

Sofa-surfing information sheet



When people have a home, they can build a life and thrive, but thousands of people in the UK are homeless.

How common is sofa-surfing?

- On any given night, 71,400 homeless families and individuals across Great Britain are forced to sofa-surf.
- For one in four people interviewed in Crisis' research, sofa-surfing meant being stuck for between three and six months.
- 74% of the people in Crisis' research had slept on a sofa in a communal space (like a front room or lounge); almost half had slept on the floor in a communal area.

What are the effects of sofa-surfing?

Sofa-surfing can be a safer place to stay than the street, but it has damaging consequences and negatively affects wellbeing.

People have no privacy or personal space and they can't lead their own lives.

- They have to follow their host's routines, for example, not being able to choose when they go to bed or wake up.
- 6 out of 10 of the people in Crisis' research weren't able to come and go as they pleased (for example, because they didn't have keys).

Sofa-surfing has an impact on people's relationships.

- People feel like a burden and there's often tension with hosts.
- People often feel pressure not to overstay their welcome.
- Over half of the people in Crisis' research saw friends and family less because they were staying too far away or felt ashamed of their situation.

Sofa-surfing is bad for people's wellbeing.

- Four out of five of people in Crisis' research said their mental health got worse when they were sofa-surfing.
- Over three quarters of people in Crisis' research said their physical health deteriorated.
- Sleeping on sofas and floors is uncomfortable (and cold) and can lead to back and neck problems.
- Lack of sleep is bad for physical health.
- Eating irregularly and poorly also contributes to ill-health and weight loss.

Living conditions are often poor and dangerous. People don't always have access to the basics they need.

- Over half of the people Crisis spoke to were exposed to drinking, drug taking, and being forced to stay up late. Over a third were exposed to drug dealing.
- Almost one in five people had nowhere to wash themselves; almost a third had no access to somewhere to wash or dry their clothes.

- Over half had nowhere to store personal items. This often meant their things were spread across different people's homes and things got lost or forgotten.
- Over a third had nowhere to store food; a quarter couldn't access any cooking facilities.

It's difficult to escape sofa-surfing and homelessness.

- It can be difficult to find or keep a job.
- It can also be harder to address other support needs.
- A lot of the people Crisis interviewed said that they moved from one experience of sofa-surfing straight to another or even went on to rough sleep after their last instance of sofa surfing.
- Sofa-surfing can be the beginning (or middle) of long periods of homelessness where people move in and out of different forms of homelessness including rough sleeping.
- 40% of people said that they couldn't move out of homelessness because they couldn't find a landlord who'd accept either Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

What causes sofa-surfing?

The people in Crisis' research knew what would've helped prevent them ending up having to sofa-search. Their answers mainly fell into two categories: better access to affordable housing and help with addressing various support needs.

Sofa-surfing is often the only option when rents are unaffordable.

- Over half of the people in the research said issues related to housing affordability were a factor in starting to sofa-surf.
- Over a third said the gap between Local Housing Allowance rates and Housing Benefits and rents was involved in leading them to sofa surf.

People often don't get the help they need.

- The majority of people (93%) had approached a local authority for housing support. In many cases, their homelessness could've been prevented.

Crisis' recommendations

Sofa-surfing is an uncomfortable, unsustainable and potentially dangerous form of homelessness.

Public authorities need to work together.

- Public authorities include primary and secondary healthcare, JobCentre Plus, probation, and social services. Effective joint working's needed to address the things that cause someone to become homeless.
- Governments in England, Scotland, and Wales should extend legal duties to prevent homelessness to all relevant public bodies and housing providers.
- This must be accompanied by long term and sustainable funding for homelessness prevention services for these agencies.

People who are sofa-surfing need to be recognised as homeless.

- Guidance should be strengthened across all legislative frameworks to make sure people who are sofa surfing are recognised and treated as being homeless when they approach for homelessness assistance.

Temporary Accommodation needs to improve.

- Some people said sofa-surfing was preferable to unsuitable Temporary Accommodation (like B&Bs).
- Temporary Accommodation provided must meet people's needs and not risk making

someone's situation worse.

- There'll always be a need for emergency accommodation (such as hostels and night shelters), but no one should be living in this kind of accommodation without a plan for rapid rehousing into affordable, secure and decent accommodation.

Welfare assistance (benefits) needs to be better at helping people.

- Housing benefit is one of the most powerful and practical tools we have to prevent and end homelessness, and needs to align closely to local rents.
- There needs to be increased investment in welfare assistance to help prevent people becoming homeless.
- The UK Government must end the freeze on Local Housing Allowance rates, and make sure that the rates cover at least the cheapest third of private rents across Great Britain.

We need more social housing.

- Being able to secure a stable home gives people the best chance of moving on from homelessness or preventing it altogether.
- Over the long-term, national governments across England, Scotland, and Wales must ensure there is enough social housing to meet current and future demand.

Where does this information come from?

- The research was conducted independently by Crisis.
- They interviewed 114 people who have experienced sofa-surfing.
- For the full report, head to [Crisis' website](#).

