# Introduction

This publication has been developed by the Department for Communities (DfC), the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and Professional Services Unit (PSU) within DfC. It presents a biannual summary of homelessness statistics in Northern Ireland and is currently divided into three sections: Homeless presenters; Homeless acceptances; and Temporary accommodation.

Homelessness figures presented in this report can be read in conjunction with those published in the quarterly [Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin](https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/housing-statistics).

Statistics on homelessness are sourced from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). Under the Housing (NI) Order 1988, NIHE has a statutory responsibility to secure permanent accommodation for persons who are unintentionally homeless and in priority need, to secure temporary accommodation in a variety of circumstances and to provide advice and assistance to those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. For further details see:

https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Housing-Help/Homelessness/Are-you-homeless

Information on the NIHE Homelessness Strategy can be found at the following link:

https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Housing-Help/Homelessness/Homelessness-strategy

The Housing Executive collects information on presenters and statutorily homeless households for administrative purposes. This data is then used to generate the tables for this publication. The data is transferred in aggregated form to PSU, who are then responsible for analysis and the production of the publication. A procedures manual and checklist of the process involved is retained internally for contingency, consistency and quality purposes.

The main summary document is published alongside supplementary tables and this quality background report on the DfC website. DfC Press Office will further publicise the report as appropriate. A mailing list will be developed based on user feedback and interest.

The quality information presented below relates to all tables. However, additional quality information is also provided for some specific tables and this is clearly noted as such.

Relevance

Data is recorded by the Housing Executive in its Housing Management System (HMS), on a daily basis.

The information provided in the tables allows users to assess the level of homelessness in Northern Ireland, the reason for homelessness and those affected. Users include the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland (DfC) and other government departments, the Housing Executive, elected representatives, councils, agencies, charities, voluntary sector organisations and the private sector.

Users are actively encouraged to provide feedback; additional information requirements will be considered for inclusion in future iterations, where possible.

DfC produce an annual Housing Statistics series and a quarterly Housing Bulletin, both of which include, among other housing themed figures, statistics on homelessness sourced to NIHE HMS. These publications can be found at:

[Northern Ireland Housing Statistics](https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/housing-statistics)

## Accuracy

Reports on the status of homelessness presentations are extracted from the Housing Management System for specified date parameters by the Housing Executive’s data analytics. The Housing Executive acknowledges that some errors may occur due to the inputting of incorrect data, but carefully checks all data that are to be published, to provide a high level of quality assurance. Users should be aware that figures are extracted from a live database on a specific date and as such could be revised at a later date.

The collection purpose of this data is to allow the Housing Executive to meet its statutory duties in relation to homelessness. This requires data to be thorough and robust enough for operational use.  A range of internal checks and audits are in place within local offices to ensure quality data, including the use of dashboards and a homelessness suite of exception reports which are designed to pick up anomalies in data input. Cross checks between internal reports are undertaken centrally. An end of year data base of all homelessness presentations is downloaded to confirm annual statistical accuracy.

NIHE forwards aggregated data on homelessness to PSU, at which point, further checks are carried out by way of trend analysis, row and column cross checking against totals and sub-totals, identification of anomalies and checks for cell completeness.  PSU follow a procedures manual which stipulates checks at numerous levels of management.

Impact of Covid-19

The Housing Executive would note that the Q1, Q2 and Q3 data submission for 2020/21 has been subject to significant variation from previous quarters and this can be directly attributed to the impact of COVID-19. As a comparison, there was a total of 12,854 presentations in Q1, Q2 and Q3 of 2019/20 and this has reduced by 7% to 11,676 in Q1, Q2 and Q3 of 2020/21. However, it should be noted that this is a lesser decrease than the 10% decrease reported at the end of Q2, highlighting the fact that presentations are gradually started to rise again with recent figures more consistent with trends during previous years.

The impact of COVID-19 on acceptances has been more pronounced with 8,561 acceptances in Q1, Q2 and Q3 of 2019/20 and this has reduced by 18% to 6,984 in Q1, Q2 and Q3 of 2020/21. Again it should be noted that this is also a lesser decrease than the decrease of 24% reported at the end of Q2.

With regards to acceptances it should be noted that in some cases social distancing guidance has meant that third party evidence may not be immediately available as home visits have not been possible leading to some decisions being delayed but the Housing Executive will ensure our statutory duty around the provision of temporary accommodation until a decision is reached is adhered to.

The data on temporary accommodation shows a significant increase and this is directly related to COVID-19 with demand increasing since lockdown arrangements were implemented on 23rd March. With these figures in mind the Housing Executive would request that this data update notes the impact of COVID-19 in any accompanying narrative.

Timeliness and Punctuality

Homelessness statistics are published biannually in the Northern Ireland Homelessness Bulletin, approximately 3 months after the reporting period has finished. This 3 month lag allows the Housing Executive to extract data normally 2 weeks after the period end to ensure all outstanding keying has been completed and to carry out the necessary cross checks. It provides time to carry out trend analysis and to identify and investigate any anomalies that may occur through consultation with local staff. For example, a flood may cause a temporary spike in homelessness in a particular area which would not be reflective of a normal trend and would require additional explanation.

PSU will typically place a formal request to NIHE for the homelessness data necessary to populate the report 6 weeks prior to publication date. NIHE forward the data to PSU within 2 weeks of it being requested.

PSU also require time to undergo the analysis, create the report, quality assure it and carry out the publication process.

To date, all publications have been delivered on time, based on the scheduled release dates.

Accessibility and clarity

This biannual publication is available in PDF and Word format from the DFC website. Supporting tables are published alongside the main document in open source format. Requests for the information in different formats can be made by contacting the Department for Communities. Supporting and/or additional information may be available on request from the Housing Executive.

Having a summary document with infographics, case studies, and information points explaining certain terminology/processes allows all audiences to gather and understand high level information about homelessness in Northern Ireland. Additional information is footnoted or signposted clearly within the summary report as appropriate.

Accompanying tables and methodological information provide technical users with an opportunity to examine findings in greater detail and perform their own analysis if they wish.

Users are invited to complete an online user feedback survey; a link is provided in the introductory page of the summary report and on the Departmental webpage that hosts the publication.

Coherence & comparability

New Breakdowns

Accommodation Not Reasonable (ANR):

The breakdown of categories was first introduced in May 2018. All cases prior to this were recorded using the generic ANR reason. All cases after this were recorded using the new category breakdowns.

Information on new categories:

* ANR Financial hardship would be used where a household is unable to sustain their property due to accruing debt – often as a result of a change in circumstances such as the loss of a job.
* ANR Mental Health would be used where a household is unable to sustain the property due to a deterioration in their mental health caused by remaining at the property.
* ANR Other would be used where a household experiences some unique event or circumstance which makes it unreasonable for them to continue to reside there and which is not covered by another category.
* ANR Overcrowding would be used where extreme overcrowding makes it unreasonable for a household to continue to occupy a property.
* ANR Physical health/disability would be used where a property becomes unsuitable for a person’s need due to their physical health, for example, no longer being able to manage stairs to a bathroom.
* ANR Property Unfitness would be used where the property is in such a poor state of repair as to be detrimental to the residents’ well being.
* ANR violence would be used where an act of violence has been committed in the property making it unreasonable for a member of the household to continue to occupy.

Intimidation:

The breakdown of categories was first introduced in May 2018. All cases prior to this were recorded using the generic intimidation reason. All cases after this were recorded by the type of intimidation experienced.

Loss of Rented Accommodation:

The breakdown of categories was first introduced in May 2018. All cases prior to this were recorded using the generic loss of rented accommodation reason. All cases after this were broken down by sub-category detailing the reason for loss of rented accommodation.

Dynamic Data

As of April 2018 the Housing Executive has moved to a new reporting system. Data which was reported in PSU housing publications (Northern Ireland Housing Statistics and The Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin) prior to this date was point in time data.

The new reporting system extracts data from the live system. The data is dynamic and reflects the changing nature of the customer journey as it happens.

All categories may be subject to change and adjustment as each quarter’s report is downloaded. For example, a case may initially be rejected in Quarter 1, however, upon review the original decision may be overturned and the household subsequently accepted. As a result when Quarter 2 data is presented, Quarter 1 will now have an additional accepted case. Cases may be concluded due to loss of contact with a household and reopened where the household re-establishes contact.

Presenting Reason/Established Reason

It should be noted that in 2017/18 an additional “presenting reason” field was included in the recording of homelessness cases.  Previously, cases were recorded by established reason which was input following investigations. Historically, this resulted in many “no data” presenting cases where the case was not accepted. The addition of the “presenting reason” field has eliminated most “no data” cases.

The implication of this is that following investigations, a household may be accepted as homeless for a different reason than their initial presenting reason.  In some cases this may result in higher level of acceptances than presentations in any category.

UK Homelessness Statistics

Homelessness data from other parts of the UK can be accessed using the following links:

England: [Homelessness Statistics](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics).

Scotland: [Housing Regeneration](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing%20Regeneration/RefTables).

Wales: [Homelessness statistics](http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/homelessness/?lang=en)

Homelessness definitions and measurements differ across the UK. Users should be aware that statistics from the above publications are not directly comparable with Northern Ireland Homelessness Statistics.

The following report investigates the feasibility of harmonising UK definitions of homelessness, and evaluates methods for improving users’ understanding of the comparability of UK homelessness statistics:  [GSS homelessness comparability report](https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/GSS-homelessness-report-1.pdf)