

Response to DCMS call for evidence on tourist accommodation registration schemes

Centre for Public Data, September 2022

Background

This is a response by the Centre for Public Data to DCMS's [call for evidence](#) on developing a tourist accommodation registration scheme in England. We believe this significantly adds to available research on the AirBNB market in the UK. Our response was submitted on 21 September 2022.

Responses to questions

Question 1

Question 1: Are you able to provide us with evidence illustrating the size and nature of the short-term and holiday letting market in England and/or its regions, and how that has changed over time?

For any data provided, it would be helpful to have:

- *data illustrating the picture at a national level*
- *data illustrating the picture in different regions of England*
- *data that might help with equalities analysis (sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act 2010), e.g. proportion of hosts on a platform that are male/female*
- *data illustrating changes since 2010, including during the pandemic.*

If you are an online platform it would be helpful to have:

- *data on the number of active listings on your platform, and how that has changed over time*
- *a breakdown of the types of listing on your platform (e.g. the number of listings run by property management companies versus individuals, the number of entire premises offered versus single rooms and the number where the listing is based on exclusive customer use as opposed to co-living with the host)*

- *data illustrating a typical host or listing (e.g. average earnings per host/listing, average number of nights hosted per year)*
- *data on occupancy rates (i.e. how often listed properties are made available per year, how this varies over the course of the year and how often they are used)*
- *data on where listings are geographically/regionally located*
- *data on the economic impact of short-term and holiday letting activity, including key source markets.*

Our response

To answer this question, we have analysed a complete dataset of over UK AirBNB listings in 2016, 2019 and 2022. This data was supplied to us by Inside AirBNB, a mission-driven project that provides data and advocacy about Airbnb's impact on residential communities, and consists of more than 280,000 scraped AirBNB listings. AirBNB does not make its own data available for analysis: in its absence, many researchers have relied on scraped listings and consider them to be reliable.

We included only listings with at least 1 day's availability in the next 12 months in our analysis, to exclude inactive listings. We analysed both the total listings in each local authority, and the proportion of permanent dwellings that are listed on AirBNB (aka the 'penetration rate'). To calculate the latter we include only entire home listings; exclude non-permanent dwellings such as guest suites, boats or camper vans; and then compare the totals with official estimates of permanent dwellings per local authority.

We found that the total number of active UK AirBNB listings rose sharply from 74,008 to 224,314 between May 2016 and May 2019, dipped briefly at the start of the pandemic, and then remained roughly static at 250,662 listings in May 2022.

However, the geographical distribution of listings shifted significantly within the UK between 2019 and 2022, with a significant fall in listings in cities, and a significant rise in rural listings, particularly in popular tourist locations.

Particularly sharp rises in the AirBNB penetration rate were seen in Gwynedd, Anglesey and Pembrokeshire in Wales. Highland and Na h-Eileanan Siar in Scotland; and in multiple areas of England, including the south west of England (Cornwall, North Devon, Dorset), Scarborough and North Norfolk.

Meanwhile, total listings fell equally sharply in central London and Edinburgh, previously the most popular AirBNB regions. In all London boroughs - including the City of London, Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea - AirBNB penetration fell between 2019 and 2022.

An especially steep fall was seen in the City of Edinburgh, which in 2022 no longer appears in the top 20 authorities by penetration rate.

This appears to match anecdotal reports of sharply rising AirBNB usage in popular tourist areas, which have accompanied a drop in the availability of private sector rental accommodation.

We also find that most listings now appear to be professionally managed. In May 2022 nearly three-quarters of all UK listings were for entire homes, a rise of 50% since 2016; nearly two-thirds of listings were offered by hosts managing multiple properties (an indicator that a property is managed by a professional), a rise of 37% since 2016; and more properties than ever before offered the ‘instant book’ feature, a likely indicator of a commercial listing.

We are very happy to discuss this analysis or share more details on request.

Question 3

Question 3: How do you assess levels of compliance with regulations on: a) Fire safety b) Gas safety c) Health and safety d) Food and drink - within the short-term and holiday letting market in England?

Our response

Compliance with regulations on fire safety and carbon monoxide safety appears to be poor among AirBNB hosts in the UK, judging on the information provided on AirBNB listings, which is the only available source of data.

Safety compliance is not required or checked by AirBNB, but AirBNB asks hosts to voluntarily provide information on a property’s safety features.

Our analysis found that many active listings do not offer smoke alarms and fire extinguishers. Excluding properties described as tents, yurts or campsites, we found:

- 22,103 listings (8.9%) were described as not offering smoke alarms
- 108,330 listings (43.7%) were described as not offering fire extinguishers.

This is disappointing since In the UK, rental hosts (including short-term rentals) are legally required to assess properties for fire safety, which is likely to include providing smoke alarms and fire extinguishers.

We also found 93,422 listings (41.2%) were not described as offering carbon monoxide detectors, excluding any listings where hosts indicated that the property does not have heating. While carbon monoxide detectors are not a legal requirement for short-term lets, AirBNB “recommends” that hosts offer them if there is a fuel-burning device in the property.

Although Gas Safe certification is a legal requirement for short-term lets, AirBNB does not ask hosts to state whether it has been completed, and therefore we cannot include this in our analysis.

Question 9

Question 9: Which of the following do you consider to be the most appropriate form of response in the short-term letting market?

Our response

We recommend that a compulsory national registration scheme should be implemented. We do not have a view on whether this should include physical or light-touch checks. However our international comparative research has found that there are two key requirements for registration schemes.

1. Data disclosure requirements on platforms

Crucially, any registration scheme should be accompanied with legal requirements for platforms to share data with local authorities, including real-time, per-listing data on nights occupied and rental fees paid.

This is for two reasons:

- a) Data supplied voluntarily by AirBNB has historically been of poor quality - for example, its evidence to the House of Commons Built Environment Committee that eight out of ten hosts are offering a single listing. This is based on survey data from just 10,000 AirBNB hosts. AirBNB has consistently attacked external researchers' use of scraped data while refusing to provide meaningful data.
- b) In March 2020, 22 European city leaders called for better access to AirBNB data, stating that data access was needed to enforce regulations on maximum rental limits, tax collection and safety regulations. Our research has corroborated this. Registration without data disclosure requirements will not provide the basis for meaningful enforcement.

2. Ability to flex registration requirements locally, supported by data disclosure

Once they have the ability to access data on the extent and nature of AirBNB listings locally, local authorities also need the flexibility to extend registration requirements to meet their local circumstances. What is appropriate in Camden may not be appropriate in Cornwall. Communities should have the flexibility to restrict - or extend - AirBNB restrictions to meet their local needs. However, as noted above, it will not be possible to enforce these unless local authorities have statutory access to listing-level data.