

## Shelter's million children campaign



All photos: Nick David

It's shocking that, in one of the richest countries in the world, more than one million children live in housing that is overcrowded, run-down, damp, or dangerous. Some live in housing that's making them ill. Many are missing out on a decent education. Others suffer chronic insecurity, shuffled from place to place in so-called 'temporary' accommodation. They deserve better.

### In twenty-first century England, how can this happen?

There simply aren't enough decent, affordable homes. While families wait for years at the bottom of council housing waiting lists in overcrowded areas, elsewhere, dilapidated homes lie empty. Dangerous, neglected estates become no-go areas. And second-home ownership is pricing local people out of many rural areas.

Children are paying the price. Shelter's million children campaign was launched to wake people up to the shocking scale and reality of the housing crisis, and to help end bad housing for the next generation.

- The acute shortage of social rented housing – homes for those who need them most – is at the root of the housing crisis. Yet since 1997 the building of rented homes has decreased by 33 per cent in England and 80 per cent in Wales.

### Children living in limbo

Today, nearly 100,000 households in England will have woken up in temporary accommodation – more than twice as many as in 1997.

*'...for four months we didn't go to school, we went to six houses, no, seven houses and six new schools. I don't like moving, because every time I make new friends and then I have to move again and again and again.'*

Alex, aged 10

Having gone through the trauma of becoming homeless, unable to afford to rent privately and without enough social rented homes available, these families live in limbo, waiting for a permanent home – sometimes for years.

*'If you've been in eight schools in two or three years, you don't have a best pal. You're lucky if you have a pal at all. That has an enormous impact on a child's well-being.'*

Liz Whyte, Head Teacher

The knock-on effects are devastating:

- Homeless children living in temporary accommodation miss out, on average, on a quarter of their schooling. (Source: Shelter, *Living in limbo*)
- Children living in cramped, often emergency accommodation, experience disturbed sleep, poor diet, hyperactivity, bedwetting and soiling, aggression and higher rates of accidents and infectious disease. (Source: Housing and Health in London: a review by the Health of Londoners Project)
- Nearly half of respondents to a Shelter survey on temporary accommodation described their children as 'often unhappy or depressed.' (Source: Shelter, *Living in limbo*)

## Bad housing wrecks lives.

Shelter believes everyone should have a home. We help people find and keep a home. We campaign for decent housing for all.

Telephone:  
0845 458 4590  
Textphone:  
020 7505 1170  
[www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk)

Call our free housing advice helpline on 0808 800 4444, 8am–midnight, seven days a week.

Registered charity number 263710



## Children in squalor

One million homes in England are unfit to live in, yet 83 per cent of them are occupied. They can be damp, run-down or dangerous, but are for almost 500,000 children, this is the only option.

Bad housing puts children at risk of injury and makes them sick.

*'My doctor says this property is not suitable for children. So he wrote a letter, three times. The health visitor wrote a letter. But they never responded. Nothing at all.'*

Joyce, mother of four

- Bad housing is as serious a risk to health as smoking, and is a greater risk than excessive alcohol consumption. (Source: British Medical Association)
- One in 12 children in Britain are more likely to develop diseases such as bronchitis, TB or asthma because of bad housing.

## Children without room to grow

In England, over 900,000 children live in overcrowded households. Children living in overcrowded conditions miss out on the space and privacy they need to play and do homework. Without room to grow, many children become sick or fall behind at school.

*'If I had my own room I wouldn't have to ask for anything more. I would have a better chance at improving school work and getting on with everyone in the family.'*

Nadira, aged 12

Two-thirds of respondents to a Shelter survey on overcrowding said their children had problems at school, and nearly half described their children as 'often unhappy or depressed'.

- Nearly one in 10 children in England lives in overcrowded housing – enough to fill the new Wembley Stadium 10 times over. (Source: DCLG, formerly the ODPM)
- 27 per cent of overcrowded families have children sleeping in living or dining rooms. (Source: Shelter, *Full house?*)

## Children in poverty

There's a strong link between bad housing and poverty – so for many of the million children suffering in poor conditions, it just compounds hardships they already face each day.

*'The kids have got used to it because they've grown up here, but if they go to somebody else's house they come back and say 'Why is our flat all black down the walls and theirs isn't?' They shouldn't have to live like this.'*

Ali, mother of three

With housing increasingly determining children's life chances, those growing up in bad housing often spend the rest of their lives running to catch up.

In 1999, the Government pledged to end child poverty in England by 2020, giving all children the solid start in life they deserve. Action to end bad housing for children must be the cornerstone of any serious attempt to tackle child poverty.

- 3.4 million children in Great Britain live in poverty after their housing costs are paid. (Source: Department for Work and Pensions)
- In the last 10 years, the housing wealth per child in the richest parts of the country has increased 20 times more than that of children living in the poorest areas. (Source: Shelter, *The great divide*)

## We need your help

Shelter's million children campaign is making real progress, from helping to persuade the Chancellor to prioritise spending on housing, to helping reduce the use of temporary accommodation by 2010.

But it's not enough. With the Spending Review on the horizon, now is the time for a strong commitment from the Government to ending bad housing for good.

You can help by adding your voice to more than 75,000 other campaigners who are calling on the Government to:

- end bad housing for the next generation of children
- build 20,000 more social rented homes per year between 2008 and 2011
- update the Dickensian overcrowding standard, used to determine how much space families need.

Please join the million children campaign today at [www.shelter.org.uk/signup](http://www.shelter.org.uk/signup) With your support, we can end bad housing for the next generation.