provides a gender analysis of the housing situation and housing policy in the UK.

## Women and housing

Understanding of housing differences between women and men remains limited<sup>3</sup>. Official data provides few breakdowns of women's and men's housing needs and circumstances<sup>4</sup>. The majority of individuals live in households with others and most data sources do not distinguish between experiences of individuals within households.

A few studies have found areas where men are disadvantaged in housing. Notably, single men dominate the numbers of people sleeping rough, making up approximately 84% of all rough sleepers<sup>5</sup>. However, women sleeping rough are routinely undercounted as they tend to be less visible, and recent data suggests the number of female rough sleepers could be as high as nine times the official estimates<sup>6</sup>.

Men who are the Household Reference Person (HRP) are more likely than female HRPs to be in homes affected by damp. However, women experience many and significant housing disadvantages. On average, women have lower incomes and less savings and ability to borrow than men. As a result, they tend to be disadvantaged in a housing system where access to housing is largely determined through the market<sup>7</sup>. Women HRPs, lone-parent households, and single women are overrepresented in poorer housing circumstances.

Due to their lower earnings, women find it more difficult to afford appropriate housing. When it comes to buying property, the median home in England costs over 12 times women's median salary (8 times for men)<sup>8</sup>.

Whether or not they are part of a household including men, women may have distinctive housing needs. Women and women-headed households make more use than men or mix-headed households of the UK's housing safety net, social housing, housing benefit and support for

---

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons Library (2022) Households in temporary accommodation (England) (<https://bit.ly/3lGLsWG>)

<sup>3</sup> For example Watson, S. (1986) 'Women and housing or feminist housing analysis?', *Housing Studies* 1(1), 1-10; Kennett, P. and Chan, K.W. (eds) *Women and Housing: An International Analysis*, London: Routledge

<sup>4</sup> Women's Budget Group (2017) Women, safety and the housing crisis: engagement with policy makers: report of a workshop hosted by the Women's Budget Group at City Hall (<https://bit.ly/35onASJ>)

<sup>5</sup> Big Issue (2024) Homelessness Facts and Statistics (Everything you need to know about homelessness in UK in 2024 (bigissue.com))

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Watson, *ibid*; Kennet and Chan, *ibid*; The Guardian (6 Mar 2017) 'Housing is a women's issue: the facts' (<http://bit.ly/2ymRtiP>)

<sup>8</sup> WBG calculation based on ONS data on private rent and house prices, May 2024 ([Private rent and house prices, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk))

some homeless households<sup>9</sup>. On average they have greater caring commitments, lower wages, spend more time at home and are at greater risk of intimate partner violence. These affect housing needs in terms of location, tenure, design, cost, housing-related support and accessibility.

Disabled people<sup>10</sup> are less likely to own their own home than non-disabled people (39.7% compared to 53%) and are over three times as likely to live in social housing (25% compared with 8%)<sup>11</sup>.

Disabled people are more likely than average to be female<sup>12</sup>, to have homes that are not 'decent'<sup>13</sup>, and to be unable to keep their homes warm enough. 68% of local authorities report that developers do not always comply with disabled accessibility requirements, and currently only 7% of English homes offer 'minimal accessibility' features<sup>14</sup>.

## Inequalities in the UK housing system

The UK housing system has undergone significant changes marked by a shift in tenure balance, increasing volatility and regional variations. Since the 1990s, each cohort of adults has been slower and less likely to enter home ownership and more likely to enter and remain in private renting. At times, change has been so rapid that siblings might have different odds of entering ownership<sup>15</sup>.

---

<sup>9</sup> UK GOV (2024) Social Housing Lettings in England, tenants: April 2021-March 2022 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/social-housing-lettings-in-england-april-2021-to-march-2022/social-housing-lettings-in-england-tenants-april-2021-to-march-2022#:~:text=New%20social%20lettings%20to%20female,%2F12%20and%202021%2F22>)

<sup>10</sup> A person is considered to be disabled if they report a long-standing illness, disability or impairment which causes substantial difficulty with day-to-day activities, as defined by the Equality Act 2010. Both the Family Resources Survey and the Labour Market Survey identify individuals with disability through self-reporting against a set of criteria based on this definition.

<sup>11</sup> House of Commons Library (2024) Disabled People in the Housing Sector ([committees.parliament.uk/publications/45020/documents/223326/default/](https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/45020/documents/223326/default/))

<sup>12</sup> WBG (2021) Covid-19 and economic challenges for disabled women (<https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Covid-19-and-economic-challenges-for-disabled-women.pdf>)

<sup>13</sup> DLUHC (2023) Survey of English Housing\*

Despite successive governments' professed support for new owners and working-class home ownership, the tenure has been increasingly dominated by the middle classes and older people<sup>16</sup>.

Housing affordability, whether rented or purchased, is one of the biggest contemporary public policy issues. Households spending more than one third of their income on housing are often said to be in 'unaffordable' housing. By this definition, 17% of households cannot afford their homes, twice the proportion of twenty years ago<sup>17</sup>. Unless action is taken, one in five households in England will be unable to afford their homes by 2030<sup>18</sup>.

## Home ownership

In June 2024, 41% of adults aged 16 and over in Great Britain reported that it was very or somewhat difficult to afford rent or mortgage payments<sup>19</sup>. Only 33% of all mortgaged owner occupiers are women, with women under 70 finding increasingly difficult to afford a mortgage on their own, due in part to the fact that women are more likely to be on low pay and single women, with and without children, have on average less wealth than single men or couples<sup>20</sup>. House prices are considered to be affordable if median prices are no more than three times median salaries. The average UK house price is around eight times

<sup>14</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) Housing and disabled people: Britain's hidden crisis (<https://bit.ly/2ZpdGtN>)

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2014) What will the housing market look like in 2040? (<http://bit.ly/2zMXg2H>)

<sup>16</sup> Wallace, A. (2017) 'Financial resilience and security: the impacts of the housing market downturn on low-income home owners in Northern Ireland', pp.135-158 in eds Dewilde, C. and Ronald, R., *Housing, Wealth and Welfare*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar (p.144)

<sup>17</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies (2017) The cost of housing for low-income renters (<http://bit.ly/2zQZZGa>)

<sup>18</sup> National Housing Federation (2023) The Housing Crisis: What will happen if we don't act? (the-housing-crisis---what-will-happen-if-we-dont-act.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> ONS (2024) Public Opinions and Social Trends, Great Britain: -22 May -2 June 2024 (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/publicopinionsandsocialtrendsgreatbritainhouseholdfinances>)

<sup>20</sup> WBG (2023) [Why Taxation of Wealth is a Feminist Issue](#)

men's average salaries, and 11 times women's salaries. In London, that rises to 13 times men's salaries and 16 times women's<sup>21</sup>. Raising interest rates have also posed increased affordability problems for some mortgage owners.

While house prices increase and the rate at which home ownership becomes possible for new buyers slows down, those who can afford to own a house are increasingly relying on parental wealth in order to do so<sup>22</sup>. In 2022/23, first-time buyers paid an average deposit of £50,000, and 37% received help from family and friends to pay it<sup>23</sup>.

## Privately rented accommodation

The number of people in private rental properties has slowly overtaken social housing, comprising 19% of housing tenure in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and 16% in Scotland<sup>24</sup>. Home ownership has dropped significantly amongst people aged 25-44 due to lack of affordability, pushing them towards private renting<sup>25</sup>. Private renting has become a large scale, long-term tenure. Among private renters in England in 2022/23, 41% did not expect to ever buy a home, and 25% expected to buy but not for five years or more. On average, in 2022/23 in England, private renters paid 32% of household income on rent, above the 30% affordability threshold<sup>26</sup>.

The cost of privately rented accommodation has increased significantly over the past 20 years. Average private rents increased by 8.9% in the year to April 2024<sup>27</sup>. The rise of housing costs has been the biggest driver of in-work poverty and the high cost of rent has undermined positive steps to increase incomes elsewhere, such as raising minimum wage levels<sup>28</sup>. Current private rental costs are the highest on record at an average monthly amount of £1,254, ranging from £666 in the North East to £2,070 in London<sup>29</sup>. On average, private renters spend 32% on rent<sup>30</sup>, however due in part to the gender pay gap, there is a distinctly gendered difference; average rents use up 36% of a woman's median earnings and only 26% of men's. In London, that is 53% for women and 41% for men<sup>31</sup>.

## Social housing

Since the 1970s, social housing has been targeted at those on low incomes. By 2000, it was by far the most targeted and redistributive aspect of the entire welfare state<sup>32</sup>. Currently, social housing makes up 17% of housing tenure in England, 16.5% in Wales and 23% in London<sup>33</sup>. Women are overrepresented amongst social renters, largely because they are overrepresented amongst those on lower incomes, lone parents and amongst households that become homeless. In 2022/23,

---

<sup>21</sup> WBG calculation based on ONS data on private rent and house prices, May 2024 ([Private rent and house prices, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk))

<sup>22</sup> Gregg, P., Kanabar, R. (2022). Intergenerational wealth transmission and mobility in Great Britain: what components of wealth matter? (CEPEO Working Paper No. 22-01). (<https://EconPapers.repec.org/RePEc:ucl:cepeow:22-01>)

<sup>23</sup> DLUHC (2024) Survey of English Housing 2022/23 London: DLUHC [Annex tables for English Housing Survey headline report 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

<sup>24</sup> Family Resources Survey (2023) Tenure data, Table 3:7 ([Family Resources Survey: financial year 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk))

<sup>25</sup> Affordable Housing Commission (Jul 2020) Making housing affordable after Covid-19 (<https://bit.ly/3iqNsyU>)

<sup>26</sup> DLUHC (2024) Survey of English Housing 2022/23 London: DLUHC [Annex tables for English Housing Survey headline report 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

<sup>27</sup> ONS, [Private rent and house prices, UK: May 2024,](https://ons.gov.uk)

<sup>28</sup> IFS (2019) Why has in-work poverty risen in Britain?

(<https://bit.ly/3ldYBqE>)

<sup>29</sup> ONS (2024) Private rent and house prices: May 2024 ([Private rent and house prices, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk))

<sup>30</sup> MHCLG (Jul 2021) English Housing Survey: Private rented sector 2019-20 (<https://bit.ly/3oEBesp>)

<sup>31</sup> WBG calculation based on median monthly England/London private rents (x 12) alongside median annual earnings for England/London. The calculation for the percentage of earnings absorbed by rent is as follows: rent divided by earnings, multiplied by 100. Figures correct as of April 2023 (latest earnings data available). Data sources: ONS, [Private rental market summary statistics](https://ons.gov.uk); ONS, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings [Table 8.7a \(England and London\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

<sup>32</sup> Sefton, T. (2002) Recent changes in the distribution of the social wage (<https://bit.ly/2z2xNyX>)

<sup>33</sup> ONS (2023) [Household Characteristics by Tenure, England and Wales, Census 2021](https://ons.gov.uk)

41% of lone-parent households were social renters<sup>34</sup>.

From 2012, council landlords were no longer required to offer lifetime tenancies, which had been standard since 1980, offering two- to ten-year tenancies instead. By 2014/15, 15% of tenants were affected by the reduction in their security<sup>35</sup>, but fixed-term tenancies were not made compulsory\*.

In 2012, the level of housing benefit paid to social tenants of working age on low incomes deemed to have more bedrooms than necessary for their household size was reduced. This reform, known as the 'bedroom tax', received widespread criticism due to the hardship it caused<sup>36</sup>. The Scottish government chose to fund the shortfall, protecting Scottish tenants from the penalty, and the reform was not applied in Northern Ireland.

In 2015, only just over half of housing associations and local authorities said they focused on housing the neediest<sup>37</sup>. A third of social landlords refused at least some tenants because they might be unable to afford social or 'affordable' housing. In 2022/23 in England, on average social renters paid 27% of their household income on rent, close to the unaffordability threshold<sup>38</sup>.

Since the Grenfell Tower tragedy in 2017, there has been concern about the safety and quality of tall blocks, social housing and landlords' responsiveness to tenants. Hundreds of private and social blocks were affected by unsafe cladding and the cost of remediation, and in 2024

there were still blocks with unsafe cladding<sup>39</sup>. In England, the Regulator of Social Housing has become more active, and in 2023, the Social Housing Regulation Act increased demands on landlords<sup>40</sup>.

Social housing stock has decreased markedly in recent years. Despite building and a small increase in the total number of social rented homes, over 2010-23, social housing has fallen from 17.7% of households in England to 16.4% of households<sup>41</sup>. In 2022/23, 9,591 social rented homes were built in England, making up 15% of affordable housing supply (with affordable rent, shared ownership, affordable ownership and other schemes making up the remainder)<sup>42</sup>. Before 2012, they made up the majority, and before 2002 the vast majority of affordable housing. In 1992/93, 57,000 new social rented homes were built<sup>43</sup>. 93,875 new social rented homes have been built since 2010, but over 271,362 have either been sold or demolished<sup>44</sup>. Recent concern about fire safety and quality has diverted landlord's building budgets onto maintenance and improvement. There is a huge disparity in the number of social houses currently being built across the UK. In England only 11% of new homes have genuinely affordable social rents, compared with 70% for Scotland and over 80% in Wales<sup>45</sup>.

Overcrowding is also a problem which disproportionately impacts particular communities<sup>46</sup>. In England, Black (16.1%) and Asian (14.6%) households are much more likely to

---

<sup>34</sup>DLUHC (2024) English Housing Survey: headline report 2022/23 [2022-23\\_EHS\\_Headline\\_Report\\_Chapter\\_1\\_Profile\\_of\\_households\\_and\\_dwellinggs\\_Annex\\_Tables.ods](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/123456/2022-23_EHS_Headline_Report_Chapter_1_Profile_of_households_and_dwellinggs_Annex_Tables.ods) ([live.com](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/123456/2022-23_EHS_Headline_Report_Chapter_1_Profile_of_households_and_dwellinggs_Annex_Tables.ods))

<sup>35</sup>DCLG (2016) Lifetime tenancies: Equality impact assessment, London: DCLG [Title](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/123456/Title.pdf) ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk))

<sup>36</sup>The Guardian (2014) Bedroom tax has failed on every count (<https://bit.ly/3kq3jyi>)

<sup>37</sup>Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2015) How do landlords address poverty? (<http://bit.ly/2j7SAKO>)

<sup>38</sup>DLUHC (2024) Survey of English Housing 2022/23 London: DLUHC [Annex tables for English Housing Survey headline report 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/123456/Annex_tables_for_English_Housing_Survey_headline_report_2022_to_2023-GOV.UK) ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk))

<sup>39</sup>DLUHC (2024) *Building safety remediation – monthly data release April 2024* London: DCLG [building safety - Research and statistics - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/123456/building_safety_-_Research_and_statistics_-_GOV.UK) ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk))

<sup>40</sup>[Regulator of Social Housing - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/regulator-of-social-housing-act-receives-royal-assent-to-become-law) ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)); [Landmark Social Housing Act receives Royal Assent to become law - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-social-housing-act-receives-royal-assent-to-become-law) ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk))

<sup>41</sup>DLUHC (2024) Live table Table 104 [LT\\_104.ods](https://www.gov.uk/government/live-tables/lt-104) ([live.com](https://www.gov.uk))

<sup>42</sup>DLUHC (2024) Live table Table 1000 [Live\\_Table\\_1000S.ods](https://www.gov.uk/government/live-tables/lt-1000)

<sup>43</sup>DLUHC (2024) Live table Table 1000 [Live\\_Table\\_1000.ods](https://www.gov.uk/government/live-tables/lt-1000)

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

experience overcrowding than White households (2.5%)<sup>47</sup>.

## Supported housing

Supported accommodation used by women has been affected by cuts to local government funding. Over 60% of referrals to refuges supporting women in England in 2022-23 were declined<sup>48</sup>.

In addition, 41% of households claiming Housing Benefit are women living on their own and another 9.5% are lone mothers<sup>49</sup>.

## Homelessness

Statutory and family homelessness numbers have been rising in England and Wales since 2018/19, though not in Scotland, reaching 94,000 households in Great Britain in 2022/23. Numbers in temporary accommodation are also rising and reached 104,000 in England alone in 2024, threatening LA solvency in some areas<sup>50</sup>. The number of people living in sheds and tents, hostels, unsuitable temporary accommodation and sofa surfing have also risen, meaning 1% of households in England were 'core homeless'<sup>51</sup>.

Street homelessness doubled from 2009/10 to 2023 to almost 3,898 in England<sup>52</sup>. The number of women sleeping rough grew slightly faster. Women make up a minority of street homeless people: 84% of people counted sleeping rough in London in 2023 were men<sup>53</sup>. Homeless women have tended to be overlooked in statistics, research and policy<sup>54</sup>, as women rough sleepers

make particular efforts to be inconspicuous. Their homelessness has distinct causes, including abuse as children and domestic violence<sup>55</sup>. Rough-sleeping women tend to be younger than rough-sleeping men and are more likely to be suffering from mental health problems<sup>56</sup>. Black British women are overrepresented in street homeless populations, representing 20% of UK citizens who sleep rough<sup>57</sup>.

Despite men making up the majority of street homeless people, women are more likely to experience homelessness at some point in their life<sup>58</sup>. At the end of 2023, female lone-parent households were the largest household type in temporary accommodation (33%)<sup>59</sup>. Single mothers are two-thirds (66%) of all statutory homeless families with children<sup>60</sup>.

## Government housing policy

Changes in recent years have weakened the housing safety net, transferring risk to tenants and social housing providers. These are likely to have an ongoing negative effect on the most vulnerable women.

The amount spent on 'housing and communities' amenities' in England by UK central government fell by 45% 2009/10-2015/16. Then spending rose, but by 2022/23 it was still 20% lower in real terms than in 2009/10, at £17.3bn, while the population

---

<sup>47</sup> ONS (Sep 2020) Overcrowded houses (<https://bit.ly/2ZvdlR3>)

<sup>48</sup> Women's Aid (2024) The Domestic Abuse Report 2024: The Annual Audit. <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/annual-audit-2024/>

<sup>49</sup> Department of Work and Pensions (Feb 2024) Stat-Xplore Dataset - Housing Benefit data, Table 4: Family type by gender, Feb 2024 (<https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/tableView/tableView.xhtml>)

<sup>50</sup> McMordie, J (2024) 'Homelessness', *UK Housing Review 2024*, Coventry: CIH

<sup>51</sup> McMordie, J (2024) 'Homelessness', *UK Housing Review 2024*, Coventry: CIH

<sup>52</sup> Big Issue (2024) Homelessness Facts and Statistics (Everything you need to know about homelessness in UK in 2024 ([bigissue.com](http://bigissue.com)))

<sup>53</sup> Big Issue (2024) Homelessness Facts and Statistics (Everything you need to know about homelessness in UK in 2024 ([bigissue.com](http://bigissue.com)))

<sup>54</sup> Pleace, N. (2016) 'Exclusion by definition: the under-representation of women in European homelessness statistics', pp.105-126 in eds Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J., *Women and Homelessness in Europe*, London: Palgrave Macmillan

<sup>55</sup> Reeve, K (2018) 'Women and homelessness: putting gender back on the agenda', *People, Place and Policy Online*, 11 (3), 165-174

<sup>56</sup> University of York (2018) *Women and rough sleeping* (<https://bit.ly/3kb2Srt>)

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> University of York (2018) *Women and rough sleeping* (<https://bit.ly/3kb2Srt>)

<sup>59</sup> UK GOV (2024) Tables on Homelessness ([Tables on homelessness - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk))

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

was larger<sup>61</sup>. The 2023 Spending Review suggested nominal spending will remain unchanged after 2024/25, meaning real spending will fall<sup>62</sup>. Over the 2021/22-2024/25 spending period, in England, the UK government spent or planned to spend similar amounts on subsidising private sector new build via grants, loans and guarantees as on 'subsidised' affordable housing, in contrast to the governments in the other nations, where the vast majority of support is for affordable housing<sup>63</sup>.

## Changes to Housing Benefit

In 2022/23 in England, Housing Benefit was used to help pay rent by 17% of working and 47% of non-working private renters, and by 36% of working and 77% of non-working social renters<sup>64</sup>.

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates determine the maximum amount of Housing Benefit that a private renter can claim to help them pay their rent. In the past, Housing Benefit met all the rent of those on low incomes. To calculate the new LHA rates that came in April 2024, average rent prices were assessed for the year up to September 2023. However, figures suggest rent prices since then have already risen on average 5% in England and 6% in London.

The number of social renters on Housing Benefit whose rent was fully covered by the benefit has fallen from 70% in 2010-12 to 50% in 2020<sup>65</sup>. Only 39% of private renters on Housing Benefit had their rent fully covered in 2023<sup>66</sup>.

The maximum LHA rate on both three- and four-bedroom properties exceeds the current monthly benefit cap both in and outside London, for both

those with and without children. For example, the benefit cap for a couple or single adult living with children in London is £2,110.25 per month. The maximum LHA rate for a three-bedroom property is £2,154.10 per month. This means that even if a family qualified for the maximum LHA rate based on their location and household type, due to the benefit cap they would not receive the full amount and would not be able to claim additional benefits either. Family households renting with Housing Benefit in high-cost areas are likely to be more affected by the benefit cap.

From its introduction in 2008 to 2011, LHA was based on the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile of local rented accommodation, but cut to the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile from 2012. From 2012 to 2016 LHA rates were uprated in line with the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rather than in line with actual rents, and in 2016 they were frozen (falling in real terms). These changes to LHAs have broken the link between rent and benefit levels, creating a large group of people facing shortfalls<sup>67</sup>. In the 2023 Autumn Statement, the Government announced an end to a four-year cash freeze in LHA rates. From April 2024 rates are determined by:

- The size of property a household is entitled to, with bedroom entitlement based on family size and characteristics.
- The 30<sup>th</sup> percentile rent for properties of different sizes within each local "Broad Rental Market Area" (BRMA) based on rents surveyed in the year to September 2023, up to national maximum amounts.

Over 100,000 households are in temporary accommodation, and 130,000 children are

---

<sup>61</sup>HM Treasury (2024) Public Spending Statistics release: February 2024 8 Feb Table 4.3 [Public Spending Statistics release: February 2024 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/publications/public-spending-statistics-release-february-2024)

<sup>62</sup>Perry, J (2024) 'Housing expenditure', *UK Housing Review*, Coventry: CIH

<sup>63</sup>Perry, J (2024) 'Housing expenditure', *UK Housing Review*, Coventry: CIH

<sup>64</sup>DLUHC (2024) Survey of English Housing 2022/23 London: DLUHC [Annex tables for English Housing Survey headline report 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/123456/Annex_tables_for_English_Housing_Survey_headline_report_2022_to_2023_-_GOV.UK)

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Lister, S and Stephens, M (2024) 'Help with housing costs', *UK Housing Review 2024*, Coventry: CIH

<sup>67</sup>Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2015) How do landlords address poverty? (<http://bit.ly/2j7SAKO>)



affected<sup>68</sup>. Women, especially single mothers, face added challenges due to lower earnings and caring responsibilities. In the long term, prioritising social housing creation over further adjustments to benefit private landlords is crucial for addressing the wider housing affordability issue.

In Scotland, private rents were frozen in September 2022 for 6 months in response to the cost of living crisis. Increases for existing tenants were limited to below inflation until March 2024, when larger increases were permitted. However, the scheme is controversial, with concerns about the effect on the supply of homes to rent<sup>69</sup>.

## Building new housing

For over two decades, new housing completions have been insufficient to meet actual and predicted need for additional homes<sup>70</sup>, and demand continues to grow. The 2019 Conservative manifesto promised 300,000 net additional homes per year by the end of the Parliament in England, but the most achieved was 248,000 in 2018/29 before the pandemic<sup>71</sup>. The government often refers to building 'affordable' housing. However, the term includes social housing, Affordable Rent at up to 80% market rent, and low-cost home ownership, leading some in Parliament to request its usage be abandoned<sup>72</sup>.

Policymakers on the left and the right also tend to assume that increased housing supply will necessarily limit house price increases, reduce affordability problems and help disadvantaged groups<sup>73</sup>. Yet those on low incomes, including poorer women, will not be able to live in most, if

any, new housing, which tends to be for sale, often above average prices<sup>74</sup>. Although schemes like First Homes, launched in May 2021, in which houses were sold to first time buyers with a 30% discount is reaching people on lower incomes than Help to Buy, it still will not benefit those who cannot afford 70% of market prices, such as one-income households, like lone parents or couples with only one earner due to caring responsibilities<sup>75</sup>.

Building new social housing is more likely to ensure improved access to housing for disadvantaged people, yet housing has fared worse than almost any government spending area since 2010. JRF has found that the Affordable Homes Programme for 2021-26 would only be able to deliver 75,000 homes at social rent, around 375,000 short of the number needed in the next five years<sup>76</sup>. It is likely that the cutbacks have had a disproportionate effect on women, who make more use of the housing safety net, social housing, housing benefit and support for some homeless households.

Government policy has focussed on the planning system as a barrier to house building, and there have been numerous reforms to the planning system. However, other explanations of relatively low building rates are that private housebuilders are profitable at lower rates of building, and that affordable home builders need more funding to do more.

---

<sup>68</sup>Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2023) Households in temporary accommodation, England (<https://opendatacommunities.org/data/homelessness/households-accommodated/temporary-housing-types>)

<sup>69</sup>Lister, S and Stephens, M (2024) 'Help with housing costs', *UK Housing Review 2024*, Coventry: CIH

<sup>70</sup>Chartered Institute of Housing (2017) UK housing review 2017 (<http://bit.ly/2AWOb5e>)

<sup>71</sup>Scott, M and Perry, J (2024) 'Dwellings, stock condition and households', *UK Housing Review 2024*, Coventry: CIH

<sup>72</sup>House of Commons Library (2019) What is affordable housing? (<https://bit.ly/3klclHe>)

<sup>73</sup>Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2017) Tackling poverty through housing and planning policy in city regions (<http://bit.ly/2A7EiVi>)

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Aug 2020) Build, build, build social housing (<https://bit.ly/3uPyNUL>)

<sup>76</sup>Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Aug 2020) Build, build, build social housing (<https://bit.ly/3uPyNUL>)

## The tax treatment of housing income and wealth

Private homeowners and landlords benefit from net tax benefits from their housing relative to other investments, including the absence of tax on their imputed income, and the tax relief on rental income and capital gains. This benefits men more than women. In 2021, women made up 55% of private landlords in England with only one home, but men made up the majority of all landlords with more than one property (for example at least 70% of those with ten or more homes)<sup>77</sup>. Meanwhile, the number of people paying income tax and paying higher rates has grown and is set to increase further<sup>78</sup>.

The main tax on housing is stamp duty, paid by house buyers, and owners also pay council tax, income tax on rent and inheritance tax.

Homeownership rates in England have fallen from 70.4% in 2001 to 62.3% in 2021<sup>79</sup>. Unequal distribution in inherited wealth for people born in the 1980s will have a significant impact on home ownership for this generation going forward. 20% of those born in the 1980s have parents with wealth 'per heir' of less than £10,000, whereas 25% will inherit £300,000 and 10% more than £530,000<sup>80</sup>.

Housing is the main source of wealth for individuals and households, and a main driver of wealth inequality. In 2022, mean net wealth among women was £267,164, 35% lower than for men

(£359,926)<sup>81</sup>. This partly reflects gender differences in homeownership rates. There is little difference in personal wealth between men and women up to the age of 40, when homeownership rates are lowest. After this, a gap starts to develop, and in their late 60s the median man has £220,000 more wealth than the median woman<sup>82</sup>.

## Housing and climate change

Housing will be a key site of tackling climate change and working towards an environmentally sustainable economy. Greenhouse gas emissions from housing contribute 22% of the UK's carbon footprint; 15% from heating and hot water<sup>83</sup>.

Those most vulnerable to the physical and mental harm caused by poorly insulated and damp homes tend to be those that spend most time at home; disabled people, older people, children and caregivers (the majority of whom are women)<sup>84</sup>.

Retrofitting existing housing stock is vital to meet climate targets, yet there was a big drop in government support for efficiency measures for low-income households in fuel poverty after 2012<sup>85</sup>, and current programmes are slow and insufficient and fall short of the £36bn required to fully decarbonise housing, as estimated by the National Housing Federation<sup>86</sup>.

---

<sup>77</sup> MLUHC (2022) *Private landlord survey 2021*, London: MLUHC

<sup>78</sup> Stephens, M (2024) 'Economic prospects and public expenditure', *UK Housing Review 2024*, Coventry: CIH

<sup>79</sup> ONS (2023) Household Characteristics by Tenure, England and Wales: Census 2021

(<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/articles/householdcharacteristicsbytenureenglandandwales/census2021#tenure>)

<sup>80</sup> IFS (Jul 2020) Inheritances and inequality within generations

(<https://bit.ly/3ilQuUO>)

<sup>81</sup> WBG (2023) Why Taxation of Wealth is a Feminist Issue

([https://www.wbg.org.uk/publication/why-taxation-of-wealth-is-a-feminist-issue-a-gendered-analysis-of-wealth-in-great-britain/#amp;\\_rt\\_nonce=fb557a3de3](https://www.wbg.org.uk/publication/why-taxation-of-wealth-is-a-feminist-issue-a-gendered-analysis-of-wealth-in-great-britain/#amp;_rt_nonce=fb557a3de3))

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> London Energy Transformation Initiative (2020) Embodied carbon primer (<https://bit.ly/3FCXokM>)

<sup>84</sup> WBG (Aug 2021) Rethinking housing supply and design (<https://bit.ly/3v3rd8Z>)

<sup>85</sup> Scott, M and Perry, J (2024) 'Dwellings, stock condition and households', *UK Housing Review 2024*, Coventry: CIH

<sup>86</sup> National Housing Federation (2021) Decarbonising: The Housing Association Sector Costs and Funding Options (chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnpicajpcgiclfindmkaj/<https://www.housing.org.uk/globalassets/files/climate-and-sustainability--energy-crisis/funding-options-report-final.pdf>)

## Conclusions

Women have distinct tenure circumstances and housing needs, because on average they have lower wages, greater caring roles and are at greater risk of intimate partner violence. Greening housing design must reflect current life/work patterns, diversity of need and equal division of domestic labour.

The deep structural failings and inequalities within the housing sector are widely recognised. Government interventions during the Covid-19 crisis such as the changes to Stamp Duty and mortgage payment moratoria prioritised the asset-owning class, whilst renters struggled to keep up with the highest rental costs on record. Given inequalities in access to housing, as well as the problems experienced trying to increase building through the private market, a focus on new building and building mainly for home ownership is unlikely to reduce housing problems or gender and other inequalities, or to meet zero-carbon targets.

Radical changes are needed to address the housing crisis, and these should be informed by feminist and environmental perspectives<sup>87</sup>.

## Recommendations

- **Prioritise the building of more social housing and constrain the Right to Buy to preserve stock in high-demand areas:** Social housing stock has decreased markedly in recent years. The government must ensure there is enough affordable housing for those in need.
- Restore the link between LHA and actual rental prices by raising LHA to the 50<sup>th</sup>

percentile and keeping it there, to ensure the most vulnerable are protected.

- Revive the Renter's Reform Bill and improve private renter's rights and security.
- **Increase the number of women's refuges** and prioritise funding for specialist services.
- Housing should be prioritised as a right rather than a financial asset in accordance with recent UN guidelines<sup>88</sup>.

---

UK Women's Budget Group, June 2024

Contact: [press@wbg.org.uk](mailto:press@wbg.org.uk)



---

<sup>87</sup> WBG (Mar 2021) Draft roadmap for a feminist Green New Deal (<https://bit.ly/3oD7QT7>)

<sup>88</sup> OHCHR (2021) The Right To Adequate Housing (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-housing/human-right->

adequate-housing#:~:text=The%20right%20to%20adequate%20housing%20contains%20freedom%20of%20privacy%20and%20family%3B%20and)

For further information contact [press@wbg.org.uk](mailto:press@wbg.org.uk)

© 2024 The Women's Budget Group

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without full attribution.