Evidence and society in the UK: public perceptions and homelessness

Ben Marshall, David Candy and Charlotte Albiston
About the Centre for Homelessness Impact

The Centre for Homelessness Impact champions the creation and use of better evidence for a world without homelessness. Our mission is to improve the lives of those experiencing homelessness by ensuring that policy, practice and funding decisions are underpinned by reliable evidence.

Acknowledgments

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Foreword

The gap between perceptions and actuality is a common phenomenon. Human beings’ thinking is often guided by instinct or anecdote, and the pull of cognitive bias is very strong. With homelessness, perhaps more than with most social issues, this becomes not just a reality of life but an obstacle to long lasting change.

People tend, for example, to conflate rough sleeping with the much broader issue of homelessness, which has many other forms. The latest of our annual polls of public attitudes towards homelessness confirmed that most people in the United Kingdom think that there are more adults experiencing street homelessness than ‘hidden’ forms of homelessness, such as sofa surfing; only 20% know the reverse is the case.

Another example of the gap between perception and actuality arises when people are asked to estimate the proportion of people who experience homelessness who have a drug or alcohol dependency: the average estimate was that half (49%) do so. Data collected by local authorities on people they assess as at risk of homelessness tells us that just 4% of households in this situation have an alcohol dependency and 6% are dependent on drugs. Among people experiencing rough sleeping the proportion is higher but only for those with longer histories of street homelessness.

Now, let’s consider one more example of the gap between perception and actuality. When asked about causes of homelessness just below half (46%) people agree that homelessness is a consequence of issues beyond an individual’s control; they realise, correctly, that something has gone wrong at a system-level in the support systems and safety net that society provides. But a quarter (24%) see homelessness as caused by bad life choices made by an individual; in essence that they are themselves to blame.

We can see a pattern in how misconceptions stack up or reinforce one another to create a climate in which it is much harder to make a case for intervening to support people who experience homelessness, and harder still to invest time and resources in preventing homelessness from occurring. This polling shows that people who think homelessness is not a serious problem in the UK are more likely to think it is caused by bad life choices (36%) rather than by forces outside their control (22%).

This is why perceptions matter so much. Misconceptions compound one another, and can lead to inaccurate and damaging stereotypes of homelessness that create and reinforce stigma.

But it’s not all bad news. This year’s results show that homelessness is still perceived as a serious problem by the public who are supportive of a range of policies designed to address it. However, between 2020 and 2021 there was a trend towards weakening concern and sympathy towards people affected by homelessness.

It finds that 74% of people say more should be done to address homelessness, down from 79% in last year’s survey, while 67% say as a society we do not pay enough attention to homelessness, compared with 71% a year earlier. The proportion who think homelessness is caused by bad life choices, referred to above, has risen by seven percentage points, from 17% in last year’s polling.

This annual survey by Ipsos MORI for the Centre for Homelessness Impact will continue to quantify public opinion on key questions linked to homelessness and, crucially, to track changes over time.

We will continue to share its findings, good and bad, encouraging or dismaying as part of our work to build an evidence base for change. We want to be part of a movement that makes the best use of research evidence and data to accelerate an end to the moral outrage of homelessness. Join us in our quest.

Dr Lígia Teixeira
Chief Executive
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1. Executive summary

Ipsos MORI conducted an online survey for the Centre for Homelessness Impact in 2020 and repeated this in 2021. Survey research reflected the Centre's interest in better understanding the public's knowledge and attitudes on the issue of homelessness, and the perceived difference evidence and policy can make.

The 2021 survey involved a representative sample of 2,179 UK adults aged 16-75. It was conducted between 10-16 December 2021 (the 2020 survey was conducted during November-December). It used 'booster' sampling to increase the number of surveys completed in Wales (to a total of 514), Scotland (516) and Northern Ireland (200) to improve our ability to make comparisons. Data was weighted to the known population profile at the UK level.

As was the case in 2020, the 2021 survey found that homelessness is perceived as a serious problem and one that will get worse. These views continue to be widely-held across the UK and among different demographic groups. Two-thirds believe that we do not pay enough attention to the issue as a society and there are strong levels of support for a range of policies designed to address homelessness.

Homelessness is a personal issue for some, and a social issue for many more. Across the UK, just over a quarter (28%), say they have ever experienced homelessness either personally or through family and friends while 15% of those who have not already experienced homelessness themselves, think that it is very or fairly likely that they could personally experience homelessness in future. A majority see homelessness as affecting the whole of society.

The survey in 2021 found similar misperceptions and knowledge gaps to those identified in 2020. While majority opinion holds that homelessness is driven by poverty and factors outside individuals' control rather than bad choices people have made, problems with alcohol and drugs are the most perceived main cause of homelessness.

Reflecting their concern about homelessness, the public are instinctively supportive of a range of policies designed to address it. In England, over half said that they had heard of the 'Everyone In' policy (18-months after it was introduced) and seven in ten support the implementation of a similar policy during winter periods. This is also supported in other parts of the UK.

Evidence has a role to play, a majority would like to see important decisions about homelessness made based upon evidence of what works and most think that too little attention is given to the views of those affected by homelessness. There is also strong support for clarifying what the policy goal is - people support more realistic descriptions of success than 'ending' homeless, specifically, an aim to make it unusual and short-lived - and also back the notion of developing ways of measuring progress.

The broad shape of public opinion has remained largely unchanged between 2020 and 2021, but there have been some relative shifts in perceptions between the 2020 and 2021 surveys. Generally speaking, there has been a trend towards weakening concern about the issue of homelessness and sympathy towards those it affects.

This potentially reflects a difference in backdrop of the issue; the Coronavirus pandemic was at a different phase in December 2021 and the most recent survey found lower levels of concern about economic issues such as unemployment. This is something worth watching during 2022 and beyond.

2. Survey findings

2.1 Are the public concerned about homelessness?

Homelessness continues to be seen as a serious problem in the UK. Just over eight in ten (83%) view it as a problem. Half this proportion (39%) view it as a very serious problem although this represents a significant drop since 2020 (when it was 47%). More people see homelessness as affecting the whole of society (49%), rather than thinking the issue only affects those who experience it (25%).

As shown in Figure 1, homelessness continues to be an issue more associated with the UK's cities rather than with rural areas; 52% think it is a serious problem in cities, compared with 45% considering it as a serious problem in rural areas. There has been some change since 2020 when 87% thought homelessness was a serious problem in cities. As was the case in 2020, there remains a national-local perception gap; while 79% view it a serious issue in the UK, only 46% think the same in terms of their local area.

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1 At the start of the first national 'lockdown' in 2020 and in response to Coronavirus, governments across the UK provided funding for local councils to support people experiencing street homelessness or in shelters to move into hotel rooms and emergency accommodation.
Six in ten (61%) think homelessness will increase in the next 12 months, a significant weakening in this sentiment since 2020 when three-quarters (74%) thought the same. The same can be said for predictions over the next 2 years, as three in five (62%) think there will be an increase in the UK, compared to seven in ten (70%) in 2020. Only 4% of people in the UK think homelessness will decrease in the next 12 months, whilst only 7% think it will decrease in the next two years. Belief that homelessness is inevitable, and the only option is to manage it also stays at a similar level to the previous survey (47% vs. 50% in 2020).

Expectations are fairly similar across nations – shown in Figure 2 – however, those living in Scotland and Wales are more likely than average to think this will happen. Two-thirds (66%) in both countries expect this to happen while 61% think this in England and 64% in Northern Ireland.

A majority of people agree that ‘as a society we do not pay enough attention to homelessness’, however, there has been a slight decrease since 2020 in the proportion who do so; from 71% in 2020 to 67% in 2021. This is consistently felt across the UK but those living in Scotland are more likely than average to think this is the case, with nearly three-quarters (74%) in agreement.

Slightly fewer than half (48%) agree that homelessness is a major problem and needs to be given top priority, a similar proportion to that in 2020 (46%). This compares to only 19% who think that there are other more important problems than homelessness so it shouldn’t be given top priority. People in the North West of England are most likely to place importance on the issue; 59% there think it should be given top priority.

Overall, 15% of people think that it is very or fairly likely that they could personally experience homelessness in future. Younger people are more likely (27%) to think this could happen to them, as were those living in London (29%). As shown in Figure 3, two-thirds (66%) think that it is either very unlikely or fairly unlikely that they will ever personally experience homelessness, in line with 64% in 2020.
Evidence and society in the UK: public perceptions and homelessness

2.2 How much do the public know about homelessness?

On average, the public think that 14% of adults are currently homeless in the UK, a similar estimate to that in 2020 (11%). Answers ranged between 0% (28% gave this answer) - those who estimated zero percent are likely to think the proportion is below 1% but it may also include those who entirely reject the idea that there is homelessness in the UK - and estimates in advance of 20% which were given by 14%. While there is no clear or certain figure for the UK, recent estimates range from 200,000-280,000 people which is around 0.5% of the population.2

For those who have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives, either themselves or someone they know, the mean jumps to 21%, an increase from 2020 estimates by the same group (15%). Those who view homelessness as a serious problem in the UK and locally, are significantly more likely to have higher estimates (15% and 17%) as are those who think that homelessness is caused by bad choices of the individual (17%).

People were more accurate about levels of poverty in the UK as the mean guess was 26%, which is much closer to the estimated 17%3 and in line with average estimates in 2020 (25%). A quarter (24%) gave an answer of 0%.

Data from the survey also helps us to understand the public’s perception about who is experiencing homelessness, what they think their characteristics are likely to be and how this compares with the actual figures. In order for us to compare public perceptions with objective measurements we have therefore used two benchmarks: one of people experiencing street homelessness (i.e. the CHAIN data for London) and one of people approaching their local authority for support with their housing situation (i.e. DLUHC’s statutory homelessness ‘live tables’).

Although figures are not perfect, they offer us a point of comparison so we can begin to understand the accuracy of perceptions and whether these perceptions are more aligned with visible types of street homelessness (CHAIN data) or a broader group of people experiencing homelessness (DLUHC’s statutory homelessness ‘live tables’).

- The public think that homelessness is slightly more common amongst men. The perception that 57% are men is close to the figure of 48% of all households having been assessed for homelessness,4 84% according to CHAIN.5
- The public estimates that 41% of people who experience homelessness are under the age of 35, which sits almost halfway between the 55% of homelessness applications from adults under 35 years old,6 and CHAIN’s 38%.7
- The public think that a quarter (25%) of people who experience homelessness are immigrants to the UK, also halfway between the 12% of homelessness applications from adults born outside the UK,4 47% from CHAIN.8
- They estimate that 18% of people who experience homelessness in the UK are employed, which compares with 22% of homelessness applications, including both part-time and full-time employment (data unavailable by CHAIN).9

2 Crisis and Heriot Watt University published research estimating that 202,000 people experienced homelessness on any given night in 2020 although estimates published by Shelter are higher (around 280,000 people in 2019): see https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/the-crisis-blog/how-many-people-are-homeless-in-england-on-any-given-night/ and https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press-release/280000_people_in_england_are_homeless_with_thousands_more_at_risk

3 https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cr07066/
5 See https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports
7 See https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports
9 See https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports
2.3 What do people think are the causes of homelessness?

Just below half of the public agree that experiencing homelessness is a consequence outside of an individual's control (46%), as opposed to making bad life choices (24%), shown in Figure 4. The gap between these two sentiments has narrowed since 2020 when 52% thought homelessness could be blamed on external factors and only 17% agreed it was down to bad life choices. There has also been a significant decrease in the proportion who think that poverty is at the root of many of the problems that can lead to homelessness; two-thirds (65%) agree compared to three-quarters (73%) in 2020.

Figure 4: Homelessness – bad choices or beyond control?

As was the case in 2020, there is an association between issue-salience and what previous research has called 'self-makingness' (the notion that homelessness happens because individuals make bad choices). People who think homelessness is not a serious problem in the UK are more likely to think it is caused by bad life choices rather than by forces outside their control – 36% compared with 22% of those who think it is a serious problem.

Although the common view is that homelessness is driven by poverty and issues outside of an individual's control, the most-commonly perceived main cause of homelessness is alcohol or drug problems, selected by half (50%), among a list of 17 possibilities, and in line with 2020 (52%). Poverty features in second place, identified by 33%, followed by mental or physical health problems, chosen by 31%. Compared with 2020, significantly fewer people think homelessness is caused by unemployment (19% versus 25%).

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12 See https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports The 40% relates to people who have at least two support needs including drugs, alcohol and/or mental health issues. It should be noted that two fifths (41%) did not have a support needs assessment recorded and the majority of these (87%) had been street homeless only once or twice. Thus, this proportion is likely to be an overestimate of the actual proportion who have support needs related to alcohol and drugs use among all people experiencing street homelessness.

13 Talking about homelessness; Crisis with Frameworks Institute, 2020.
Among a list of 17 options provided, the most commonly perceived main causes of homelessness were:

1. Alcohol or drug problems (50% vs. 52% in 2020);
2. Poverty (33% vs. 31% in 2020);
3. Mental or physical health problems (31% vs. 35% in 2020).

Those least frequently identified as key causes were:

1. Discrimination (2% vs. 2% in 2020);
2. Lack of interest from national and local politicians (3% vs. 4% in 2020);
3. Lack of targeted evidence-based interventions to address the issue (4% vs. 2% in 2020).

Source: Ipsos MORI/Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2,179 UK adults (England - 949, Wales - 514, Scotland - 516 and Northern Ireland - 200), 10 December-16 December 2021

2.4 What are the potential solutions?

Two-thirds (66%) of people agree that homelessness would be helped with more affordable housing, while seven in ten (69%) think that governments should guarantee that everyone has the right to access decent and affordable housing. These figures compare to 71% and 74% in 2020.

A large majority (74%) of the public think that more should be done in general to address the issue of homelessness, although this a significant decrease from 2020 (79%). Nearly seven in ten (68%) also support creating a legal right to shelter for anyone who does not have a home, but this compares with 73% in 2020. In terms of moving people who experience homelessness to their own more permanent accommodation, rather than temporary solutions like hostels or B&Bs, opinion has remained more consistent (69% support this compared with 70% in 2020). Six in ten (60%) support giving higher priority to improving the rights of tenants to reduce the risk of homelessness.

There has been a significant decrease in those who support an increase in housing benefit to help those who need (58% compared with 66% in 2020), however the proportion who oppose this, remains at a similar level (13% compared with 11% in 2020). A similar trend can be seen in terms of paying for support needed to get people with drug, alcohol, or mental health problems so they can stay where they live; 60% support this compared to 65% in 2020, while opposition has risen from 9% to 12%. The proportion of the public who support investment in preventing homelessness rather than in services to help those who are homeless has stayed the same at 61%.

For the purposes of understanding what actions the public think should be prioritised to do something about homelessness, respondents were given a list of actions where they could choose the two or three which they think should be given highest priority.

In a separate question, respondents were given an additional list of actions that people have proposed to deal with homelessness and they were then asked to say whether they support or oppose each measure.

Among a list of 10 options provided, the most popular actions to tackle homelessness were:

1. Helping people who have nowhere to live when they leave hospital, prison or the care system (28% vs 28% in 2020);
2. Providing emergency shelters and hostels for people who are homeless (28% vs 27% in 2020); and
3. Providing more support for people who are homeless to find a job and stay employed (27% vs 31% in 2020)

Source: Ipsos MORI/Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2,179 UK adults (England - 949, Wales - 514, Scotland - 516 and Northern Ireland - 200), 10 December-16 December 2021

Three-quarters (76%) of the public supported the action of providing support such as training to people who face homelessness and are in work to help them remain in employment. There was also strong support for providing better support for people leaving prison to prevent homelessness and reoffending (68%), providing paid jobs to people at risk of homelessness (65%) and improving legal rights and support for tenants, so they don't have to move out of accommodation at short notice (63%).

Although still mostly supportive, the public were more likely to oppose measures to provide accommodation without conditions attached to those who are experiencing homelessness, provide one-off payments for people at risk to prevent homelessness, and provide unpaid work opportunities to people who are homeless. One in five were in opposition for all three measures.

2.5 Awareness of 'Everyone In'

At the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, councils across England were instructed to find self-contained accommodation for all people sleeping on the streets in their area under a scheme that became known as 'Everyone In'. Similar schemes were in operation in different parts of the UK. In England, over half of adults, 53%, said in December 2021 that they had heard of this 18-months after it was introduced and based on the following description:
At the start of the first national ‘lockdown’ in 2020 and in response to Coronavirus, governments across the UK provided funding for local councils to support people experiencing street homelessness or in shelters to move into hotel rooms and emergency accommodation.

Four in ten, 40%, said they hadn’t and 7% were unsure either way. Claimed awareness was highest among older age groups and higher income groups. Awareness was higher in Wales (59%) and lowest in Northern Ireland (41%).

In England, seven in ten, 70%, support governments across the UK implementing a similar policy this winter, more than ten times the proportion who are opposed (6%):

- providing funding for local councils to support people experiencing street homelessness or in shelters to move into hotel rooms and emergency accommodation

Support is similarly high in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (UK-wide sentiment is shown in Figure 5). It was also higher among those who considered homelessness a very or fairly serious problem in the UK and something which should be given top priority. Younger age groups were relatively more likely to oppose this policy than other age groups – still, a majority were supportive; 11% of 16-34-year-olds compared to 63% in support. This was also the case among those who hadn’t heard of the ‘Everyone In’ policy - 66% of this group supported the policy - but this group were also less likely to oppose it, and give an opinion either way.

Figure 5: Public support for ‘Everyone In’ policy

In England, seven in ten, 70%, support governments across the UK implementing a similar policy this winter, more than ten times the proportion who are opposed (6%):
As shown in Figure 7, just over a quarter, 27%, strongly agree with this while just 4% tend to or strongly disagree. A quarter 25%, say they neither agree nor disagree or don’t know. The balance of opinion is strongly positive among all groups and geographies although those who don’t think homelessness is a problem in the UK or that it only really affects those people who experience it (and not wider society) are more likely to answer neither agree nor disagree.

Figure 7: Attitudes towards ‘ending’ homelessness

Source: Ipsos MORI/Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2,179 UK adults (England - 949, Wales - 514, Scotland - 516 and Northern Ireland - 200), 10 December-16 December 2021

2.7 Are there differences across the UK?

We used ‘booster’ sampling to increase the sample size in Wales (up a total of 514 respondents), Scotland (516) and Northern Ireland (200) in order to improve our ability to make comparisons. However, as boosters, the samples are not necessarily representative of the populations there and should not be considered in isolation. Data was weighted to the known population profile at the UK level.

We have commented on differences throughout this report. For the most part, though, and as shown in Table 2 below, there are more similarities than differences between different parts of the UK.

Table 2: Differences between UK nations (selection of questions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>England</th>
<th>Wales</th>
<th>Scotland</th>
<th>N.Ireland</th>
<th>UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n949</td>
<td>n514</td>
<td>n516</td>
<td>n200</td>
<td>n2,179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2 Here is a list of issues facing the country these days. Please indicate how serious a problem, if at all, you think each one is? … Levels of homelessness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% very/fairly serious problem</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% not a very serious problem/not a problem at all</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 … in England, Wales, Scotland, N. Ireland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% very/fairly serious problem</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% not a very serious problem/not a problem at all</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 … the area where you live – that is within about 15-20 minutes’ walk away</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% very/fairly serious problem</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% not a very serious problem/not a problem at all</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5 Do you think homelessness will increase or decrease or stay the same … in England, Wales, Scotland, N. Ireland … in the next 12 months?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q21 (1) Please read the following pairs of statements about homelessness and decide which comes closest to your own opinion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: “Decisions about homelessness should be made based mostly on evidence of what works”</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: “Decisions about homelessness should be made based mostly on what people think is the right thing to do”</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the start of the first national ‘lockdown’ in 2020 and in response to Coronavirus, governments across the UK provided funding for local councils to support people experiencing street homelessness or in shelters to move into hotel rooms and emergency accommodation.

Q26. Before completing this survey, had you heard of this or not?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Yes</th>
<th>53</th>
<th>59</th>
<th>52</th>
<th>41</th>
<th>53</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% No</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ipsos MORI/Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2,179 UK adults (England - 949, Wales - 514, Scotland - 516 and Northern Ireland - 200), 10 December-16 December 2021
2.8 Key trends – 2021 versus 2020

There have been some notable shifts in perceptions between the 2020 and 2021 surveys (both conducted during winter periods) but, at the same time, many attitudes have remained largely unchanged. Table 3 summarises changes across a selection of repeat questions.

For the most part, the public continue to:

• see homelessness as a serious issue and to expect levels of homelessness to increase;
• consider factors such as poverty or housing much more important causes of homelessness than the individual choices of homeless people; and
• support policies to alleviate homelessness, such as changes to housing benefit.

However, while many viewpoints are consistent, there has been a trend between 2020 and 2021 towards weakening concern about the issue of homelessness and sympathy towards those it affects.

Homelessness is seen as less of a problem than it was in 2020, and there is less expectation that it will increase. Only slightly fewer believe that homelessness is a serious problem in this year’s survey than in 2020 (83% in 2021 compared with 86% in 2020). Similarly, there has been a small but statistically significant decrease in how many agree that as a society we do not pay enough attention to homelessness (from 71% to 67%). That said, people are just as likely to think homelessness should be given top priority as they were in 2020.

People are much less pessimistic about future homelessness levels than in 2020. While a large majority believe that homelessness will increase, as in 2020, this has fallen year-on-year; 61% think that homeless will increase in the UK in the next 12 months, compared with 74% who thought this in 2020. A similar pattern is evident in terms of the proportions who think homelessness will increase in the UK over the next two years - it was 62% in 2021, down from 70% in 2020 - and similar movements in expectations occurred in the different parts of the UK.

While people remain broadly sympathetic, relatively less emphasis is placed on external factors contributing to homelessness. For example, compared with 2020, a higher proportion think that most people who are experiencing homelessness have made bad choices in life that have put them in that situation; 24% compared to 17% in 2020, mirroring a decrease in the proportion who think most people have become homeless due to factors out of their control, down from 52% to 46%.

People are less convinced by the role of economic factors; fewer agree that poverty is at the root of the problems that can lead to homelessness (65% than did so in 2020 (73%). Similarly, the proportion who agree that homelessness would be less of an issue if housing was more affordable has decreased from 71% to 66%, as has the proportion who agree that governments should guarantee that everyone has the right to access decent and affordable housing – from 74% to 69% over the same period. By contrast, the minority that agree that the negative view of people who are homeless ‘is fair’ has increased from 20% to 25%.

While there has been no change in the proportion who consider personal choice to be one of the main two or three causes of homeless, there have been marked decreases for some economic and social causes such as unemployment (down from 25% in 2020 to 19% in 2021), mental or physical health problems (from 35% to 31%) and lack of support for people leaving hospital, prison, the care system or armed forces (from 22% to 15%).

Levels of support for some government policies are lower than they were. While the vast majority continue to support doing more to address the issue of homelessness, this has decreased from 79% in 2020 to 74% in 2021 and support for increasing housing-related benefits to help those who need it to afford somewhere to live, has dropped by eight percentage points from 66% to 58%. A smaller proportion of people support creating a legal right to shelter for the homeless - down from 73% to 68% - or paying for the support needed to help people with drug, alcohol or mental health problems to stay where they live - down from 65% to 60%.

Table 3: Trends from 2020 to 2021 (selection of questions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q2 Here is a list of issues facing the country these days. Please indicate how serious a problem, if at all, you think each one is? ... Homelessness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% very/fairly serious problem</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% not a very serious problem/not a problem at all</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 ... England, Wales, Scotland, N. Ireland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% very/fairly serious problem</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% not a very serious problem/not a problem at all</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 ... the area where you live – that is within about 15-20 minutes’ walk away</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% very/fairly serious problem</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% not a very serious problem/not a problem at all</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5 England, Wales, Scotland, N. Ireland ... do you think homelessness will increase or decrease or stay the same ... in the next 12 months?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>2021</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q21 (1)** Please read the following pairs of statements about homelessness and decide which comes closest to your own opinion.

- **A**: "Decisions about homelessness should be made based mostly on evidence of what works”  
  - 65 61
- **B**: "Decisions about homelessness should be made based mostly on what people think is the right thing to do”  
  - 10 14

**Q21 (2)**

- **A**: "Most people who are homeless have probably made bad choices in life which has put them in that situation”  
  - 17 24
- **B**: "Most people who are homeless are probably in that situation because of things outside of their control”  
  - 52 46

**Q21 (3)**

- **A**: "Homelessness is a major problem and needs to be given top priority”  
  - 46 48
- **B**: "There are other more important problems than homelessness so it shouldn’t be given top priority”  
  - 20 19

**Q21 (4)**

- **A**: "Homelessness only really affects those people who experience it”  
  - 20 25
- **B**: "Homelessness doesn’t just affect the people experiencing it, it affects the whole of society”  
  - 56 49

Source: Ipsos MORI/Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2,179 UK adults (England - 949, Wales - 514, Scotland - 516, Northern Ireland - 200), 10 December-16 December 2021

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A – Sample profile**

**Weighted and unweighted sample profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population group</th>
<th>Sample size (unweighted)</th>
<th>Unweighted %</th>
<th>Weighted %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK adults aged 16-75</td>
<td>2,179</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,024</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1,155</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-24</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-75</td>
<td>922</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working full-time/part-time</td>
<td>1,313</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>866</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ipsos MORI/Centre for Homelessness Impact, 2,179 UK adults (online), 10 – 16 December 2021

Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding

*indicates percentages of all those answering/data available
Appendix B – Statistical reliability

It is important to note that, strictly speaking, confidence intervals relate only to samples that have been selected using strict probability sampling methods but, in practice, it is reasonable to assume that these calculations provide a good indication of the confidence intervals relating to this survey given the approach used.

The table below shows that we can expect an overall sampling tolerance (this refers to the upper and lower limit of error) of up to +/- 1.5 percentage points at the ‘95% confidence interval’ for a 50% finding the survey overall.

### Survey sampling tolerances (rounded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of sample on which survey result is based and approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels</th>
<th>10% or 90%</th>
<th>30% or 70%</th>
<th>50%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2,179 UK</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>949 England</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>516 Scotland</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>514 Wales</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 Northern Ireland</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, with a sample size of 2,179 where 12% say that they have ever personally experienced homelessness, then the chances are 19 in 20 that the ‘true’ value (i.e. the one which would have been obtained if the whole UK population had been interviewed) will fall within the range of +1.4 percentage points from the survey result (i.e. between 13.4% and 10.6%).

The following table indicates the sampling tolerances when comparing different groups of participants (or the same group across different questions). If we once again assume a ‘95% confidence interval’, the differences between the results of two separate groups must be greater than the values given in the following table in order to be deemed ‘statistically significant’.

### Survey sampling tolerances: sub-group level (rounded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample sizes and differences required for significance at or near these percentage levels</th>
<th>10% or 90%</th>
<th>30% or 70%</th>
<th>50%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>949 vs. 516 (England vs. Scotland)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, if 30% of people in England give a particular answer compared with 36% of those in Scotland (assuming sample sizes in the table above), then the chances are 19 in 20 that this six-point difference is statistically significant.
Ipsos MORI's standards and accreditations

This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the following quality standards:

**ISO 20252**

This is the international market research specific standard that supersedes BS 7911/MRQSA and incorporates IQCS (Interviewer Quality Control Scheme). It covers the five stages of a Market Research project. Ipsos MORI was the first company in the world to gain this accreditation.

**ISO 27001**

This is the international standard for information security designed to ensure the selection of adequate and proportionate security controls. Ipsos MORI was the first research company in the UK to be awarded this in August 2008.

**ISO 9001**

This is the international general company standard with a focus on continual improvement through quality management systems. In 1994, we became one of the early adopters of the ISO 9001 business standard.

**Market Research Society (MRS) Company Partnership**

By being an MRS Company Partner, Ipsos MORI endorses and supports the core MRS brand values of professionalism, research excellence and business effectiveness, and commits to comply with the MRS Code of Conduct throughout the organisation.

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