

Focus Ireland

5 point plan to tackle the housing and homeless crisis

Focus Ireland believes ending the homeless crisis must be a priority for the next government. Recent figures show a shocking record total of 125 families (with 253 children) became homeless in January in Dublin.

Focus Ireland is the lead agency working with families who are homeless in Dublin. We house 1 family a day, but 3 or more become homeless, so the crisis deepens. Our election campaign called for 5 actions to be implemented by the next Government to end the housing and homeless crisis. We argue that a credible and coherent plan to tackle homelessness, incorporating these 5 actions, must be the heart of the next programme for Government.

Commit to ending family homelessness

The crisis in family homelessness is deepening due to the prolonged crisis in the private rented sector. Some claim homelessness is solely a delivery issue and it's true we need many more homes. Focus Ireland is calling for a commitment to build 40,000 social homes over the life of the next government, and a realistic plan to deliver them. That is one part of the solution.

However, we also need to prevent families that currently have a home from losing it and becoming homeless. We need greater security for all in the private rented sector, meaning the government will have to address both rent regulation and security of tenure.

A growing cause of this crisis is lending agencies foreclosing on buy-to-let landlords and evicting tenants. The repossession of buy-to-let

homes – often by banks owned by the Irish people – may account for up to half of recent cases of family homelessness. There are over 35,000 buy-to-let landlords more than a year in arrears on their mortgages. The next Government must act to ensure if a bank repossesses a property the tenancy must be kept in place so the family do not lose their home. If this requires constitutional change then it must – and can – be progressed urgently. Recent events in Tyrellstown is an extreme example of this with vulture funds trying to evict up to 200 households for profit driven reasons.

One of the difficulties that the Government will face is that the Constitution protects the rights of property owners – including 'vulture funds' – without any counterbalancing 'right to a home'. We believe an early referendum seeking to create such a right is essential if the Government is to introduce some of the legislation needed to protect renters and home-owners from banks and 'vulture funds'.

Ending long-term homelessness

The homeless crisis is broader than families. A commitment to end long-term homelessness must include single person household, couples and young people. In particular the trapping of young people in homelessness must be addressed.

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Focus Ireland is calling on all parties to include the following 5 key commitments in the Programme for any new Government. There is now a record number of over 5,500 people homeless. This includes almost 900 families and over 1,800 children – 1 in every 16 households is on social housing waiting lists. We need action now.

1 Commit to ending family homelessness and set a deadline to achieve this.

There are over 1,800 children in nearly 900 families who are homeless in Ireland. Many are trapped in hotels or bed and breakfasts in one room with their children. This will require a complete overhaul of the Rent Supplement system. Families are becoming homeless mostly for economic reasons. Many more households are also struggling to pay their rent or mortgage each month.

2 Commit to ending long-term homelessness and the need to sleep rough and set a target date for achieving this.

There is a record total of over 5,500 people homeless in Ireland. The vast majority are in emergency accommodation such as hostels or hotels with a small number sleeping rough.

3 Commit to build at least 40,000 social houses over its lifetime.

A record total of 100,000 households are on social housing waiting lists nationwide.

4 Hold a referendum on the 'right to a home' early in the term of the next Government.

This may be required to protect thousands of families from profiteering 'vulture funds'.

5 Commit to ending the youth homelessness trap.

Over 500 young people are trapped in emergency accommodation, with a social welfare rate too low to provide them with a proper home and unable to get a job or training because they are homeless.

As one of Ireland's leading housing and homeless charities, Focus Ireland has been working since last year on our own election campaign. We lobbied all parties and key independents in and submitted a comprehensive policy document to each outlining very specific actions that need to be taken by each Government Minister in the next Government. These 5 key demands above come out of this more comprehensive policy document.

For more information about Focus Ireland and our work go to www.focusireland.ie

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