



The Unstoppables

Celtic and Rangers pull away at the top **the game**

Thousands at risk of a homeless new year

Families are sent to live in B&Bs

Kaya Burgess, Rosemary Bennett

Tens of thousands of people are at risk of becoming homeless and have appealed to their local councils for emergency help as Christmas approaches, research by *The Times* has found.

The number forced to live in bed and breakfasts and other forms of temporary accommodation has also risen for the first time since 2005, as authorities across the UK report a sharp increase in households in trouble with their rent.

Rising unemployment and the economic climate are contributing factors towards rent arrears, evictions and

One in five fear losing their job in next year

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mortgage defaults. Domestic violence and relationship breakdowns are also forcing people to move out or seek shelter elsewhere, the study found.

The Times contacted all 407 local authorities in Britain. 206 responded with information on the number of people they had identified in their area as being "currently at risk of losing their homes".

The councils, a mix of urban and rural local authorities, said that between them they were dealing with requests for help from 50,869 residents who had approached them in the past year fearing they could be forced out of their homes.

This trend, taken across the rest of the country, would equate to more than 107,000 people nationwide in trouble, an increase from the 102,000 reported in March by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

Official figures from DCLG reveal that in the year to March 44,160 households in England were classified as homeless, up 10 per cent on a year ago. But more statistics from the department also show that at the end of October there were 49,100 households in bed and breakfasts, hostels or other forms of temporary accommodation. Some 36,680 of those included children or a pregnant woman, and of these 1,340 were in bed and breakfasts, widely considered to be the worst place for a family to be housed.

That figure is up from 930 at the end of the same period last year. Also, 310 people have been in their B&B for six weeks or more, in breach of national guidelines.

Hilary Benn, the Shadow Communities Secretary, said that a growing number of families faced a bleak and uncertain Christmas.

"Homelessness went down 70 per cent during Labour's time in office, but in the last 18 months it has increased by 10 per cent. [Families] will be asking why the Government isn't doing more."

Freedom of information requests by *The Times* indicate that more than 100,000 more householders are at risk of losing their homes in the new year, when major cuts in housing benefit

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Václav Havel, former President of the Czech Republic, who died yesterday: at the end, only the velvety voice remained of the architect of the Velvet Revolution

Death of the good king of Wenceslas Square

Roger Boyes salutes Václav Havel, writer, smoker and the greatest revolutionary of 1989



You could hear Václav Havel coming down the corridor of the palace a few minutes in advance. Clip-clip, clip-clop: the accelerated walk of a short-legged man in a hurry. And always the loud chatter of his political advisers, their competing voices like birdsong at dusk. Then came the whiff of cigarette smoke, and with a flourish, the man himself — a theatrical entrance for a playwright-turned-politician.

In more than two decades of watching central Europe's dissident jailbirds become the leaders of post-communist Europe, no one impressed me more than Václav Havel who died yesterday, aged 75. There

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was a clarity to his language, a lack of waffle, a love of reasoned argument. Many Czechs, though, refused to surrender to his charm. For them, Havel seemed to be a reproach: he had been jailed for his beliefs, did not buckle, while society as a whole made its separate accommodation with the communist rulers.

Later, after he had been thrust into power in 1989-90, they came to resent his finger-wagging, his persistent appeal to his fellow countrymen to behave more nobly. When he stepped down as President of the Czech Republic eight years ago, the commentator Martin Komárek drily remarked: "The world still applauds

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IN THE NEWS

Abramovich move

A former top Kremlin aide has called for Roman Abramovich and Boris Berezovsky to face a criminal investigation as the \$6 billion (£3.86 billion) court battle of the oligarchs enters its final stages. **News, page 3**

Eurozone states talk

European finance ministers have delayed their Christmas holidays for a conference call today in the effort to shore up the single currency. They will discuss plans to recapitalise the IMF. **News, page 6**

Fishermen 'face ruin'

Fishermen's leaders warned that Scottish trawlermen will either be bankrupted or quit the business in the new year, because of a "disastrous" deal that has been agreed with EU officials. **News, page 13**

Cable banking vow

Vince Cable, the Business Secretary, has vowed to back recommendations from the Independent Commission on Banking to split banks' retail and investment units. **Business, page 38**

Times2 today

Bras: a history of bust and boom



Omid Djalili storms the Iranian embassy of prejudice

