

# Public Perceptions Poll on Homelessness 2025



# Introduction

In February 2025, Simon Community conducted a *Public Perceptions Poll* on homelessness in Northern Ireland to understand how people perceive one of the most urgent, and often misunderstood, social issues facing NI. Delivered in partnership with LucidTalk, the poll gathered responses from over 2,000 individuals, with a demographically balanced sample of 1,050 adults used in the final analysis. The results offer a clear picture of public attitudes: what people believe about the scale, causes, and solutions to homelessness - and where these perceptions differ from reality.

## Why we did it

Homelessness in Northern Ireland has reached record levels. We currently have almost 60,000 people legally classified as homeless. But the true number is even greater with an estimated additional 25,000 people outside the system, not getting the support they so desperately need.

Unless we act, the devastating impact of the homelessness crisis will deepen, creating more generations trapped in poverty and homelessness. Years of underinvestment in housing, coupled with repeated breakdowns in political leadership and growing pressure on public services, have allowed this crisis to escalate.

At the same time, public understanding of homelessness hasn't kept pace with the scale or nature of the problem.

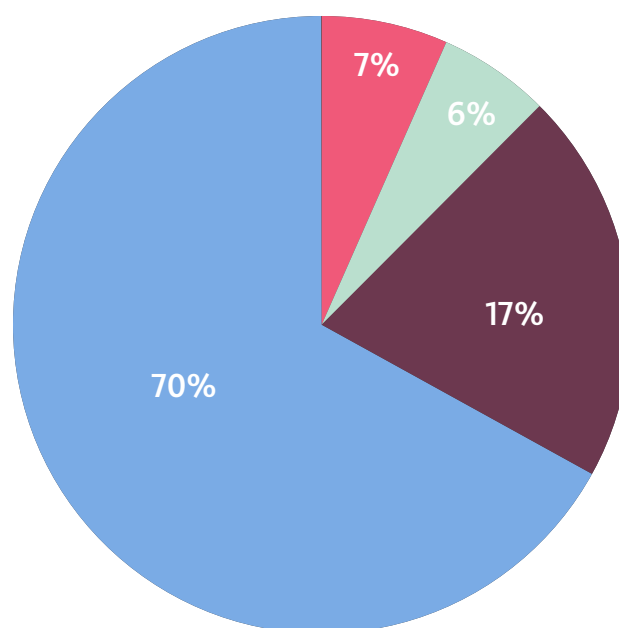
Many people still believe that homelessness is rare, that it only affects those sleeping on the streets, or that it's somehow a personal failing. These misconceptions stand in the way of action.

To change the system, we must first change the story. This research gives a baseline for public understanding in 2025. It identifies the misconceptions we must challenge, the awareness we can build on, and the opportunities for changing the conversation around homelessness in Northern Ireland.

# Experience of homelessness

## Question 1: Have you or anyone you know well experienced homelessness?

- YES - I personally have
- YES - A family member has
- YES - Someone I know has
- NO



The survey results confirm that while homelessness is widely recognised as a societal issue, it also has direct or proximate impact on a substantial share of the population in Northern Ireland. While 70% of respondents reported no personal or known experience of homelessness, 17% indicated that someone they knew had experienced it, and 6% reported a family member who had faced homelessness. Notably, 7% of respondents reported personal experience of homelessness. When extrapolated to Northern Ireland's population of approximately 1.9 million, this equates to around 133,000 individuals, a considerable proportion, particularly given the long-term and often traumatic nature of homelessness. This finding challenges the idea that homelessness is peripheral or exceptional; instead, it suggests that homelessness is structurally embedded and far closer to people's lives than public discourse often implies.

### Personal Experience of Homelessness

**Gender:** There is no significant variation by gender, with both males and females reporting 7% personal experience.

**Age:** Prevalence is highest among those aged 18–44, with 10% in each of the 18–24, 25–34, and 35–44 age groups reporting personal experience. Beyond this, prevalence declines with age: 6% among 45–54, 5% among 55–64, and just 2% in the 65+ age group. This downward trend may reflect cumulative socio-economic advantage, under-reporting among older cohorts, or generational differences in exposure to housing insecurity.

### Family Member's Experience of Homelessness

**Gender:** No notable difference was observed, with 6% of both men and women reporting that a family member had experienced homelessness.

**Age:** Reported rates were relatively consistent across age groups. The highest rates were among those aged 18–24 and 45–54 (8%), followed by 35–44 and 55–64 (7%). The 25–34 group reported 5%, and the 65+ group the lowest at 3%.

Although these percentages represent a small minority, the consistency across age groups suggests that family exposure to homelessness is not isolated to any one stage of life. The slightly higher rates among younger adults and those in midlife may reflect intergenerational dynamics, such as younger individuals witnessing homelessness within their immediate family, or adults supporting children or relatives facing housing instability.

### Knowing Someone Who Has Experienced Homelessness

**Gender:** 20% of females reported knowing someone who has experienced homelessness, compared to 15% of males. This difference may reflect broader social networks among women, greater openness in discussing personal challenges, or a likelihood of being confided in about such experiences.

**Age:** The highest reporting came from the 45–54 age group (25%). In contrast, only 10% of 18–24-year-olds and 11% of those aged 65 and over reported the same. Middle age groups 25–34, 35–44, and 55–64 were closely aligned, ranging between 18% and 19%.

These findings suggest that midlife adults, particularly those aged 45–54, are more likely to encounter homelessness within their social circles. This may reflect cumulative exposure over time or greater involvement in caregiving, community, or professional roles where such experiences are more visible. The lower figures among younger and older respondents may relate to smaller or less varied networks, reduced disclosure, or generational differences in awareness or engagement with the issue.

### Knowing Someone Who Has Experienced Homelessness

Working Class (C2DE) respondents report the highest exposure to homelessness:

- o 11% personal experience
- o 22% know someone who has been homeless
- o 9% report a family member's experience

Middle Class (ABC1) respondents report:

- o 5% personal experience
- o 15% know someone who has been homeless
- o 6% report a family member's experience

Other group (retired, students, and non-salaried individuals) report the lowest overall prevalence:

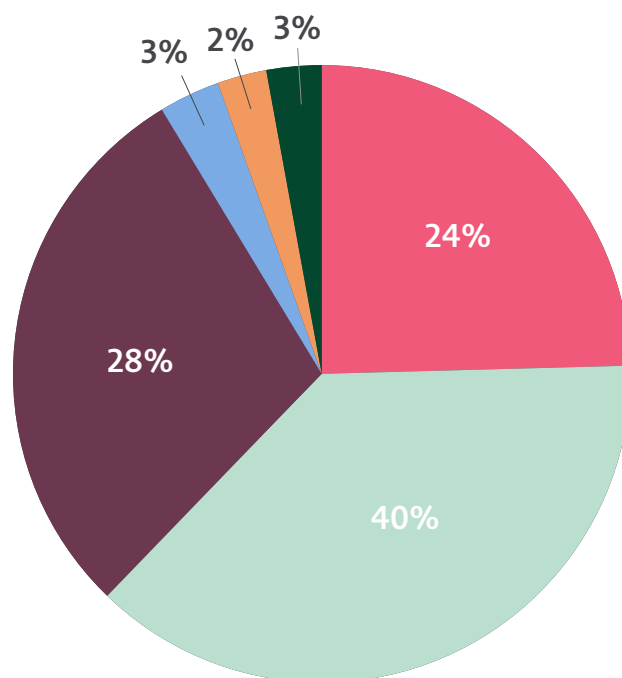
- o 3% personal experience
- o 3% family member experience
- o 13% know someone who has experienced homelessness

While personal and family experience of homelessness shows no significant gender difference, with both males and females reporting 7% and 6%, respectively, the gender gap emerges more clearly in social proximity to homelessness. 20% of female respondents report knowing someone who has experienced homelessness, compared to 15% of males. This suggests that women are more likely to be aware of, or connected to, individuals experiencing homelessness. These findings reflect clear socio-economic disparities. Those in working-class households are more than twice as likely to have experienced homelessness personally than those in middle-class groups. The differences are similarly marked across indicators of indirect experience. This supports wider evidence on the social gradient of housing insecurity and confirms that homelessness remains closely linked to material inequality.

# The seriousness of homelessness in Northern Ireland

## Question 2: In your view, how serious of a problem is homelessness in Northern Ireland?

- Extremely serious
- Very serious
- Moderately serious
- Not that serious
- Not serious at all
- Don't know



The survey findings confirm a strong public recognition of homelessness as a serious issue in Northern Ireland. 92% of respondents view homelessness as serious to some degree: 24% consider it extremely serious, 40% very serious, and 28% moderately serious. This reflects broad concern about the scale and impact of homelessness across the population. A small minority (3%) view homelessness as not very serious or not serious at all, indicating underestimation among a limited segment. A further 3% were unsure or selected "don't know", suggesting a degree of uncertainty or disengagement from the issue.

While the perception of seriousness is widely held, differences emerge by gender. 95% of women view homelessness as serious, compared to 88% of men, with 26% of women identifying it as extremely serious, compared to 21% of men. This points to a slightly stronger intensity of concern among women, potentially linked to greater proximity to those experiencing homelessness, as indicated elsewhere in the findings.

Across age groups, 25–34 year olds are most likely to view homelessness as extremely serious, at 34%, the highest proportion across all cohorts. This may reflect generational concerns about housing access, affordability, and wider socio-economic insecurity.

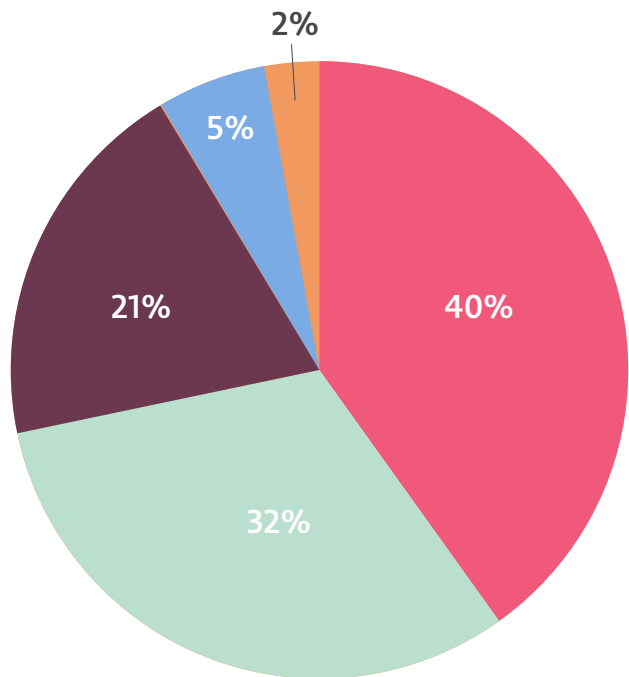
By socio-economic group, perceptions of seriousness are high across all categories, but individuals in the working-class group (C2DE) are more likely to view homelessness as extremely serious, with 28% selecting this option, compared to 18% of the middle-class group (ABC1). This difference may reflect closer lived experience of housing precarity and economic disadvantage, reinforcing the link between class, exposure, and concern.

Overall, the results reflect widespread public concern about homelessness but also suggest that those with closer social or economic proximity to the issue are more likely to perceive its severity in acute terms.

# Scale of Homelessness

## Question 3: How many people do you think are homeless in Northern Ireland?

- 10,000
- 25,000
- 50,000
- 100,000
- 150,000 or more



The survey results show a widespread underestimation of the scale of homelessness in Northern Ireland. The official figure for statutory homelessness in Northern Ireland currently stands at 59,518 people (approximately 1 in 32 individuals). But this doesn't account for the estimated additional 25,000 people outside the system. The true scale of homelessness is therefore likely to be closer to 85,000 people. 40% of respondents believe the number is just 10,000, and 32% estimate it at 25,000. A further 21% think it is 50,000, 5% estimate 100,000, and only 2% believe it to be 150,000 or more. Overall, 93% of the public underestimate the true scale of homelessness, revealing a substantial gap between perception and reality.

This pattern is consistent across demographic groups. There is little difference between men (95%) and women (92%), indicating widespread underestimation of the scale of homelessness.

Across age groups, underestimation rates remain high, 97% among both 18–24 and 55–64 year olds, with the lowest rate still at 88% among 25–34 year olds. By socio-economic group, 92% of middle-class (ABC1), 93% of working-class (C2DE), and 96% of respondents in the 'other' category underestimated homelessness levels.

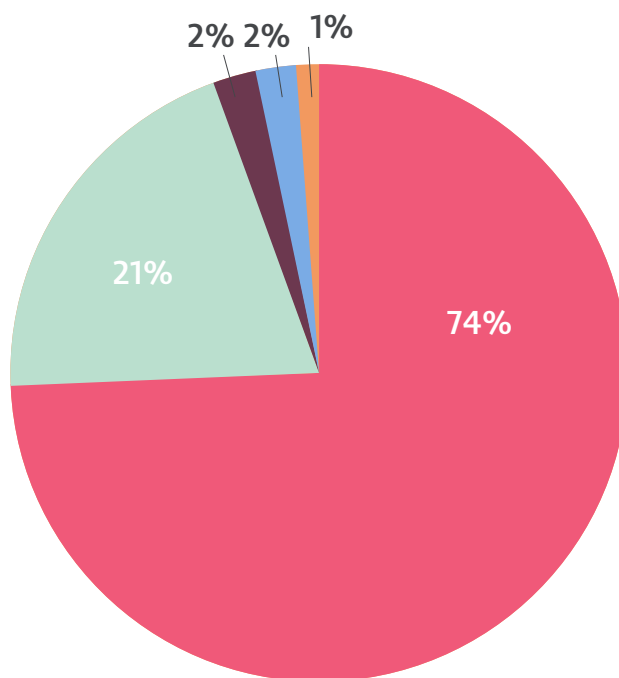
These findings point to a persistent gap between public perception and the actual extent of homelessness in Northern Ireland. This disconnect may shape how urgently the issue is treated in policy and public discourse. It underscores the need for targeted communication strategies to improve awareness and challenge misconceptions about the scale and nature of homelessness.



# Importance of reducing homelessness

## Question 4: How important do you think it is to reduce homelessness in NI?

- Very important
- Quite Important
- Neutral - Neither Important or Unimportant
- Not that important
- Very Unimportant



The survey results demonstrate strong and consistent public support for efforts to reduce homelessness in Northern Ireland. 74% of respondents consider this a very important issue, with a further 21% viewing it as quite important. Only 2% see it as neutral, and another 2% believe it is not that important. Fewer than 1% deem it very unimportant, and no respondents selected “don’t know.” In total, 95% of the population recognise homelessness reduction as an important or very important policy priority. This level of agreement reflects a clear and shared public mandate for action on homelessness.

Gender differences are evident in the intensity of concern. 78% of females selected “very important”, compared to 71% of males, suggesting that women are more likely to perceive homelessness as a critical issue requiring urgent attention.

Age-based analysis shows that support for homelessness reduction increases with age. The 65+ age group reports the highest proportion considering the issue very important (81%), followed by 45–54 (77%), 55–64 (76%), and 25–34 (75%).

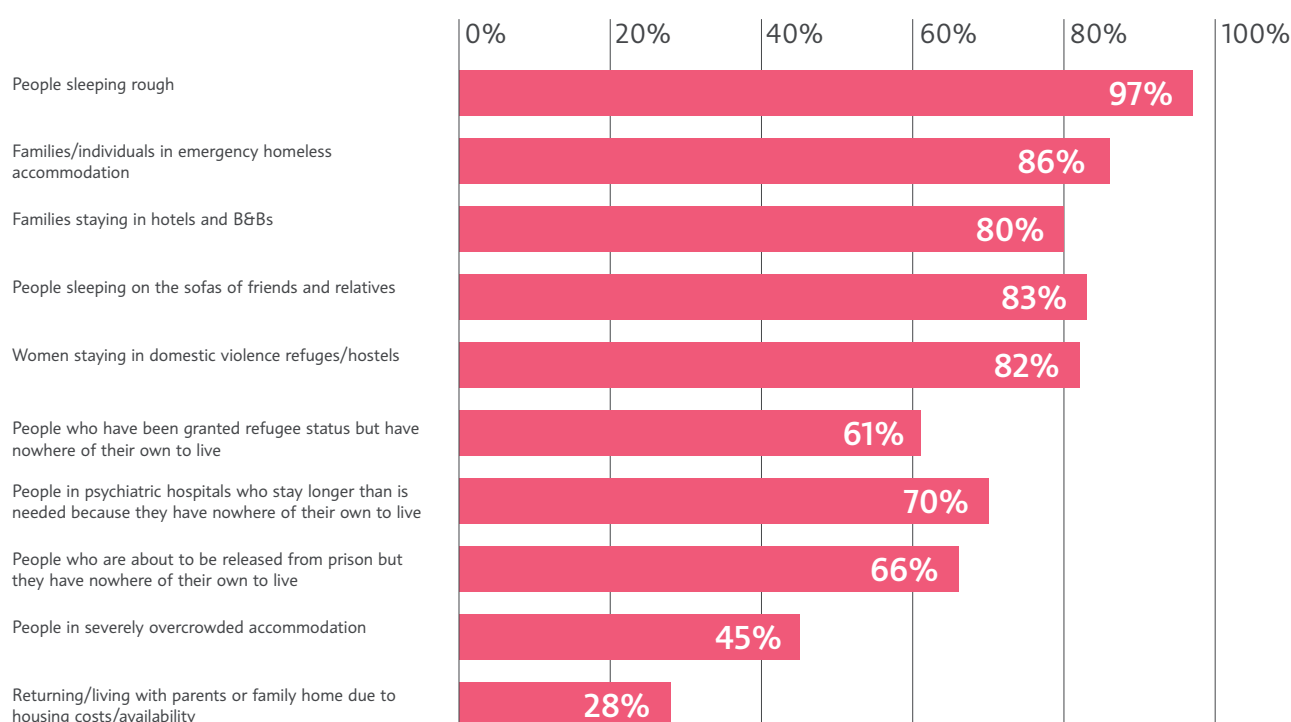
The lowest level of urgency is found among 18–24 year olds, where 66% rate it as very important. While the majority in all groups support action, the variation may reflect generational differences in exposure to or prioritisation of social issues.

Socio-economic background also influences perceptions. The highest level of concern is among those in the ‘other’ group (retired, students, or not in salaried employment), with 79% identifying homelessness reduction as very important. This is followed by working-class (C2DE) respondents at 76%. By contrast, middle-class (ABC1) respondents show comparatively lower concern, with 69% rating it as very important. This variation may reflect differing levels of proximity to housing insecurity and economic vulnerability.

Overall, the data highlights broad public consensus on the need to prioritise homelessness reduction, while also pointing to meaningful differences in intensity of concern across gender, age, and socio-economic group. These findings suggest a strong foundation of public support for policy intervention, but also reinforce the importance of tailoring engagement and messaging to specific demographic groups.

# Understanding Homelessness

**Question 5: When you think of people living in the following circumstances, would you consider them to be homeless or not?**



The survey results reveal a broad and nuanced public understanding of homelessness, one that extends beyond the narrow image of rough sleeping to include a wider spectrum of housing insecurity. 97% of respondents identify people sleeping rough as homeless, reflecting near-universal agreement on the visibility and severity of street homelessness. This finding reinforces the dominant public perception of homelessness as a crisis rooted in extreme deprivation.

## Living in emergency shelters or temporary accommodation

However, the data also shows considerable awareness of less visible forms of homelessness. 86% of respondents recognise families and individuals living in emergency shelters or temporary accommodation as homeless.

This reflects growing public understanding that homelessness is not limited to those on the streets but also includes those in precarious and temporary living arrangements. A clear gender difference emerges: 91% of females view those in temporary accommodation as homeless, compared to 81% of males. This gap may reflect differing levels of social awareness, caregiving roles, or exposure to hidden forms of homelessness.

Differences by age group are also notable. Young people aged 18–24 show the highest level of agreement (94%) that families and individuals staying in emergency homeless accommodation are homeless, suggesting stronger alignment with broader definitions of homelessness.



In contrast, respondents aged 35–44 report the lowest level of agreement at 81%, which may point to more traditional or limited perceptions of what constitutes homelessness among this cohort.

Across socio-economic groups, both middle-class (ABC1) and working-class (C2DE) respondents show strong agreement at 87%, while agreement is lower among those in the 'other' group (retired, students, or non-salaried individuals), at 82%. This may reflect differing levels of proximity to housing services or varying interpretations of state-supported accommodation.

### **Families staying in hotels or B&Bs**

80% of respondents agree that families staying in hotels or B&Bs due to a lack of permanent housing should be considered homeless. Gender differences are evident: 84% of women recognise this situation as homelessness compared to 76% of men, indicating that women may be more attuned to hidden or family-based forms of housing exclusion.

When analysed by age, 18–24 year olds demonstrate the highest level of agreement, with 94% viewing families in hotels or B&Bs as homeless. This sharply contrasts with the 35–44 year old group, where only 75% hold this view, the lowest across all age groups. This generational gap may reflect differing levels of exposure to precarious housing or varying interpretations of what constitutes homelessness.

By socio-economic group, 82% of middle-class (ABC1) respondents agree that families in hotels and B&Bs are homeless, compared to 79% of working-class (C2DE) respondents and 78% in the 'other' category (retired, students, or non-salaried). While agreement is high across all groups, the slightly higher figure among middle-class respondents may reflect increased awareness of housing definitions, media framing, or policy language.

### **Sleeping on the sofas of friends or relatives**

83% of respondents agree that people sleeping on the sofas of friends or relatives due to having nowhere else to live should be considered homeless. This reflects growing public recognition of hidden homelessness, a form of housing exclusion that lacks visibility but carries significant social and emotional consequences. Unlike rough sleeping, sofa surfing often falls outside formal homelessness statistics, making public understanding of its impact especially important.

Gender differences show that 85% of women recognise this situation as homelessness, compared to 80% of men, suggesting women may be more aware of informal and less visible forms of housing precarity. By age, the highest level of agreement comes from 18–24 year olds at 89%, indicating that younger people may be more exposed to or familiar with sofa surfing, possibly through peers or lived experience. The 35–44 year old group again shows the lowest agreement, at 79%, consistent with other findings where this cohort appears less likely to recognise less visible forms of homelessness.

In terms of socio-economic background, views are relatively consistent among working-class (C2DE) and middle-class (ABC1) respondents, both at 84%, with a slight drop to 79% among those in the 'other' group (retired, students, or non-salaried). This suggests broad consensus across economic groups, although marginally lower recognition among those outside of the workforce may reflect reduced engagement with contemporary housing dynamics.

### **Women staying in domestic violence refuges or hostels**

82% of respondents consider women staying in domestic violence refuges or hostels to be homeless, reflecting growing recognition of the intersection between homelessness and domestic abuse. This is a critical but frequently underexamined dimension of the homelessness crisis, where the need for physical safety coexists with the absence of stable, permanent housing.

A notable gender disparity emerges: 88% of females agree that this situation constitutes homelessness, compared to 77% of males. This gap may reflect differing levels of awareness or exposure to gender-based violence and its consequences for housing.

By age group, agreement is highest among 45–54 year olds (88%), while the 18–24 year old cohort shows the lowest recognition, at 75%. This age-related variation may signal generational differences in understanding domestic violence as a housing issue or in recognising institutional settings like refuges as part of the homelessness system.

Across socio-economic groups, perceptions are relatively aligned: 84% of working-class (C2DE) and 83% of middle-class (ABC1) respondents agree with this classification. Agreement falls slightly among

those in the 'other' category (retired, students, or non-salaried), at 79%, which may reflect lower levels of direct engagement with domestic abuse services or less exposure to gendered housing precarity.

### Refugee Status

When asked whether individuals granted refugee status but without permanent accommodation should be considered homeless, 61% of respondents agreed. This indicates a moderate level of public recognition that housing exclusion can persist despite formal legal protection. However, the fact that nearly 4 in 10 respondents did not view this as homelessness suggests a limited understanding of the housing precarity or housing entitlements that refugees often face.

Gender differences were notable: 65% of women considered this situation to be homelessness, compared to 56% of men. This may reflect stronger alignment among women with broader, more inclusive definitions of homelessness, particularly where displacement and vulnerability are concerned.

Age-based variation was also evident. Agreement was highest among 18–24-year-olds (76%), indicating greater support among younger cohorts for recognising refugee housing exclusion as homelessness. In contrast, only 56% of those aged 35–44 agreed, suggesting generational differences in how displacement and state responsibility are perceived.

Socioeconomic status further shaped responses. Among middle-class respondents (ABC1), 67% agreed that refugees without housing should be considered homeless, compared to just 54% of working-class respondents (C2DE).

### Leaving Institutions

70% of respondents agreed that individuals remaining in psychiatric hospitals longer than necessary due to the lack of permanent housing should be considered homeless. This reflects a growing public awareness of the intersection between mental health systems and housing insecurity, and recognition that discharge without accommodation constitutes structural exclusion.

Gender differences were clear: 74% of women supported this view compared to 66% of men.

By age, the highest agreement came from 18–24-year-olds (87%), while support was lowest among those aged 35–44 (61%). These patterns suggest younger cohorts may hold broader definitions of homelessness and a stronger understanding of institutional pathways into housing precarity.

Socioeconomic background also influenced views. Among middle-class respondents (ABC1), 72% recognised extended hospital stays due to housing barriers as homelessness, compared to 67% of working-class respondents (C2DE). Lower recognition among working-class participants may reflect different experiences with mental health services or varying conceptions of institutional care.

When asked whether people leaving prison without secure housing should be classified as homeless, 66% agreed. This indicates moderate public recognition that the justice system can contribute to housing instability, particularly when post-release reintegration is unsupported by appropriate accommodation.

Again, women were more likely to agree than men (70% vs. 62%). Support was highest among 18–24-year-olds (73%) and lowest among those aged 65 and over (60%), reflecting generational differences in attitudes toward rehabilitation and reintegration.

Socioeconomic differences were minimal: 65% of working-class (C2DE) respondents, 68% of middle-class (ABC1), and 64% of those in the 'other' category supported this view. While overall agreement is relatively high, the slightly lower support for prison leavers compared to hospital discharges may reflect persistent moral judgements around criminality. The lower recognition of housing need in this context may signal a distinction in how the public perceives 'deservingness' based on institutional background.

These findings underscore that while the public increasingly acknowledges institutional settings as potential sites of hidden homelessness, levels of recognition vary by gender, age, and class. The data highlight the need for public education and policy action on institutional discharge pathways, especially in health and justice sectors, where inadequate housing support can entrench cycles of exclusion and further marginalise those most vulnerable to institutional cycling.

### Overcrowding

Recognition of severe overcrowding as a form of homelessness is more limited. 45% of respondents consider people living in severely overcrowded accommodation to be homeless. While this reflects a broader public interpretation that extends beyond street homelessness, the relatively low level of agreement suggests that many still underestimate the severity of overcrowding and its impact on health, privacy, and overall quality of life.

Gender differences are evident: 49% of females recognise overcrowding as homelessness compared to 40% of males, indicating a greater tendency among women to acknowledge hidden or less visible forms of housing need. By age, the highest level of agreement is found among 25–34 year olds (48%), possibly reflecting lived experience or greater awareness of housing affordability challenges in this life stage. 18–24 year olds report the lowest agreement at 39%, which may reflect lower exposure to overcrowding as a housing issue or a narrower understanding of homelessness.

Socioeconomic differences are modest but present. Both working-class (C2DE) and middle-class (ABC1) respondents report similar agreement levels (45–47%), suggesting some shared understanding of overcrowding across class lines. However, agreement falls to 40% among those in the 'other' group (retired, students, or non-salaried), which may indicate less direct engagement with the issue or differing housing expectations.

### Returning to family home

Only 28% of respondents consider adults returning to live with their parents or family due to housing costs or unavailability to be homeless. This relatively low level of agreement suggests that this form of housing precarity is less widely recognised as homelessness, likely due to cultural norms and perceptions that frame returning to the family home as a temporary or acceptable solution rather than a marker of exclusion.

However, such situations often reflect a lack of genuine housing choice and autonomy, particularly in the context of inflated rents and limited housing supply.

Gender differences were notable: 32% of females identified this as homelessness compared to 24% of males, indicating that women may be more likely to interpret economic dependency and constrained housing options as forms of housing insecurity.

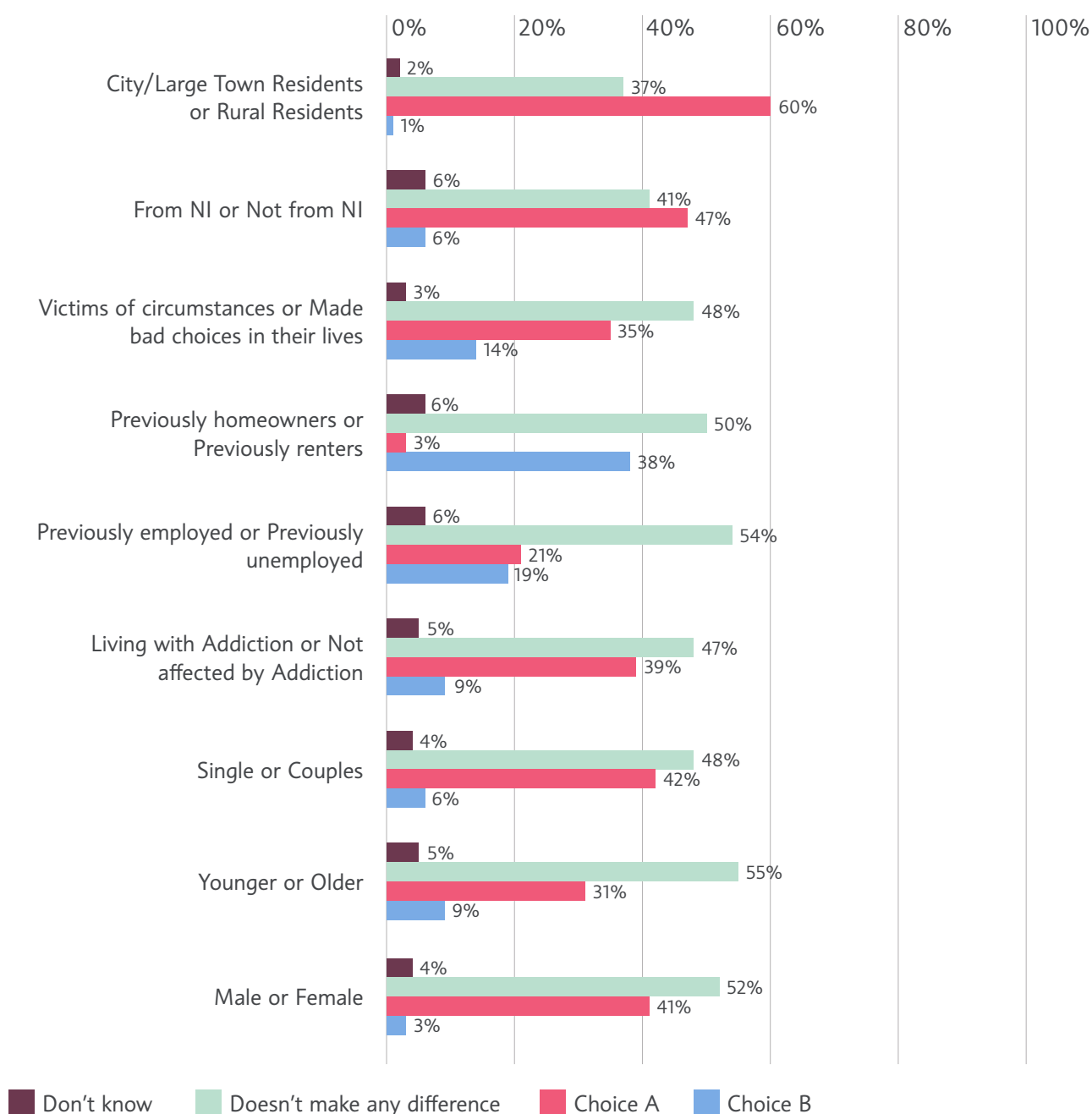
By age, 55–64 year olds showed the highest level of agreement (34%), possibly reflecting concern for adult children or intergenerational housing pressures. In contrast, only 11% of 18–24 year olds agreed, despite being the group most likely to be affected. This may indicate normalisation of the experience within their age cohort, or a reluctance to view their own situation as homelessness. There was no notable difference relating to socio economic group.

Only 1% of respondents selected "None of the above", indicating a strong consensus on what constitutes homelessness. These findings show that while there is significant public understanding of the various forms of homelessness, the concept of overcrowded accommodation and the return to parental homes remain contentious. The results underscore the need for continued education to broaden the definition of homelessness, including precarious housing situations that may not fit traditional, visible models of homelessness but have equally damaging effects on individuals and families.

# Understanding of Homelessness - Demographic

This poll examines public perceptions of the demographics and circumstances of people experiencing homelessness, presenting a series of comparative statements (Choice A vs. Choice B) about common stereotypes associated with homelessness.

## Question 6: When you think about people who are homeless, do you think the majority of them are?



The survey results reveal important insights into the public's perceptions of the demographics and causes of homelessness in Northern Ireland, reflecting both broad awareness and significant biases.

### Male Vs Female

A notable gender bias is evident in public perceptions of homelessness. 41% of respondents associate homelessness primarily with males, while only 3% associate it with females. The majority, 52%, selected "Doesn't Make Any Difference", indicating some recognition that homelessness affects all genders. However, the stark imbalance suggests that homelessness is still overwhelmingly perceived as a male issue, despite substantial evidence of gender-specific pathways into homelessness, including domestic abuse, economic dependency, and family breakdown, which disproportionately affect women.

Perceptions differ further by gender of respondent. 46% of males believe homelessness is predominantly a male issue, compared to 36% of females, suggesting that women are more likely to acknowledge the broader gendered dimensions of homelessness.

Age differences also emerge. Among 18–24 year olds, 48% believe homelessness mainly affects men, the highest across all age groups. In contrast, only 36% of those aged 55–64 hold this view, possibly reflecting a more developed understanding of homelessness over the life course, or differing generational attitudes toward gender roles.

A significant difference is also observed across socio-economic groups. 46% of middle-class (ABC1) respondents believe homelessness primarily affects men, compared to just 34% of working-class (C2DE) respondents. This may suggest that those in more advantaged socio-economic positions are more likely to rely on visible or stereotypical representations of homelessness, while those closer to the issue may have a more diverse understanding shaped by lived or proximate experience.

Overall, while over half of respondents acknowledge that homelessness affects all genders, entrenched assumptions about masculinity and visibility continue to shape public understanding. These perceptions risk obscuring women's homelessness, particularly forms that are hidden or institutionalised, and highlight the need for gender-informed public education and service design.

### Age of People Experiencing Homelessness

When asked whether homelessness primarily affects younger or older individuals, 31% of respondents associated it with younger people, while just 9% identified it as affecting older individuals. A majority, 55%, selected "Doesn't Make Any Difference," reflecting broad recognition that homelessness can occur at any stage of life. However, the stronger association with youth suggests that younger individuals remain more visible in public narratives, likely due to their higher presence in street-based or service-connected contexts.

There was no significant gender difference: around one-third of both male and female respondents associated homelessness with younger people. The most marked age-related variation appeared among 18–24-year-olds. In this group, 39% viewed homelessness as affecting younger people, and 23% identified it as affecting older people, both figures notably higher than in other age groups. In contrast, across other age brackets, around one-third associated homelessness with youth, while only 4–9% saw it as primarily impacting older adults. This suggests younger respondents may be more attuned to age diversity in homelessness or more exposed to narratives of youth housing insecurity. It also reflects a broader trend of under recognition of homelessness among older adults, whose experiences are often less visible and more closely tied to isolation, declining health, and income insecurity.

Socioeconomic status further shaped perceptions. Only 25% of working-class (C2DE) respondents believed homelessness mostly affects younger people, compared to 36% of middle-class (ABC1) respondents. These differences may reflect varying levels of exposure to youth housing precarity or differing assumptions about who is most vulnerable to homelessness.

Overall, while there is a growing public understanding that homelessness can affect individuals of all ages, the emphasis continues to be placed on youth. The relative invisibility of older adults experiencing homelessness, despite their increasing numbers and heightened vulnerability, highlights the need for a more inclusive public framing and policy focus that considers homelessness as a life-course issue.

### Single vs Couples

42% of respondents associate homelessness with single individuals, while 6% believe it affects couples or families. 48% selected "Doesn't Make Any Difference", indicating that homelessness is largely perceived as an individualised experience. This framing risks overlooking the distinct and often complex challenges that families face when homeless, including the need for larger, stable housing, access to childcare, and income adequacy.

When disaggregated by gender, 45% of men believe homelessness primarily affects single people, compared to 38% of women. This may suggest that women are slightly more likely to recognise the presence of couples or families within the homeless population, potentially linked to greater awareness of family instability, domestic violence, or child welfare concerns as drivers of homelessness.

By age, the view that homelessness primarily affects single individuals is most pronounced among 18–24 year olds (56%), with agreement declining significantly among 45–54 year olds, where only 32% hold this view. This variation may reflect age-based differences in assumptions about household formation, visibility of homelessness among peers, or exposure to family homelessness.

Differences also emerge by socio-economic group. 35% of working-class (C2DE) respondents view homelessness as primarily affecting single people, compared to 45% of middle-class (ABC1) respondents and 47% in the 'other' group (retired, students, or non-salaried). These differences could reflect varying levels of proximity to family homelessness or differing assumptions about the structure of housing precarity.

Overall, these findings highlight the dominance of an individual-centric view of homelessness in public perception. While this aligns with the visibility of lone individuals in street settings or emergency accommodation, it risks rendering family homelessness less visible and less prioritised, despite its growing prevalence and the unique vulnerabilities it involves. Greater public and policy recognition of family homelessness is needed to ensure responses reflect the full spectrum of housing need.

### Public Perceptions of Addiction and Homelessness

Public perceptions continue to strongly associate addiction with homelessness. 39% of respondents linked the two, while only 9% associated

homelessness with people not affected by addiction. Nearly half (47%) selected "Doesn't Make Any Difference." This indicates that although addiction remains a dominant explanatory frame, a significant portion of the public recognises the complexity of homelessness and rejects singular explanations.

The persistence of this association reflects the enduring stereotype that homelessness results from personal failings, particularly substance misuse. However, the high proportion of respondents who did not make a definitive link suggests growing awareness of structural causes such as poverty, unaffordable housing, and systemic disadvantage.

Gender differences were evident. 43% of men believed homelessness is primarily linked to addiction, compared to 36% of women. This may suggest women are more likely to consider a wider range of contributing factors beyond individual behaviour. Age-based differences were more pronounced. Among 18–24-year-olds, 66% believed most people who are homeless are affected by addiction. This contrasts sharply with the 55–64 age group, where only 30% held this view. The gap suggests generational differences in how addiction is understood or in levels of exposure to visible homelessness involving substance use.

Across socio-economic groups, perceptions were relatively consistent:

- 36% of working-class (C2DE) respondents associated homelessness with addiction,
- 41% of middle-class (ABC1),
- and 42% of those in the 'other' category (retired, students, and non-salaried individuals).

Overall, while addiction remains prominent in public thinking, the findings suggest a shift away from purely individualised explanations toward greater recognition of structural and systemic drivers of homelessness. Nonetheless, the strength of the addiction narrative, particularly among younger respondents, highlights the continued need for public education to challenge reductive stereotypes and promote a more accurate understanding of homelessness.



## Perceptions of Employment Status and Homelessness

Public perceptions reflect a shifting understanding of the relationship between employment and homelessness. While 19% of respondents associated homelessness with individuals who were previously unemployed, 21% believed it affected those who had been employed. A majority (54%) selected “Doesn’t Make Any Difference,” suggesting growing recognition that homelessness is not exclusively linked to joblessness. This aligns with increased public awareness of structural drivers such as insecure work, low wages, rising housing costs, and limited social protections.

Across gender, socio-economic background, and most age groups, the dominant view was that employment history is not a determining factor. Between 52% and 61% across these groups selected “Doesn’t Make Any Difference.” The notable exception was among 18–24-year-olds, where only 23% held this view. Instead, 39% in this age group associated homelessness with prior unemployment, and 26% with prior employment. This may reflect stronger exposure to narratives that individualise homelessness or greater visibility of street homelessness among those out of work.

The 25–34 age group showed an inverse pattern: 27% associated homelessness with prior employment, and only 14% with unemployment. This may reflect greater awareness of in-work poverty and housing exclusion, particularly among younger adults navigating insecure labour markets and unaffordable housing.

Gender differences were minimal. Among women, 19% associated homelessness with prior employment and 18% with unemployment. Among men, the figures were 23% and 21%, respectively. These patterns suggest a broad consensus across genders that employment status alone does not protect against homelessness.

No significant variation emerged across socio-economic groups. Perceptions were consistent, with most recognising that homelessness can affect people regardless of work history.

Overall, the findings indicate a move away from simplistic assumptions that equate homelessness with unemployment. While joblessness remains a factor for some, there is increasing public recognition

that structural economic insecurity, such as low pay, unstable contracts, and unaffordable housing, can lead to homelessness even among those in work. This points to the need for policy responses that link housing provision to labour market reforms, recognising the interconnected nature of employment conditions and housing stability.

## Perception of Housing Status and Homelessness

When asked whether people experiencing homelessness are more likely to have been homeowners or renters, public responses reflected a recognition of housing precarity across tenure types. Only 3% of respondents associated homelessness with former homeowners, while 38% linked it to former renters. Notably, 50% selected “Doesn’t Make Any Difference,” suggesting a growing awareness that both renters and homeowners can be vulnerable to homelessness, particularly in contexts of eviction or financial instability.

This view reflects an evolving public understanding that housing history is not a protective factor in itself, and that homelessness can follow sudden or cumulative economic shocks, regardless of tenure status.

Gender differences were negligible, indicating a shared perception across men and women regarding the relationship between prior housing status and homelessness.

By age, significant variation emerges. 18–24 year olds were the most likely to associate homelessness with prior renting, with 68% holding this view. In contrast, only 29% of those aged 65 and over believed homelessness primarily affects former renters. Additionally, only 25% of 18–24 year olds said that housing history made no difference, compared with 59% of 55–64 year olds, suggesting older respondents are more likely to hold an inclusive view of housing pathways into homelessness. At the same time, younger people may focus more narrowly on renting as the main risk.

By socio-economic status, the view that homelessness primarily affects former renters was held by:

- 35% of respondents in the ‘other’ group (retired, students, non-salaried),
- 37% of working-class (C2DE) respondents,
- 40% of middle-class (ABC1) respondents.



These variations are relatively modest, indicating a general consensus that renters are more vulnerable, but also that tenure is not the sole determinant of housing insecurity.

Overall, the findings highlight a maturing public understanding that homelessness is not confined to one type of housing history. While renters are more readily associated with housing instability, there is increasing recognition that homeowners are not immune, especially amid rising living costs, interest rates, insecure incomes, and a lack of safety nets. The results underscore the need for policies that address housing insecurity across the tenure spectrum, ensuring that interventions do not narrowly target one group at the expense of others facing similar risks.

### Perceptions of Victimhood and Personal Responsibility

Public opinion reflects a mixed but evolving understanding of the causes of homelessness. 35% of respondents view homelessness as the result of individuals being victims of circumstance, while 14% attribute it to bad personal choices. A further 48% selected "Doesn't Make Any Difference", suggesting widespread recognition that homelessness is shaped by multiple intersecting factors, rather than easily assigned to individual fault. These include structural forces such as economic hardship, insecure housing, trauma, and system-level failures, which often lie beyond individual control.

The data points to a public shift away from simplistic, moralistic narratives. While just over a third directly acknowledge structural victimhood, the high proportion of respondents choosing "no difference" suggests an awareness that homelessness cannot be reduced to one type of story or cause. It reflects a degree of pragmatism and, potentially, uncertainty, but it also signals that the space is there for more nuanced public conversations about the drivers of homelessness.

Gender differences are pronounced. Only 10% of females believe homelessness results from bad choices, compared to 18% of males. This may reflect women's greater proximity to experiences of structural vulnerability, such as gender-based violence, lone parenthood, or informal caregiving, that are often overlooked in individualised accounts of homelessness.

Socioeconomic background also appears to shape interpretation. Just 10% of working-class respondents associate homelessness with bad choices, compared to 18% of middle-class respondents. Those closer to economic insecurity may better recognise the external pressures that lead to housing loss, whereas middle-class respondents may be more inclined to adopt personal-responsibility frameworks, possibly reflecting greater distance from these realities.

By age, younger respondents are more likely to maintain blame-oriented views. Among 18–24 year olds, 19% attribute homelessness to bad choices, the highest across age groups, compared to 12% among 45–54 year olds. This suggests that dominant individualistic narratives may still have traction among younger people, potentially shaped by media, education, or limited direct exposure to homelessness.

Overall, the findings highlight a critical moment in public understanding. While a sizeable portion of the population still views homelessness through a moral lens, a larger share of those who reject a binary explanation or affirm structural causes reflects a growing openness to more complex interpretations. These attitudes provide a foundation for shifting public discourse and policy towards systemic responses rather than ones that centre individual fault.

### Perceptions of Homelessness and Place of Origin

When asked whether homelessness is more likely to affect individuals from Northern Ireland or from elsewhere, 47% of respondents associated it with people from Northern Ireland, while only 6% linked it to those not originally from Northern Ireland. A further 41% selected "Doesn't Make Any Difference", indicating that most respondents either view homelessness as a local issue or believe that place of origin is irrelevant to the experience of housing exclusion.

Disaggregated data reveals important demographic variations. Among females, 43% believed that people experiencing homelessness are from Northern Ireland, compared to 51% of males, suggesting that men are more likely to perceive homelessness as a locally rooted issue. At the same time, 7% of males believed homelessness affects those not from Northern Ireland, compared to 4% of females, indicating that men are also more likely to associate homelessness with people from outside the region.

This dual tendency may reflect a broader perception among men that homelessness is widespread and affects multiple groups.

Age differences also shape perceptions. Among respondents aged 35–44, 41% believed people experiencing homelessness are from Northern Ireland. This rises to 51% among those aged 65 and over, suggesting that older respondents may be more inclined to see homelessness as a locally embedded issue, possibly shaped by different generational experiences with migration and housing access.

Differences by socio-economic group are more modest but still notable. The belief that people experiencing homelessness are not from Northern Ireland was held by 4% of working-class (C2DE) respondents, 6% of middle-class (ABC1) respondents, and 7% of those in the 'other' group (retired, students, or non-salaried). While these numbers are small, they may reflect varying levels of concern about migration or perceived competition for public resources across socio-economic lines.

Overall, these findings challenge broader narratives that position homelessness as primarily driven by migration. The dominant public view in Northern Ireland is that homelessness affects people from within the region, though a small minority continues to associate it with outsiders. The sizeable proportion of respondents selecting "Doesn't Make Any Difference" reinforces the view that homelessness is a structural issue, shaped by poverty, housing stress, and systemic barriers, regardless of origin. These insights provide a useful foundation for promoting inclusive, evidence-based responses that avoid reinforcing exclusionary or misinformed beliefs.

### Perceptions of Urban vs. Rural Homelessness

Public understanding of homelessness remains strongly urban-centric. 60% of respondents believe that people experiencing homelessness are more likely to be residents of cities or large towns, while only 1% associate homelessness with rural areas. A further 37% selected "Doesn't Make Any Difference", indicating that while homelessness is widely seen as an urban issue, a significant minority recognise it as a problem affecting all types of communities.

This disparity in perception likely stems from the visibility of street homelessness in urban centres, where rough sleeping, service hubs, and public encounters with homelessness are more common.

By contrast, rural homelessness, often hidden in nature through sofa surfing, overcrowding, or insecure accommodation, is less likely to be seen and therefore less likely to be acknowledged.

By gender, 64% of men and 55% of women linked homelessness with urban areas, suggesting men are more likely to adopt the dominant narrative of homelessness as a visible, city-based issue. Among age groups, the perception is particularly strong in the 18–24 year olds, where 89% believed homelessness primarily affects city or large town residents, and 0% selected rural areas. Similarly, among 45–54 year olds, 50% associated homelessness with urban areas, with 0% selecting rural, and the remainder believed location made no difference.

By socio-economic group, 65% of middle-class (ABC1) respondents associated homelessness with urban areas, compared to 53% of working-class (C2DE) respondents. This gap may reflect differences in proximity to visible homelessness, reliance on services, or exposure to media representations that centre cities.

Overall, the data highlights a significant under-recognition of rural homelessness, with only 1% explicitly identifying it as a concern. While 37% acknowledge that homelessness can occur in both urban and rural settings, the overwhelming association with cities suggests that rural homelessness remains largely invisible in public discourse. These findings point to the need for greater visibility, research, and policy focus on non-urban forms of housing exclusion, ensuring that responses are not skewed toward urban areas alone.

### Overall Commentary

The survey findings reflect an increasingly nuanced public understanding of homelessness, with growing recognition that it affects people across genders, age groups, family situations, housing histories, and geographical locations. There is evidence that many respondents recognise hidden and less visible forms of homelessness, including those in temporary accommodation, sofa surfing, or fleeing domestic abuse, indicating movement away from narrow, street-focused definitions.

However, stereotypical assumptions persist. Homelessness continues to be most strongly associated with men, younger people, single individuals, and those living in urban areas.



While these associations reflect certain realities of visible homelessness, they risk obscuring the diverse pathways into homelessness, including those affecting older adults, women, and families, whose experiences may be less visible or institutionally embedded.

The frequent selection of “Doesn’t Make Any Difference” across several demographic categories suggests a degree of conceptual openness among the public. Yet this may also indicate uncertainty or lack of detailed knowledge, rather than a clearly held inclusive view. Notably, associations with addiction remain prominent, signalling the continued influence of individualised explanations, even as more complex understandings gain ground.

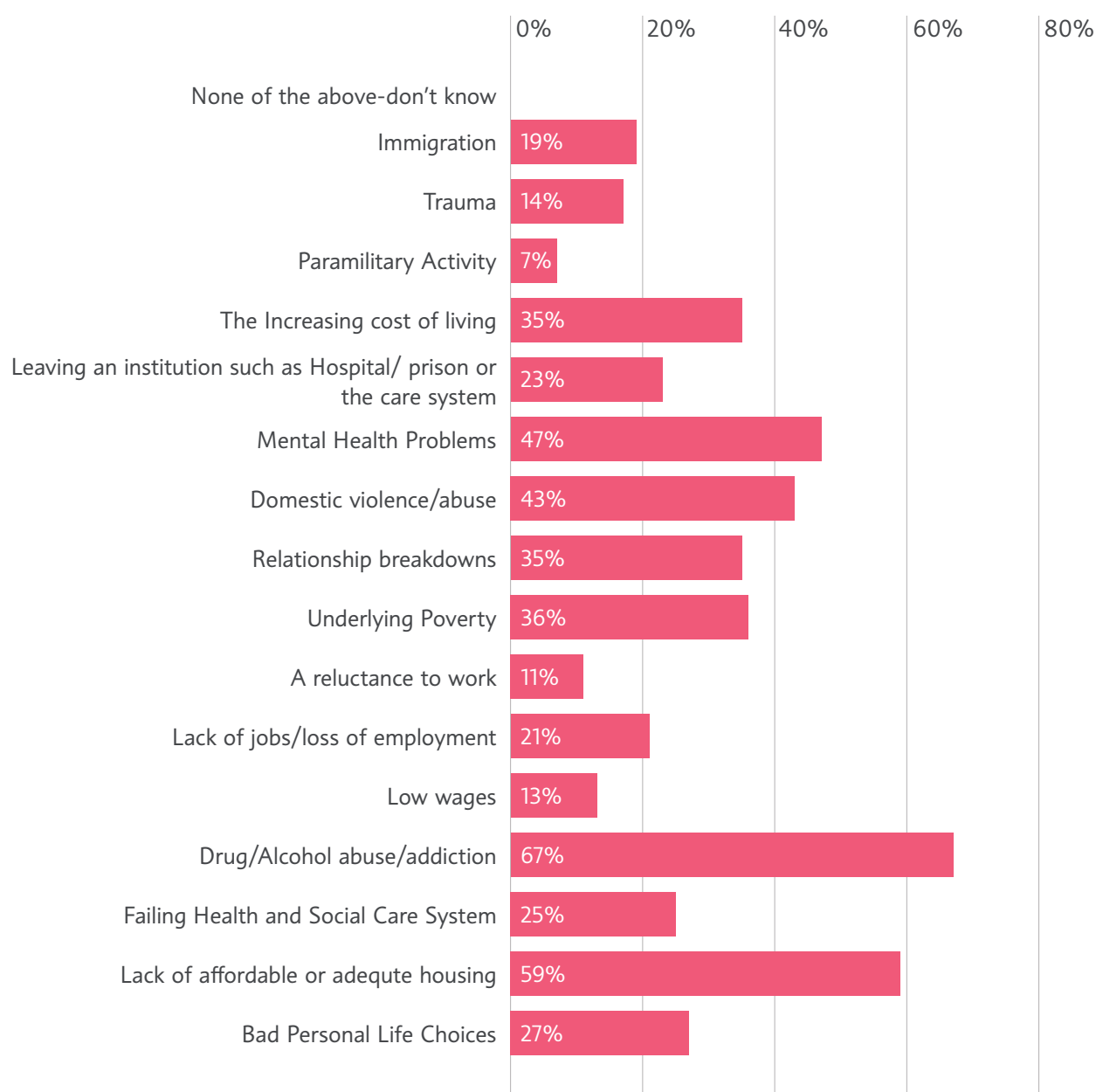
These findings underscore the need for targeted public education, awareness-raising campaigns, and policy communication that reflect the full spectrum of homelessness experiences. Challenging persistent stereotypes, particularly those tied to age, gender, and family status, and addressing the under-recognised forms of homelessness in rural areas, among older people, and in institutional settings will be essential for shaping responses that are both inclusive and evidence-based.



# Factors contributing to homelessness

This section of the poll identifies the public's perceptions of the main factors contributing to homelessness in Northern Ireland. Respondents were asked to select up to five factors they believe cause homelessness.

## Question 7: In your view, which of the following are the main factors that cause homelessness in Northern Ireland?



### Substance Use and Homelessness

A strong association between addiction and homelessness persists, with 67% of respondents identifying drug or alcohol abuse as a primary cause. This perception remains consistent across age groups (64–65%), with the highest agreement among those aged 65+ (73%). By socioeconomic status, 64% of working-class (C2DE) respondents supported this view, increasing to 72% among the 'other' category (retired, students, non-salaried).

While this perception aligns with entrenched stereotypes linking homelessness to personal failings, it overlooks broader structural causes such as poverty and housing exclusion. Despite widespread support for this view, there is a need to challenge reductionist narratives that limit the understanding of homelessness to substance misuse.

### Housing Affordability

A lack of affordable and adequate housing was identified by 59% of respondents as a significant cause of homelessness. This reflects growing public recognition of structural drivers. Gender differences were present: 64% of females agreed, compared to 55% of males. Support was most substantial among those aged 25–34 (67%) and lowest among the 45–54 age group (49%). There was a slight variation in Socioeconomic groups, with 61% of working-class (C2DE) and 56% of middle-class (ABC1) respondents identifying this as a cause.

Although public focus on affordability is increasing, it may not fully capture the influence of policy failures, such as the shortage of social housing and the impact of the private rental market.

### Mental Health

47% of respondents cited mental health issues as a contributing factor. Women were slightly more likely to identify this as a cause (50%) than men (45%). Age differences were modest, with agreement ranging from 45% (35–44) to 52% (45–54). Socioeconomic variation was negligible.

Although mental health is recognised more than some other structural causes, it remains underemphasised compared to addiction, suggesting a continued gap in public understanding of its role in homelessness.

### Domestic Violence and Abuse

Domestic violence or abuse was identified as a cause by 43% of respondents. Women were more likely to agree (46%) than men (40%).

Awareness increased with age, from just 26% among 18–24-year-olds to 55% among those aged 55+. Socioeconomically, 39% of middle-class (ABC1) and 41% of working-class (C2DE) respondents identified this cause, rising to 53% in the 'other' group.

Despite its significance, particularly for women, domestic abuse remains underrepresented in public discourse around homelessness.

### Underlying Poverty

Only 36% of respondents identified poverty as a cause of homelessness. There was minimal gender difference (35% of females vs. 38% of males). The highest agreement was among 35–44-year-olds (42%), dropping to 32% for those aged 55+. By socioeconomic status, 37% of working-class (C2DE) and 38% of middle-class (ABC1) respondents agreed, with 32% in the 'other' group.

These figures suggest poverty's role in homelessness is under-recognised, despite being a key structural driver.

### Health and Social Care System

Just 25% of respondents linked a failing health and social care system to homelessness. Gender differences were slight (26% of females, 23% of males). Younger respondents (18–24) were most likely to support this view (31%), while those aged 55–64 were least likely (21%). Around a quarter of each socioeconomic group agreed.

This low level of recognition suggests that systemic gaps in support services are not widely understood as contributors to homelessness.

### Relationship Breakdown

35% of respondents identified relationship breakdown as a cause. Women were more likely to agree (37%) than men (33%). Only 7% of 18–24-year-olds saw this as a main factor, compared to 48% of those aged 65+, indicating increasing recognition with age. Agreement was consistent across working-class and middle-class respondents (33%), rising to 40% in the 'other' group.

While relationship breakdown is a common pathway into homelessness (as noted in NIHE data) public awareness remains moderate.



### Cost of Living

35% of respondents identified the rising cost of living as a cause of homelessness. Gender differences were negligible (36% of females; 35% of males). Agreement was highest among 35–44-year-olds (44%) and lowest among those aged 65+ (26%). By socio-economic group, 44% of working-class respondents identified it as a cause, compared to 34% of middle-class and 23% of those in the 'other' category.

While cost of living pressures are acknowledged by a portion of the public, the issue remains under-recognised relative to other structural factors. The results suggest that, despite its relevance, public understanding of economic strain as a pathway into homelessness is not yet widespread or prioritised across all groups.

### Low Wages

Low wages were identified as a cause by only 13% of respondents. Men were more likely to agree (17%) than women (9%). The highest support came from 18–24-year-olds (24%), dropping to 7% among those 65+. Both working- and middle-class respondents reported 14% agreement, compared to 10% of the 'other' group. This limited recognition may reflect an underappreciation of in-work poverty as a driver of homelessness.

### Institutional Discharge

Leaving institutions such as hospitals, prisons, or the care system was identified as a cause by 23% of respondents. Gender variation was notable: 30% of women agreed, compared to 15% of men. Most age groups showed similar levels of support in the high 20s, except for the 25–34 group, where only 9% agreed. Among socioeconomic groups, 17% of working-class (C2DE), 24% of middle-class (ABC1), and 28% of the 'other' category recognised this as a cause. Despite growing awareness, the link between institutional discharge and homelessness remains under-recognised.

### Bad Life Choices

27% of respondents attributed homelessness to bad personal life choices. This belief was more common among men (33%) than women (21%). By age, 30% of both 18–24 and 35–44-year-olds held this view, compared to 23% of those aged 55–64.

This reflects the persistence of individualised explanations, despite strong evidence of structural causes

### Unemployment

Lack of jobs/ loss of employment was identified as a cause by 21% of respondents. Men were slightly more likely to agree (23%) than women (19%). Among 18–24-year-olds, 49% saw this as a key factor, over twice the rate of other age groups such as 35–44 (16%). By socioeconomic group, 22% of working-class (C2DE), 18% of middle-class (ABC1), and 25% of the 'other' group agreed. Despite being a key structural factor, unemployment ranks lower than addiction or housing costs in public perception.

### Reluctance to Work

Only 11% of respondents cited reluctance to work as a cause. Men were more likely to agree (15%) than women (7%). Agreement peaked at 23% among 18–24-year-olds and dropped to 7% among those aged 45–64. By socioeconomic group, 7% of working-class, 15% of middle-class, and 11% of the 'other' group supported this view.

This reflects a lingering stereotype but limited public support overall.

### Trauma

Trauma was identified as a cause by just 14% of respondents. Women were more likely to agree (16%) than men (11%). The 25–34 age group showed the highest support (22%), compared to only 8% among those aged 65+. By class, 14% of working-class and 16% of middle-class respondents supported this view, dropping to 9% in the 'other' group.

Public recognition of trauma, including Adverse Childhood Experiences and adult adversity, remains limited despite its strong links to homelessness.

### Immigration

Immigration was cited as a cause by 19% of respondents. Men were more likely to agree (23%) than women (15%). The lowest support came from 18–24-year-olds (6%), increasing to 25% among 35–54-year-olds. By class, 20% of working-class, 19% of middle-class, and 17% of the 'other' group agreed. These results suggest that homelessness is still largely viewed as a domestic issue, with limited awareness of the housing challenges facing refugees and migrants.

### Paramilitary Activity

Paramilitary activity was identified as a contributing factor by just 7% of respondents. Gender differences were minor (8% of men vs. 6% of women).

Agreement ranged from 4% among 45–54-year-olds to 13% among those aged 65+. Support was lowest among working-class respondents (5%) and highest among the 'other' category (11%).

While this reflects some concern about regional dynamics, paramilitary activity is not widely viewed as a key cause of homelessness.

### Conclusion

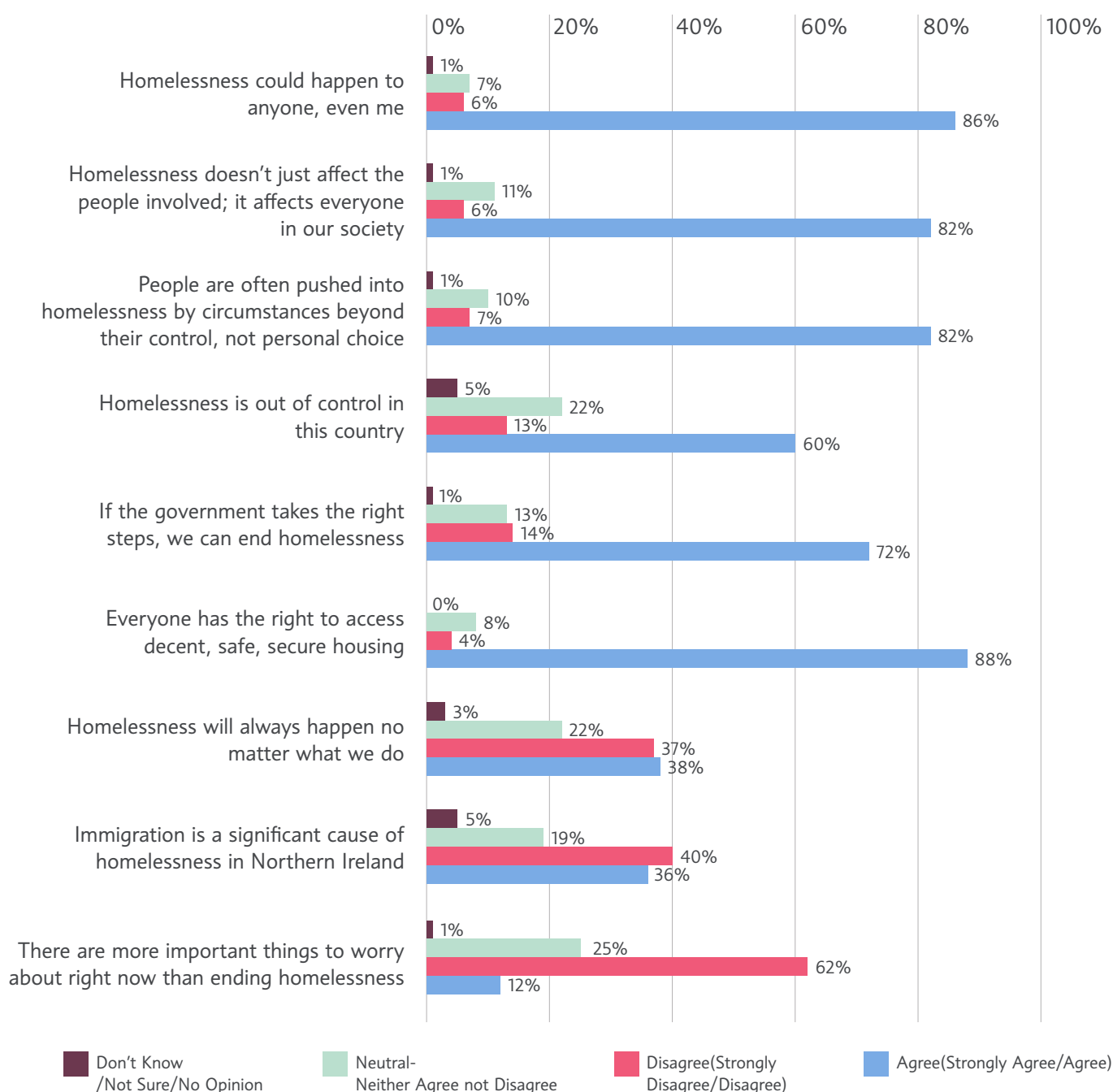
The findings reveal a complex picture of public understanding. While there is growing recognition of structural drivers such as housing affordability and economic insecurity, many respondents continue to emphasise personal factors like addiction or poor choices. The relatively low recognition of trauma, institutional discharge, poverty, and systemic failures indicates persistent gaps in public understanding. These insights point to the need for more comprehensive public education and policy messaging to reflect the multifaceted causes of homelessness in Northern Ireland.



# Causes and Solutions

This section of the poll presents public opinions on statements related to the causes, impacts, and potential solutions to homelessness in Northern Ireland. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

## Question 8: Thinking about homelessness, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?



### Public Priority and Perceived Urgency

The survey findings indicate strong public recognition of homelessness as a pressing societal issue. A clear majority (62%) disagreed with the statement that “there are more important things to worry about than ending homelessness,” while only 12% agreed. A further 25% were neutral, suggesting that although some respondents are uncertain about its relative priority, there is broad consensus that homelessness warrants serious and immediate attention. Overall, the results show that homelessness is widely seen not just as an individual problem but as a societal challenge requiring a collective response.

### Beliefs About the Causes of Homelessness

#### *Structural vs. Personal Responsibility*

A large majority of respondents (82%) agreed that people are often pushed into homelessness by circumstances beyond their control, while 10% were neutral and only 7% disagreed. Very few explicitly endorsed the idea that homelessness results from personal choices. These findings indicate a growing public understanding that homelessness is primarily driven by structural factors such as poverty, housing shortages, and inadequate support systems, rather than individual failings.

#### *Immigration*

Public views on immigration as a cause of homelessness are divided. While 36% of respondents agreed it is a contributing factor, 40% disagreed, and 19% were neutral. Only 5% were unsure, indicating that most people hold a formed opinion. The absence of consensus suggests that immigration is not widely regarded as a central driver of homelessness. However, the sizeable minority who attribute homelessness to immigration points to an underlying perception, what might be called a negative space in public thinking, where housing pressures are implicitly linked to population movement. This reflects a belief, whether accurate or not, that immigration contributes to housing scarcity, reinforcing a narrative of competition for limited resources that may overshadow more significant structural causes.

### Perceptions of Controllability and Government Responsibility

#### *Fatalism and Hope*

Public attitudes toward the inevitability of homelessness are divided. While 38% agreed with the statement “homelessness will always happen no matter what we do,” a nearly equal proportion (37%)

disagreed, and 22% were neutral. This distribution reflects a clear tension between fatalistic and solution-oriented perspectives, with no dominant view. The results suggest that while some see homelessness as an unavoidable social reality, others hold optimism that it can be addressed through effective intervention.

#### *Government Action*

There is strong public confidence in the potential of government-led solutions to end homelessness. A clear majority (72%) agreed that homelessness could be resolved if the government took the right actions, while only 14% disagreed and 8% were neutral. These findings reflect broad support for state intervention and optimism that policy change can effectively address the issue.

### Rights and Responsibilities

#### *Housing as a Human Right*

An overwhelming 88% of respondents agreed that everyone has the right to access decent, safe, and secure housing, while only 4% disagreed and 8% were neutral. This strong level of support reflects widely shared values that recognise housing as a fundamental human need. However, such consensus may also obscure limited public awareness of the structural and systemic barriers, such as housing supply shortages, affordability constraints, and policy gaps that hinder the realisation of this right in practice.

#### *Shared Societal Impact*

A significant majority (82%) agreed that homelessness affects everyone in society, while 11% were neutral and only 6% disagreed. This indicates strong public recognition of the wider social, economic, and public health consequences of homelessness, reflecting an understanding that its impact extends beyond individuals experiencing it directly.

#### *Perceived Risk and Empathy*

A strong majority (86%) of respondents agreed that homelessness could happen to anyone, even themselves, while 7% were neutral and 6% disagreed. This reflects a high level of empathy and a recognition that homelessness is not limited to specific groups. It also indicates public awareness of the vulnerability created by economic instability, unexpected life events, and the absence of robust safety nets.

### *Perception of Crisis*

A majority of respondents (60%) agreed that homelessness is “out of control” in Northern Ireland, while 13% disagreed and 22% were neutral. This reflects a strong, though not overwhelming, public perception that homelessness is a widespread and poorly managed issue. Given the scale and urgency of the current crisis, the findings suggest growing concern, but also highlight the need for broader public engagement and awareness.

### **Implications for Policy and Public Engagement**

The findings reflect a high level of public concern and strong support for action on homelessness, particularly through government intervention and structural reform. There is broad understanding that homelessness is not solely caused by individual failings, and increasing recognition of systemic factors.

However, persistent misconceptions remain, particularly around the inevitability of homelessness and the role of immigration. These areas suggest a need for continued public education and engagement to shift narratives further and support the implementation of evidence-based, comprehensive policy solutions.

The public’s belief that homelessness can affect anyone and their support for treating housing as a right provide a strong foundation for advocacy and policy reform. Addressing remaining gaps in understanding will be critical to sustaining momentum and achieving long-term change.

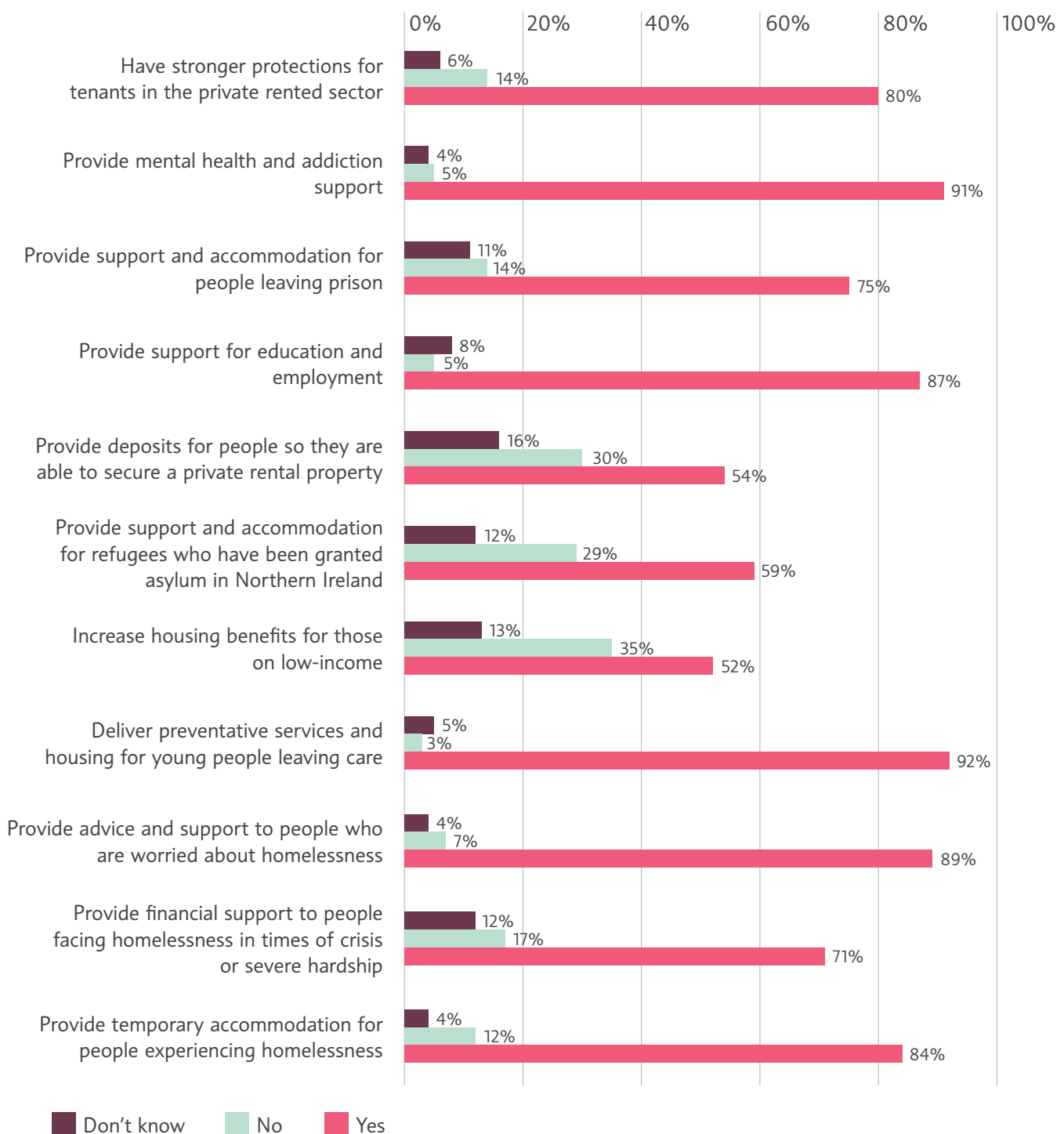




# Homelessness solutions

This poll question assesses public opinion on the effectiveness of various solutions to homelessness in Northern Ireland, asking whether respondents agree or disagree that specific strategies are practical and effective.

## Question 9: Do you agree, or disagree, that these are practical and effective solutions to homelessness in Northern Ireland?



## Public Support for Solutions to Homelessness

The survey reveals a broad public consensus on the effectiveness of a range of responses to homelessness. There is strong support for both immediate interventions and long-term, preventative strategies. While some measures attract near-universal agreement, others, particularly financial supports, receive more mixed responses, indicating areas of uncertainty or concern about long-term impact.

### Immediate Interventions

#### *Temporary Accommodation*

84% of respondents agreed that providing temporary accommodation is an effective way to address homelessness. Only 12% disagreed, and 4% were unsure. This indicates widespread recognition of the need for immediate shelter as a foundational response to homelessness.

### Preventative Measures

#### *Advice and Support Services*

The strongest level of agreement was seen for advice and support services, with 89% believing these are effective in preventing homelessness. This reflects a clear endorsement of early intervention and personalised support as essential components of prevention.

#### *Targeted Prevention for Young People Leaving Care*

92% agreed that preventative services and dedicated housing for young people leaving care are effective, signalling public recognition of the specific risks faced by this group and strong support for tailored preventative action.

#### *Support for Prison Leavers*

75% of respondents supported housing and support services for people leaving prison, while 14% disagreed and 11% were neutral. This reflects public awareness of the barriers to reintegration and the heightened risk of homelessness following discharge from institutional settings.

#### *Education and Employment Support*

87% of respondents endorsed education and employment initiatives as effective solutions to homelessness, highlighting the public's belief in the importance of long-term stability and income security in preventing housing loss.

## Mental Health and Addiction Services

A significant 91% of respondents agreed that access to mental health and addiction support is an effective solution. This overwhelming support reflects a high level of public awareness of the strong links between mental ill-health, substance use, and homelessness.

### Financial Solutions

#### *Financial Support*

71% of respondents agreed that financial support is effective for people at risk of homelessness, while 17% disagreed. This indicates that while income support is seen as important, there is some public uncertainty about its ability to address the root causes or to provide long-term security.

#### *Deposits for Private Rentals*

Support for providing deposits to access private rental housing was more mixed, with 54% in favour and 30% opposed. This suggests recognition of the financial barriers people face in securing accommodation, but also some doubt about the sufficiency of this approach as a standalone solution.

#### *Housing Benefits*

Only 52% agreed that increasing housing benefits for low-income individuals would be an effective solution, with 35% disagreeing. This relatively low level of support points to ongoing public debate about the role of welfare in preventing homelessness and concerns about long-term dependency or inefficiency.

### Policy-Based Solutions

#### *Support for Refugees Granted Asylum*

59% of respondents agreed that providing support for refugees is an effective solution to homelessness, while 29% disagreed. Although a majority recognise the housing needs of refugees, the level of disagreement suggests a degree of reluctance to prioritise this group, likely reflecting concerns about competition for limited housing resources and the perception that local needs should come first. This underscores the continuing tension in public attitudes where support for refugees is acknowledged, but not universally accepted within the broader context of housing scarcity.

#### *Tenant Protections*

80% supported stronger tenant protections as a way to prevent homelessness, showing strong public backing for policy measures that safeguard renters' rights and reduce housing insecurity.

### Conclusion: Appetite for Comprehensive and Targeted Solutions

The survey findings reveal a strong public appetite for practical, multifaceted approaches to addressing homelessness. The highest levels of support were directed toward interventions with immediate and visible impact, such as temporary accommodation, mental health and addiction services, and targeted prevention for vulnerable groups, particularly young people leaving care.

There is also clear endorsement for structural solutions, including tenant protections and access to education and employment, suggesting that the public is broadly aligned with evidence-based, long-term strategies.

However, views on financial supports, such as housing benefits and rent deposit schemes, were more mixed. This indicates not only uncertainty about their effectiveness but also reflects deeper public ambivalence around who is considered deserving of financial assistance. Unlike support services, which tend to be viewed as reactive and needs-based, direct financial aid is often judged through a moral lens, shaped by political and policy narratives that have long framed poverty as a matter of personal failure.

This framing, embedded in decades of welfare discourse, has contributed to a societal response that questions the legitimacy of financial support as a solution to homelessness. As a result, public scepticism toward income-based interventions may be less about evidence and more about how poverty and dependency have been politicised.

To build broader support for financial measures that are central to housing stability, there is a need for sustained public engagement that reframes poverty as a structural condition, driven by economic inequality, housing policy, and systemic disadvantage, not an individual shortcoming. This means shifting public discourse toward collective accountability and recognising homelessness as a social outcome that demands a coordinated, inclusive response.

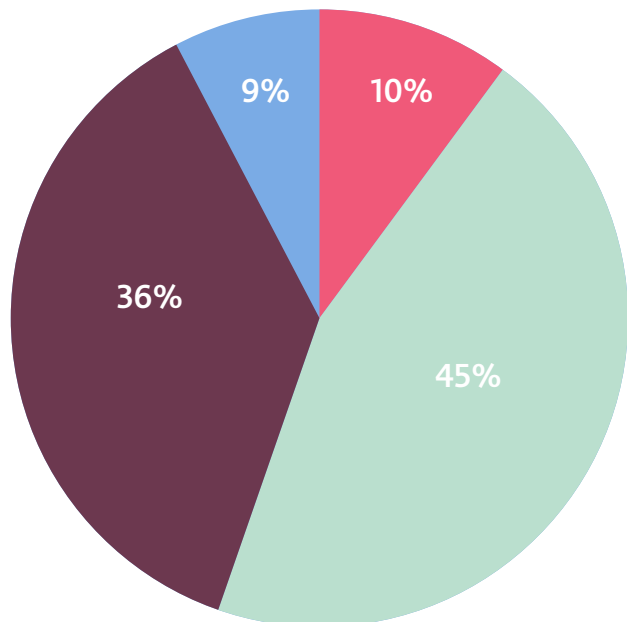
Overall, these findings suggest a public ready to support comprehensive policy action, particularly where solutions are seen to address root causes and support those with complex needs. To maintain and deepen that support, future policy efforts must be paired with strategic communication that challenges reductive narratives, promotes a structural understanding of homelessness, and positions housing as a shared societal responsibility.

# Work of Simon Community

This poll question examines the public's familiarity with Simon Community's work in tackling homelessness across Northern Ireland.

## Question 10: How familiar are you with the Simon Community's work in tackling homelessness across Northern Ireland?

- Very familiar
- Quite familiar
- Not very familiar
- Not at all familiar



The survey results provide valuable insights into the public's familiarity with Simon Community's efforts in tackling homelessness in Northern Ireland. 10% of respondents indicated they are very familiar with the organisation's work, reflecting a relatively low level of deep familiarity, despite the prominence of homelessness as an issue. 45% reported being familiar, suggesting that a significant portion of the population recognises Simon Community's role, though their understanding may not encompass the full extent of the organisation's scope or operations.

Meanwhile, 45% of respondents stated they are not familiar with Simon Community's work, highlighting a notable gap in public awareness, with close to half of the population not having a strong grasp of the organisation's contributions.

These results suggest that while there is moderate recognition of Simon Community's efforts, the organisation still has room to enhance its visibility and deepen public engagement. By addressing this gap in awareness, Simon Community could broaden its reach and influence in addressing homelessness, ensuring that its mission resonates more deeply with the public.

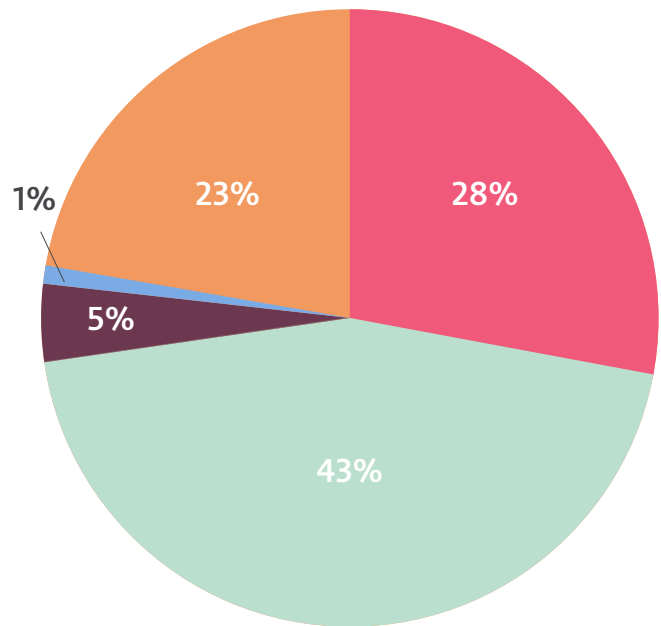


# Trust Simon Community

This poll question gauges the level of trust that the public places in Simon Community's ability to tackle homelessness across Northern Ireland.

## Question 11: How much do you trust the Simon Community to tackle homelessness across Northern Ireland?

- Very trustworthy
- Quite trustworthy
- Not very trustworthy
- Very untrustworthy
- Don't know



The survey results reveal that 28% of respondents consider Simon Community to be very trustworthy in tackling homelessness, indicating a solid foundation of trust in the organisation's efforts. However, this also suggests that there is room for Simon Community to build deeper trust among the public. A larger portion, 43%, rated the organisation as quite trustworthy, reflecting moderate confidence in its ability to address homelessness effectively. While this shows recognition of Simon Community's work, it implies that a significant portion of the population may not fully perceive the organisation as a trusted leader in the field.

Only 5% of respondents expressed that they find Simon Community not very trustworthy, and 1% considered it very untrustworthy, suggesting that mistrust is not widespread. This points to a generally positive reputation, but a small minority remains sceptical of the organisation's credibility or effectiveness. Additionally, 23% of respondents selected "Don't Know", indicating a substantial

portion of the population is uncertain or not sufficiently familiar with Simon Community to form an opinion. This gap in awareness presents an opportunity for the organisation to increase visibility and engagement to build more recognition and understanding of its work.

The results suggest that while Simon Community enjoys a strong base of support, with 71% of respondents viewing it as quite trustworthy or very trustworthy, there remains a need to enhance public education and outreach. By addressing the 23% of respondents who are unsure, Simon Community can strengthen its relationship with the public, increase trust, and further solidify its role as a leading force in addressing homelessness in Northern Ireland.

# Conclusion

## Emerging Themes from Public Perceptions Poll on Homelessness



### 1. Homelessness is Closer to Home Than Commonly Assumed

A significant minority of the population in Northern Ireland reports personal (7%) or proximate (23%) experience with homelessness, underscoring that homelessness is not marginal but widely experienced across social groups. The survey challenges perceptions of homelessness as rare or distant.

### 2. Structural Understanding is Growing, But Individual Narratives Persist

Public opinion increasingly recognises systemic drivers, housing unaffordability, mental health, domestic abuse, and economic precarity, yet addiction and 'bad choices' remain prominent in causal explanations. This tension highlights the persistence of individualised narratives alongside a shift toward structural thinking.

### 3. Conceptual Openness Exists, but Visibility Shapes Perceptions

While most respondents recognise visible forms of homelessness (rough sleeping, hostels), awareness of hidden homelessness, sofa surfing, domestic violence refuges, and institutional discharge is uneven. Overcrowding and returning to family homes remain the least recognised, suggesting gaps in understanding less visible forms of exclusion.

### 4. Demographic Differences Shape Perception and Empathy

Gender, age, and socio-economic background influence both understanding and concern. Women consistently show greater awareness and empathy; younger respondents hold more stigmatising or narrow views in some areas (e.g. addiction, individual blame), while older age groups express higher concern for systemic causes.

### 5. Broad Public Support for Solutions, Especially Preventative Interventions

There is strong support for immediate and preventative responses (e.g. temporary accommodation, mental health support, services for care leavers). Financial supports receive more mixed responses, reflecting moral ambivalence tied to public discourse on welfare and dependency.

### 6. Public Believes Homelessness is Preventable and Solvable

The majority view homelessness as a shared societal issue, not a personal failure. 72% believe it could be resolved with the right government action, and 86% agree it could happen to anyone. These findings indicate a clear mandate for systemic reform grounded in rights-based approaches.

### 7. Stereotypes Still Influence Who is Seen as Homeless

Homelessness remains primarily associated with men, young people, and single individuals living in urban settings. These dominant images risk marginalising the experiences of women, older adults, families, rural dwellers, and those in institutional care.

### 8. Simon Community Has Broad Support But Limited Public Familiarity

While 71% find Simon Community trustworthy, only 10% are very familiar with its work. This suggests strong latent support that could be mobilised through increased public engagement and communication.

The findings of this poll reveal a public that is both concerned about and increasingly informed on homelessness in Northern Ireland. While rough sleeping remains the dominant image, broader awareness of hidden forms—like sofa surfing, temporary accommodation, and institutional discharge—is growing, though recognition of overcrowding and family dependency remains limited.

Structural explanations are gaining ground, with strong recognition of issues like housing unaffordability, mental ill-health, and domestic abuse. Yet individualised narratives—particularly addiction and moral blame—persist, especially among younger respondents. The frequent use of “Doesn’t Make Any Difference” suggests both openness and uncertainty in public understanding.

Support for action is widespread, especially for preventative and supportive responses. However, financial interventions receive more cautious backing, reflecting moral ambivalence shaped by public discourse around welfare and personal responsibility.

Public perceptions remain shaped by visible stereotypes—primarily men, young people, and urban dwellers. This risks overlooking less visible groups such as women, families, and rural populations.

Finally, while Simon Community NI enjoys high trust, public familiarity with its work is limited, highlighting an opportunity to expand engagement and advocacy.

These findings underline a strong public appetite for action and reform. The challenge ahead is to sustain this momentum with clear, inclusive, and informed strategies that promote structural solutions over individual blame.





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