

Focus Ireland

Insights into Family Homelessness

Number 5

Survey of the families
that became homeless
during June 2016

Visit focusireland.ie

Find us on 

CHY 7220



FOCUS
IRELAND

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Summary of Key Findings | 3 |
| Introduction | 5 |
| Methodology | 6 |
| Demographic Profile | 8 |
| Age..... | 8 |
| Nationality | 8 |
| Family Type..... | 9 |
| Employment Status of Respondents..... | 10 |
| Location of Last stable Home | 10 |
| Housing History and Accommodation Trajectory Type | 10 |
| Last Stable Accommodation | 10 |
| Housing and Accommodation Transitions prior to Homelessness | 11 |
| Themes Emerging in June 2016 Analysis | 12 |
| Landlords Leaving the Market | 12 |
| Increased Prevalence of Migrant Families | 13 |
| Help-Seeking <i>before</i> Becoming Homeless | 13 |
| Conclusion | 14 |
| Appendix 1: Telephone Survey Instrument..... | 17 |

Summary of Key Findings

- This study presents key findings from a short quantitative survey conducted by telephone with 47 families who presented to Dublin family homeless services during June 2016. This represents 65% of the total number of families who presented as homeless in the Dublin region during the month of June (N=72).
- The principle aim of the telephone survey was to capture key demographic information of families entering homelessness and also to identify the accommodation trajectories of families *before* they presented to homeless services. It is hoped that the generation of timely data on homeless families will help to inform appropriate prevention and service planning and responses.
- Among the 47 respondents who were surveyed, 23 (49%) were born in Ireland and 24 (51%) were 'migrants' (i.e. born outside Ireland): 11 (23%) were from countries within the EU and 13 (28%) were from outside the EU. This signifies a disproportionate presence of migrant-headed families, particularly among non-EU migrants, who are entering into homelessness. It also signals a relative increase in the proportion of migrants since the March 2016 survey (as discussed later in the document).
- 39 (83%) of the survey respondents were women while 8 (17%) were men.
- Among those who were surveyed, 23 (49%) were experiencing homelessness with their partner *and* child(ren), while 24 (51%) were single parents. Of those who were single with children, all but one were female-headed households.
- 12 (26%) of the respondents were aged between 18 and 25 years, 17 (36%) were 26 to 35 years and 18 (38%) were over the age of 36 years. 31 (66%) of the families constituted one or two children. The remaining 16 (34%) of the respondents had three or more children.
- The vast majority (85%) of the respondents described themselves as unemployed (n=40). 4 respondents were in employment - either part-time (n=2) or full-time (n=2). An additional 2 respondents were studying full-time or part-time. One respondent was engaging in a Community Employment Scheme.
- 32 (68%) of the respondents reported that their last stable home was in the private rented sector. All but 3 of these families were in receipt of rent supplement in this private rented property. This echoes the March 2016 survey, in which 73% of the sample reported their last stable accommodation was in the private rented sector.

- Similar to March 2016, in analysing the participants' previous four accommodations in June 2016 survey, three trajectory 'types' were identified:
 1. Stability in the private rented sector.
 2. Precariousness in the private rented sector.
 3. Prolonged instability and hidden homelessness.

- In terms of patterns around help-seeking or early engagement with services, 34 (72%) of the respondents sought help or support *before* becoming homeless. The most common first port-of-call for families was their local authority. Many also approached service such as Focus Ireland Information and Advice Service, Threshold, RTB, or their local social welfare office. This early engagement often related to legal or advocacy support in challenging or negotiating a notice of termination to allow more time in the property.

- Changes or consistencies identified between March and June 2016 surveys include:
 - ∞ A majority reported that their last stable accommodation was in the private rented sector, as was the case in March.
 - ∞ In both March and June, an overwhelming majority were unemployed at time of homelessness indicating the persistent association between joblessness and homelessness.
 - ∞ There was an increase in the number of landlords leaving the market in June survey.
 - ∞ In June sample, there is an increase in the number of migrant households entering homelessness, particularly among non-EU migrants.
 - ∞ There were fewer reports of domestic violence in June in comparison to March 2016.

- This survey does not claim to offer a representative insight of all families experiencing homelessness in the Dublin region; rather, it offers a *point-in-time analysis* of a *proportion* of those entering homelessness during a particular month. It is hoped that by conducting this survey every three months, however, trends and patterns may emerge which will build our understanding of family homelessness over time.

Introduction

During June 2016, 72 families presented as homeless to their local authority across the four Dublin regions¹. This culminated in a count of 939 families and 1,894 children who were living in homeless accommodations across the Dublin region during that month². Across the country as a whole, there were a total of 1,078 families with 2,206 children residing in emergency accommodation. This represents a 51% increase in comparison to the 620 families who were homeless across the country during June 2015. This increase in family homelessness was most dramatic in the Dublin region, where there is currently an acute housing shortage – particularly in affordable housing.

Focus Ireland was appointed by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) as the Homeless Action Team (HAT) for families across the Dublin region³. When a family presents as homeless to their relevant local authority, they are routinely provided emergency accommodation in the form of commercial hotels or B&Bs. They are then referred to the Focus Ireland HAT who make contact with the family as soon as possible in order to set up an initial assessment. While information is collected in this process, there was a need to collect *timely* data in order to understand and respond to family homelessness as the problem continues to unfold.

Therefore, it was decided by Focus Ireland (and with the advice of our Research Advisory Group⁴), that a concise and targeted survey be conducted with families entering homelessness in the Dublin region, and importantly, for this exercise to be repeated every three months. This collection of data and related discussion is then presented through separate publications as part of Focus Ireland's *Insights into Family Homelessness Series*⁵. As such, a short briefing report was produced on families who presented as homeless during March 2016⁶ and the current report provides details of the survey of those who entered homelessness in June 2016.

¹ This number represents the number of families who had not previously reported as homeless during the previous two years.

² Dublin Region Homeless Executive (2016) *Families who are Homeless in the Dublin Region: June 2016*. Available at: <http://www.homelessdublin.ie/homeless-families>. Accessed 04 October 2016.

³ While Focus Ireland is the principle service who assists families experiencing homelessness in Dublin region, other homelessness organisations also work with families. See the back page of this document for a brief background of the role and function of Focus Ireland Family HAT.

⁴ The Focus Ireland Research Advisory Group (RAG) consists of expert researchers and academics in the area of homelessness and housing.

⁵ Focus Ireland Insights into Family Homelessness Series publications can be found here:

<http://www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/publications-and-partnerships/research/>

⁶ Focus Ireland Insights into Family Homelessness No. 4 (2016) *Survey of the Families that became Homeless during March 2016*. Available at: <http://www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/publications-and-partnerships/research/>.

Methodology

The 3-page telephone survey developed for the purpose of this exercise was concise, tightly structured and targeted in its design⁷. This was for the purpose of efficiency, to maximise the response rate, and most importantly, to minimise the burden on families in crisis situations (see Appendix 1 for survey instrument).

The survey seeks to capture the demographic profile of respondents⁸, accommodation trajectories or journeys and their interaction with services prior to their presenting as homeless. Questions pertaining to the last four accommodations – which formed the main component of the survey – captured change and transition in the respondents' living situations and to (partially) capture the dynamics of their housing history. This section also included duration of time spent in these four accommodations, self-reported reasons for leaving each accommodation, and details around rental supplements.

In total, 47 of the 72 families who became homeless in the Dublin region during June 2016⁹ participated in the survey, representing 65% of the entire cohort of families presenting as homeless. These surveys were administered by telephone during the month of August and September. Prior to the Focus Ireland Researcher making contact with the respondents, a member of the Family HAT team attained verbal consent from respondents during a routine phone call with the family as part of their initial assessment to the service. 6 of the families declined to participate in the study at this initial stage, and a further 12 families were not contactable (Focus Ireland did not have telephone contact details because they left homelessness very quickly or another organisation was assisting them). The remaining families gave consent to be contacted and of these, 47 surveys were successfully completed. Surveys with the remaining families (who supplied consent) were not conducted due difficulties in reaching them, telephone numbers not working or the participants did not answer their phone or return voicemail messages¹⁰.

Upon making contact with the participants, the researcher clearly stated the purpose of the telephone call and what was involved in taking part in the survey. In cases where information was requested by the family in relation to their homelessness or housing situation, the telephone number of the Family HAT team was provided to the individual. While the survey was structured in design and the questions were posed in a consistent way, in many cases, the families expanded on their answers (research notes were recorded in these instances). The surveys typically took around 5-10 minutes each, but were sometimes longer - depending on the level of detail offered by participants themselves. All data was inputted and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22.

⁷ The survey was designed by the advocacy team with the guidance of Focus Ireland Research Advisory Group – which consists of leading experts in the area of homelessness and research (representatives from the University of Dublin Trinity College, University College Dublin, NUI Maynooth, Waterford IT, and the Housing Agency).

⁸ Demographic details captured age, marital status, employment status, country of origin of the participant, number of children, and current accommodation.

⁹ This compared to 70 of the 84 families who presented as homeless in March 2016.

¹⁰ The researcher attempted to make contact a total of four times with each family. In cases where families had a message service activated on their mobile phone, one voicemail was left.

Focus Ireland's Data Protection and Customer Confidentiality policies, as well as the organisation's Ethical Guidelines for Conducting Research, were adhered to at all times in the completion of this study. The respondents were made aware at both initial phone call and follow-up phone call that involvement in the study was entirely voluntary and that they were under no obligation to participate¹¹. All details emerging from the research were anonymised and this was also explained to the respondents¹².

¹¹ Importantly, families also explained that their participation or non-participation would not in any way impact on the Family HAT service support offered by Focus Ireland. Moreover, the Family HAT would not have been aware of the decision of families to engage or not.

¹² The contact numbers and names were destroyed once the telephone surveys were completed and all identifiable details were removed.

Demographic Profile

All 47 of the respondents were adult parents (i.e. over the age of 18 years) and were accompanied by one or more of their children.

At time of survey, 35 (74%) of the families were residing in private emergency accommodation (commercial hotels or B&BS), 3 (6%) families were living in family emergency accommodation, and 9 of the families (19%) had exited homelessness¹³.

Age

Of the participants who were surveyed, 12 (26%) were aged between 18 and 25 years; 17 (36%) were between 26 and 35 years of age; and 18 (38%) were 36 years or older. See Table 1 below.

Table 1. Age Breakdown of Sample

| Age Group (in years) | Number of Research Participants (N=47) | Percentage of Total |
|----------------------|--|---------------------|
| 18-25 | 12 | 25% |
| 26-35 | 17 | 36% |
| 36+ | 18 | 38% |
| TOTAL | 47 | 100% |

Reflecting the March 2016 survey, a quarter of the June sample were 25 years or younger. However, the June survey reported a slightly higher number of respondents over the age of 36 years (38% of the sample as opposed to 24% in March).

Nationality

In June 2016 survey, 23 (49%) of the research participants were born in Ireland, while 24 (51%) were born outside of Ireland; 11 (23%) of the migrant-headed households were originally from an EU country while 13 (28%) were from outside the EU.

¹³ These surveys were contacted 2-3 months after they first entered homelessness (as opposed to 2-4 weeks after March survey) which is likely to explain the higher number of families who had exited homelessness upon being first contacted. Focus Ireland have recently commissioned a dedicated study on family exits from homelessness which will be published in early 2017.

Table 2. Nationality Breakdown of Sample

| Nationality Category | Number of Research Participants (N=47) | Percentage of Total |
|----------------------|--|---------------------|
| Ireland | 23 | 49% |
| EU | 11 | 23% |
| Non-EU | 13 | 28% |
| TOTAL | 47 | 100% |

The number of migrants in June sample signals a notable increase since March 2016 survey in which 34% of the sample were of migrant origin.

Family Type

In June, 24 (51%) of the respondents were one-parent households. Apart from one single father, all one-parent households were headed by women, demonstrating the high prevalence of single mothers among those entering into homelessness. Yet this represents a small decrease in the number of one-parent households since March 2016, in which 67% of the respondents were single parents. The remainder 23 (49%) in June were two-parent families.

1 of the 47 families (66%) had either one or two children in their care. 5 families were accompanied by 3 children and 11 families consisted of four children or more. Additionally, 7 of the families who were surveyed in June were also expecting a child in the coming months.

Table 3. Breakdown of Number of Children as per Each Family unit

| Number of Children | Number of Families | Percentage of Total |
|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | 16 | 34% |
| 2 | 15 | 32% |
| 3 | 5 | 11% |
| 4 | 4 | 8% |
| 5+ | 7 | 15% |
| TOTAL | 47 | 100% |

The numbers of children in families also reflects March data, in which 69% of the respondents were accompanied by either one or two children.

Employment Status of Respondents

The vast majority (n=40, 85%) of the research participants described themselves as unemployed or full-time parents, almost the exact same as March 2016 (84%). 2 (4%) of the respondents were in part-time employment, while 2 (4%) were engaged in full-time employment. Additionally, 2 respondents were studying full-time or part-time, but all expressed difficulties in maintaining their studies since becoming homeless. The remaining respondent was engaging in a Community Employment scheme. This demonstrates the association between joblessness and limited income with increased risk of homelessness or housing instability.

Location of Last stable Home

The survey included the location of the participant's last stable home. The most common areas of Dublin included Dublin 15 (specifically, Blanchardstown, Castleknock, Tyrellstown, Ashtown and Ongar), Dublin 22 (Clondalkin, Tallaght, Lucan), Dublin 8 (Inchicore), Dublin 17 (Coolock, Darndale) and Dublin 7 (Phibsboro), Dublin 18, and other areas cited were Ballymun, Balbriggan, Crumlin, and Lusk. These areas of Dublin would generally be considered as having high proportion of rental accommodation, particularly for low income individuals and families.

6 families reported that their last stable accommodation was outside of Dublin, including Counties Carlow, Galway, Longford, Waterford, and Leitrim. In the case of those families who lived outside of Dublin, they had previously lived in Dublin in the past and returned to Dublin when they became homeless.

Housing History and Accommodation Trajectory Type

The survey captured the details – including duration, tenure and reasons for leaving – of the last four accommodations prior to their becoming homeless. Gleaning this information enabled two principle areas of insight: it captured a concise analysis of the participants' recent housing history and it revealed triggers which resulted in their homelessness. It also indicated the nature of their housing histories and specifically, whether the families had experienced homelessness or housing stability in the past.

Last Stable Accommodation

Mirroring March 2016 telephone survey data, the majority of respondents (n=32, 68%) reported that their last stable home was in the private rented sector (73% in March). 29 of these families were also in receipt of rent supplement in this rental accommodation, while 3 families were meeting their rent through their own income. The predominance of rental supplement among families entering homelessness in both the March and June cohorts suggest additional difficulties these families face in securing alternative accommodation which accepts rent supplement.

6 families reported that their last stable housing was the family home, the majority of which were young parents who had only recently left home. 1 family was living in social housing and had to

leave when the house but left after the property became too small for their growing family (and stated they were not offered alternative housing).

4 families had never had a stable housing in Ireland as they were relatively new to the country and had, instead, resided with friends for prolonged periods of time before presenting as homeless to their local authority.

Housing and Accommodation Transitions prior to Homelessness

The March 2016 telephone survey data identified a number of different housing trajectory types in which captured varying degrees of (in)stability in housing¹⁴. These typologies and proportions emerged in the June 2016 survey also. These include:

1. **Previous Stability in the Private Rented Sector** – Families who reported no prior experience of homelessness; who reported stable tenancies in the private rented sector (more than two years); who were not reliant on friends or family to provide housing or accommodation.
2. **Precariousness in the Private Rented Sector** – Families who reported broadly stable housing histories but had experienced *some* degree of housing instability or precariousness in the past (i.e. where they were living in overcrowded, inadequate or insecure housing); and who demonstrated a certain level of reliance on family or friends for accommodation, sometimes for prolonged periods of time.
3. **Prolonged Housing Instability and Hidden Homelessness** – Families who are largely marginalised from the housing market; who had little or no experience of living in independent or stable tenancies; who were reliant on friends or families, sometimes for lengthy periods and reported difficulties in accessing private rental accommodation. Some had previous histories of homelessness.

Significantly, the housing trajectories reported by the June 2016 cohort were almost identical to the March cohort in terms of percentages in each grouping. For example, in June there were 25 respondents who reported a stable housing history (53% of the June sample, compared to 49% of March sample); 10 respondents reported a precarious housing histories (21% of June sample, compared to 20% in March); and 23 respondents reported prolonged housing instability and hidden homelessness (26% of June sample, compared to 31% in March).

The 25 families who reported a stable private rented accommodation history (Group 1 above) generally reported many years living in adequate, stable and secure accommodation. Tenancies were frequently sustained for several years. Triggers to homelessness among this group typically related to affordability problems in the private rented sector or tenancies coming to an end for various reasons beyond their control. A total of 15 respondents of this subsample were migrant families. Perhaps significantly, all but two of the families who reported a stable housing history were over the age of 26 years. Young people in this survey (18-25 years) were, therefore, far less

¹⁴ Individuals and households who experience homelessness demonstrate diverse experiences and housing histories. As such, these three categories serve as broad analytical groupings as opposed to definitive and distinct cohorts; there were commonalities and anomalies across all three groupings.

likely to report any degree of stability in their housing trajectory (even among those aged 23-25 years).

Among the 10 families who reported precarious housing histories, 2 had resided in emergency accommodation in the past, while the remainder had spent at least some time in 'hidden' homeless settings (such as doubling up in the accommodation of friends or family members). This degree of housing precariousness or inadequacy was often related to financial issues, loss of job, relationship breakdown, or affordability problems. On the whole, however, this group had spent more times in stable tenancies in the private rented sector than in insecure living situations. The majority of this group (i.e. 8 of 10 respondents) were Irish-born and, like Group 1, they tended to be over the age of 25 years (i.e. also 8 of 10 respondents).

Those who reported extensive hidden homelessness and prolonged housing instability – categorised under Group 3 – were largely excluded from the housing market and had little experience of living in independent housing. This constituted 12 respondents of the sample of 47 (26%). 4 of these respondents reported homelessness in the past. They were particularly dependent on friends or family members sometimes for many years, and in many cases, they moved frequently between different living situations. Significantly, 8 of these respondents were under the age of 25 years and had not secured stable housing since leaving the family home. 3 families were migrants who have not experienced stable housing since moving to Ireland, instead staying with friends for months or even years. Triggers to homelessness were diverse and interrelated – often related to personal crises combined with structural disadvantage or a lack of financial resources.

Themes Emerging in June 2016 Analysis

Additional themes were also identified in this June analysis which merit further discussion as they may point to emerging trends and processes of family homelessness and therefore implications for policy and service responses. However, it is worth noting that while the following themes may be significant for *this* particular sample, it remains to be seen whether the findings here reflect the characteristics of all families experiencing homelessness. By repeating this survey on a regular basis, however, trends and patterns can emerge, culminating in a more complete and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Landlords Leaving the Market

One of the most prevalent triggers to homelessness reported by the June cohort was “Landlords selling property”. In total, 17 respondents in June (36%) reported that their last stable accommodation broke down specifically because of landlords selling their property. This compares to 14% of the March cohort. Additionally, 1 family reported that their landlord was moving back into the property and another reported that their landlord was renovating - with a view to subsequently selling the property. These families were unable to access or secure alternative accommodation, even in cases when considerable notice was given – which ultimately led to their homelessness. Securing accommodation which accepted rent supplement was a particular barrier reported by the respondents.

In cases where a landlord is forced to sell (by their financial lender) or where the landlord wants to occupy the property, the landlord does not have to wait until the end of the normal four-year lease to serve a Notice. While the recent Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2015 introduced a range of additional documents which landlords must provide when they are attempting to issue a notice of termination, it is important that these measures are monitored to ensure that these notices of tenancy termination are fully compliant.

Increased Prevalence of Migrant Families

While there was a high prevalence of migrant respondents who were entering homeless with their children during March 2016 (34% of the sample of 70 families), this number was even greater among the June 2016 cohort. In total 51% of the June respondents were migrants (n=24), just over half of the migrants in this study were *originally* from outside of Europe¹⁵ (n=13). Migrants represent 12% of the general population - 3.5% of whom are non-EU¹⁶. The fact that they represent 36% of the families entering homelessness in March, and 51% in June, is therefore significant as their numbers are disproportionately high - particularly among non-EU migrants.

As can be seen in the survey instrument at the end of this document, a survey question was included on whether respondents satisfied the Habitual Residence Condition¹⁷. All of the 47 survey respondents satisfied HRC and in cases where the respondents were unemployed, all were in receipt of social welfare payments¹⁸.

In terms of the housing histories of migrants, the majority reported stable housing histories in the private rented sector. Five of the sample had originally entered the country as asylum seekers and lived in Direct Provision accommodation until they were granted refugee status¹⁹. Since this time, however, they have resided for several years in the private rented sector and reported long tenancies in each accommodation. 3 other migrants had arrived to Ireland in the last two years and during this time had not secured stable accommodation. They had, instead, been staying in overcrowded conditions with friends or family members prior to presenting as homeless.

Help-Seeking *before* Becoming Homeless

32 of the 47 (n=72%) respondents surveyed reported that they approached a service *before* becoming homeless. The majority of these families cited Local Authority or City Council Office as one of the first port of calls to discuss their impending homelessness. Threshold, Focus Ireland

¹⁵ While some of these non-EU migrants had Irish citizenship, they were nonetheless recorded as 'migrants' in this study as, in some cases, their ethnic minority status may have an impact on their access to stable housing.

¹⁶ Census 2011 (www.cso.ie). Census 2016 results pending at time of writing this document.

¹⁷ Introduced in 2004 in response to EU enlargement, the HRC determines access to social welfare entitlements, which is based on the following considerations of each applicant: the length and continuity of the applicant who has lived in the Irish State, the nature and pattern of the applicant's employment, and the future intentions of the applicant (FLAC, 2010).

¹⁸ The fact that all families satisfy the HRC is likely to be the case because migrants with no immigration status must use when presenting as homeless are routed through an alternative emergency provision system. These migrants report to the New Communities Unit in Gardiner Street.

¹⁹ This was determined in the accommodation trajectories section, in which one of the last four accommodations reported by the respondent lived was Direct Provision.

(advice and information services) or a local social welfare office were also commonly reported as sources of information for families. Several of the families had also approached Residential Tenancies Board (previously PRTB), or in some cases, an advocacy support network or their local councillor or TD. Some of the families had previous contact with their local authorities as they were already on the local authority housing list for several years. In cases where families did not contact any service, it was typically related a lack of knowledge about which services were available and how they could help.

In many cases, families approached advice and information services *after* they received a notice of termination. Therefore, legal and advocacy support was needed in disputing or challenging notices of termination, for rental support or ‘top-ups’, or alternatively, in requesting repairs on accommodation if required. While this support enabled some families to remain in their home for a number of weeks or months, it did not ultimately prevent their homelessness (particularly in cases where the property was put up for sale or when tenancies were terminated). A small number of families were engaging with activist networks who advocate for those experiencing homelessness, with some of these approaching media channels in highlighting their plight to the wider public.

In the open-ended questions at the end of the survey (which captured additional comments on services and what might help them in the future), respondents described the importance of friendliness and approachability of front-line staff. When staff members are rude or unhelpful (either by phone or in person), this added significant distress on an already stressful daily life for families. By contrast, a dedicated support worker with whom the family had made a positive and productive connection was greatly appreciated by families.

Several families described the deterioration of their health of living in a hotel or emergency accommodation due to the lack of storage or cooking facilities in their hotel accommodation. Difficulties reported in this interaction included the logistical challenges in negotiating the bureaucracy across different services such as social welfare, housing, and other agencies.

In the final question of the survey in which it was asked what the respondents themselves wanted to see in the future, a majority said they wanted a stable and adequate house for them and their family. Some expressed dissatisfaction with the private rented sector in terms of the lack of stability and quality it offers, which can have a negative impact on family life. Specifically, they described the stressful reality of searching for appropriate housing which accepts rent supplement or Homeless Assistance Payment (HAP) was very challenging for families and many reported feeling intense frustration and disappointment during this process.

Conclusion

The purpose of this regular telephone survey exercise with families presenting as homeless is to produce a concise and targeted examination of the accommodation trajectories, demographic profile and help-seeking patterns of families experiencing homelessness. As has been emphasised a number of times within this document, the findings do not necessarily pertain to all families experiencing homelessness; rather, they relate to a particular cohort of families at a particular point-in-time. Nonetheless, repeating this exercise on a regular basis can yield relevant and timely

analysis of family homelessness which slowly builds a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon.

As was the case in March, the June survey results also reveal particular 'at risk' groups to family homelessness which may help inform prevention strategies: families who are on rent supplement and on low income, young families experiencing income poverty and difficulties in the family home, migrant families, and families who are residing in overcrowded accommodation and may be 'hidden' from services. The results presented here also points to the interaction between structural disadvantage (i.e. unemployment, lack of adequate income, housing market imbalances) with personal crises (i.e. domestic violence, relationship breakdown, family conflict and overcrowding).

It is worth naming the key similarities and changes which were identified between March and June 2016 surveys as these insights contribute to a broader understanding the shape and dynamic of family homelessness.

1. **Increase in the number of families who are homeless due to landlords leaving the market.** As described earlier in the document, there was an increase from 14% in March to 36% in June of families becoming homeless due to landlords selling their accommodation. This finding has also been reported anecdotally in other Focus Ireland services.
2. **Continuing prevalence of young parents entering homelessness:** Identical to March sample, a quarter of all the families in June were under the age of 25 years. These young people had little or no experience of living independently in stable housing and reported significant barriers in accessing affordable housing. Their living situations were often strained as they spent considerable periods of time in overcrowded conditions with their young children.
3. **Increase in the number of migrant families:** 51% of the June sample was represented by migrant respondents as opposed to 36% of the sample in March. The high prevalence of non-EU families across both months are worth noting, as is the continuing presence of families who have histories of living in Direct Provision accommodation (5 families in each survey respectively). By contrast with March survey in which families who left Direct Provision were reliant on friends and families for several years, the 5 families surveyed in June reported considerably stable tenancies since being granted refugee status.
4. **Persistent link between joblessness and homelessness:** 84% and 83% of the respective March and June survey respondents were unemployed. Several respondents also described during the survey the negative impact homelessness had on their ability to sustain and also to find employment. Similarly, those who were students reported considerable strain on their ability to maintain their studies.
5. **Reductions in the incidents of domestic violence:** 11 respondents in the March survey cited domestic violence as being the main cause of their homelessness²⁰, with an additional 5 reporting that domestic violence had negatively impacted on their housing stability in the past. June recorded 2 families who self-reported that they entered homeless as a result of domestic violence.

In conclusion, this survey reveals the ongoing and persistent difficulties facing low income families in the private rented sector. Loss of accommodation is closely linked to issues of affordability or landlords selling or taking back their property and other issues which demonstrate that the often

²⁰ This was in the cases of both intimate partner violence and also violence in the family home.

precariousness of the private rented sector as a tenure. For families with more unstable housing histories, they appear largely excluded from the private rented sector and marginalised from the broader housing market altogether. Cumulatively, this signals the inadequate provision of social housing and affordable housing for low income households, particularly in stressed urban housing markets such as Dublin.

Acknowledgements

Focus Ireland would like to thank the commitment and expert guidance from all members of our Research Advisory Group over the course of this study. Thank you also to the Family HAT team, and in particular to Majella Byrne, who provided ongoing assistance throughout the survey data collection.

Appendix 1: Telephone Survey Instrument
Telephone Survey with Families - June 2016

SECTION I: Demographic Profile

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----------------------------|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|----|
| Q1 | PASS ID – <i>to be completed prior to phone call</i> | | | | | |
| Q2 | What is your age? | | | | | |
| Q3 | What is your gender? | Male | Female | Other: | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Q4 | Where are you originally from? | Irish | EU | Non-EU | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Q5 | What is your employment status? (If unemployed, ask Q5b below). | Unemployed | Student | Part-time Employment | Full-time Employment | |
| | | | | | | |
| Q5b | <i>If unemployed, are you in receipt of a weekly social welfare payment?</i> | Yes | No | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Q5c | <i>If you are <u>not in receipt</u> of welfare payment, is this related to HRC/citizenship status?</i> | Difficulties attaining HRC | Difficulties in attaining citizenship status | Have not applied for HRC | Other (please state): | |
| | | | | | | |
| Q6 | Are you single or in a couple? | Single | In a couple | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| Q7 | How many children do you have? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5+ |
| | | | | | | |
| Q8 | What type of accommodation are you currently residing in? | Hotel | Family Emergency Accomm. | With Friends/Family | Have Exited Homelessness | |
| | | | | | | |

SECTION II: Accommodations Prior to Homelessness

Please describe your previous four accommodations (note to interviewer: No.4 is the accommodation IMMEDIATELY BEFORE entering Hotel/B&B accommodation):

| Q9 | Tenure Type | Duration of Stay | Reasons for Leaving (insert coding category) | If you were in PRS: | | |
|-----|---|---------------------|--|--|---|----------|
| | | | | a) were you in receipt of rent supplement? (Y/N) | b) did you have to 'top up' this payment with your own money? | |
| 1 | | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | | |
| Q10 | How long would you say it has been since you last had a 'stable' accommodation? | Less than one month | 1-6 months | 7 months – 1 year | 1-2 years | 3+ years |
| | | | | | | |
| Q11 | In what area/location was your last stable home? (please specify): | | | | | |
| Q12 | Would you describe this as the first time you have experienced homelessness? | First Time Homeless | Have experienced homeless before | | Don't know | |
| | | | | | | |

SECTION III: Help-seeking PRIOR to becoming homeless

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Q13a | Did you contact anyone BEFORE you became homeless? | Yes | No | Don't know |
| | | | | |
| Q13b | If yes, who did you contact? (✓all that apply) | Local councillor/TD | | |
| | | Local Authority | | |
| | | CWO | | |
| | | Citizens advice | | |
| | | MABS | | |
| | | PRTB | | |
| | | Local Social Welfare Office | | |
| | | Non-Statutory organisations: | Focus Ireland | |
| | | | Threshold | |
| | | | Simon Community | |
| | | | Crosscare | |
| | | | Other (please state): | |
| | | GP | | |
| | | Your landlord | | |
| Other (please state): | | | | |
| Q14 | Do you have any comments on the services you have experienced? | | | |
| Q15 | What do you think would help you have a good future? | | | |

Thank you very much for taking part in this survey.

We really appreciate it

Focus Ireland has been appointed by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) as the Homeless Action Team (HAT) for families across the four Dublin local authorities since 2012. This service provides case management support to families to assist them to move out of homelessness into sustainable long-term accommodation. The team also includes specialist support workers for children to support them in overcoming the experiences associated with the period of homelessness. The Family HAT team is funded by DRHE, HSE Social Inclusion and Túsla. Focus Ireland also carries out work around preventing family homelessness and this is funded by these agencies as well as Bord Gáis Energy.

The 'Insights into Family Homelessness Series' is funded by Focus Ireland. The accuracy of the information and analysis contained in this report, and any judgments made, are entirely the responsibility of Focus Ireland. The views do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders.

Focus Ireland
Head Office
9–12 High Street
Christchurch
Dublin 8

Tel 01 881 5900
LoCall 1850 204 205
Fax 01 881 5950
Email info@focusireland.ie
focusireland.ie

Registered charity CHY 7220

