

**FOCUS**  
Ireland

**Survey of  
the families  
that became  
homeless during  
September 2016**

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The principle aim of this report is to capture the accommodation trajectories of families *before* they presented to homeless services and the key factors which impacted on their loss of housing. The analysis also captures demographic information of families as well as patterns around help-seeking. It is hoped that the generation of timely data will help to inform policy and service responses to family homelessness in Ireland today.

This is the third telephone survey conducted with families presenting as homeless in the Dublin region – an exercise which is repeated every three months to capture change or consistencies over time.

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## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS – SEPTEMBER 2016

- This study presents key findings from a short quantitative survey conducted by telephone with 43 families who presented to Dublin family homeless services during September 2016. This represents 66% of the total number of families who presented as newly homeless in the Dublin region during the month of June (N=65). This compared to 65% of the sample captured in June and 83% in 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 what is driving family homelessness over time.
- 10 (23%) of the respondents were aged between 18 and 25 years, 19 (44%) were 26 to 35 years and 14 (33%) were over the age of 36 years. Therefore, the relatively high numbers of young parents among families entering homelessness continue to be a key trend in September 2016.
- Among the 43 respondents who were surveyed, 26 (60%) were born in Ireland and 17 (40%) were categorised as being of migrant origin (i.e. born outside Ireland): 9 (21%) were from countries within the EU and 8 (19%) were from outside the EU. This pattern of 50/50 EU non-EU migrants has been seen consistently across surveys. 5 respondents from non-EU countries had resided in direct provision accommodation in the past for those seeking asylum.
- Of the sample, 15 (35%) were experiencing homelessness with their partner and child(ren), while 28 (65%) were lone parents. Of the 28 who were lone parents, 4 were single fathers and the rest were female-headed households.
- 30 (69%) of the families constituted one or two children. The remaining 13 (31%) of the respondents had three or more children.
- Of these 43 families, there were 93 children – 40% of these children were aged 4 or younger.
- The vast majority (n=34, 79%) of the respondents described themselves as unemployed. 8 respondents were in employment - either part-time (n=6) or full-time (n=2). One respondent was studying.
- 32 (74%) of the respondents reported that their last stable home was in the private rented sector. This was also seen in both the March and June surveys. 25 of these 32 families had been in receipt of rent supplement in this private rented property.
- The most prominent reason for their leaving their last accommodation was properties being withdrawn from the market (n=17, 40%), as reflected in previous surveys. The most common reason within this category was landlords selling up, which was reported by 14 respondents (33%).
- Given that 4 of the 6 families who had lost their housing due to rental increases did so 1-5 years previous to presenting to emergency accommodation, indicates the possibility that forms

of rent control which have been implemented in recent years may help prevent some families becoming homeless.

- In analysing the respondents' previous four accommodations, key trajectory 'types' were identified. These are expanded upon in the report, and are illustrated with anonymised case profiles:
  1. Stability in the private rented sector.
  2. Precariousness in the private rented sector.
  3. Prolonged instability and hidden homelessness.
  4. Young people who never lived independently
  
- In terms of patterns around help-seeking or early engagement with services, 27 (63%) of the respondents sought help or support before becoming homeless. This is somewhat fewer than the 72% of respondents who approached a service in June survey.
  
- The most common first port-of-call for families was their local authority, Threshold or Focus Ireland advice and information services. Nine families sought help or advice from their local TD, an occurrence which was not seen as much in previous surveys.

Changes or consistencies identified between September survey and March/June 2016 surveys include:

- ∞ A majority of families that became homeless continued to report that their last stable accommodation had been in the private rented sector.
- ∞ There was a continued high reported incidents of properties being withdrawn from the market.
- ∞ There continued to be a significant number of young parent's entering homelessness, many of whom have little or no experience living in independent housing.
- ∞ There was a continued presence of families of migrant origin – both EU and non-EU – presenting as homeless
- ∞ The majority of respondents were unemployed at time of becoming homeless and dependent on rent allowance supplements, indicating the persistent association between joblessness, low income and homelessness.

## INTRODUCTION

During September 2016, 65 families presented as newly homeless to their local authority across the four Dublin regions<sup>1</sup>. There were 1,014 families residing in emergency accommodation in the Dublin region alone during that month – comprising of 1,014 adults and 2,065 children<sup>2</sup>.

Across the country as a whole during September 2016, there were a total of 1,173 families with 2,426 children living in emergency accommodation<sup>3</sup>. This represents a 37% increase when compared to the 737 families who were homeless across the country during the same month in 2015. However, the continued inflow of families presenting to their local authority as homeless is greatest in the Dublin region, where the high demand on housing is most pronounced.

Focus Ireland was appointed by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) as the Family Homeless Action Team (HAT) for families across the Dublin region<sup>4</sup>. 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 Family HAT who make contact with the family as soon as possible in order to set up an initial assessment.

In an effort to ensure that Focus Ireland (and relevant stakeholders and policy-makers) have an accurate and timely understanding of the accommodation trajectories and ‘triggers’ to family homelessness, Focus Ireland conduct telephone surveys with as many of the families presenting as homeless as possible<sup>5</sup>. This regular reporting highlights key causes of family homelessness and how can monitor how this can change over time. These regular reports also capture key demographic profile information on families who are presenting as homeless.

This report is the fourth publication in this series involving telephone surveys of families becoming homeless, and the third report replicating the same survey. This collection of data and related discussion is then presented through separate publications as part of Focus Ireland’s *Insights into Family Homelessness Series*<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This figure represents the number of families who became homeless during the relevant month and had not been counted as homeless in the past. Focus Ireland press release on the month of September can be found here: <https://www.focusireland.ie/press/latest-focus-ireland-figures-report-65-families-became-newly-homeless-dublin-september/>

<sup>2</sup> Monthly infographics on family homelessness in the Dublin (Dublin Region Homeless Executive): <http://www.homelessdublin.ie/homeless-families>

<sup>3</sup> The count which is conducted on a monthly basis through regular reporting of statistics to the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and pertains to all persons residing in Section-10-funded emergency accommodation (during the final week of each month). This does not include women and children residing in domestic violence refugees nor does it include non-Section-10 funded facilities. Homeless figures for September 2016 can be found at:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/homelessness-report-september-2016>

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> As agreed in the Research Programme set out by the Focus Ireland Research Advisory Group (RAG) – a subcommittee of the organisation’s Board – which comprises of expert researchers and academics in the area of homelessness and housing.

<sup>6</sup> Focus Ireland Insights into Family Homelessness Series publications can be found here: <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 design<sup>7</sup>. 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 a recent trajectory of accommodation transitions, the demographic profile of respondents, and 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, 43 of the 65 families who became homeless in the Dublin region during September 2016 participated in the survey, representing 66% of the entire cohort of families newly presenting as homeless. These surveys were administered by telephone during the month of January. In comparison to the previous surveys conducted during 2016, there was a greater delay in carrying out the September survey. This was due to the high demand on services and their involvement in a number of other studies on family homelessness being undertaken at the end of 2016.<sup>8</sup> In keeping with Focus Ireland Research Ethics Guidelines, significant attention was paid by both the services and advocacy staff members to ensuring that families were never invited to participate in more than one study and that high ethical standards were maintained at all times.

Prior to the Focus Ireland Research Officer 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. Two families declined to participate in the survey at this initial stage, and eleven families were not contactable (Focus Ireland did not have telephone contact details because they left homelessness very quickly or another organisation was assisting them). Several families were not contactable due to difficulties in connecting with them via telephone (phones were always engaged or connecting to 'call catcher') or, alternatively, the families did not answer their phone or return voicemail messages<sup>9</sup>. Thus, 43 surveys were successfully completed with relevant families via telephone.

Upon making contact with the participants, the research officer stated the purpose of the telephone call and what was involved in taking part in the survey. While the survey was broadly structured in design and questions were posed in a consistent way, in many cases, the families expanded on their answers and there was some flexibility in terms of follow up questions (research notes were recorded in these instances). The surveys typically took around 5-10 minutes each, but sometimes calls were longer - depending on the level of detail offered by participants themselves. In some cases, phone calls exceeded 15-20 minutes as families voluntarily described their trajectories into homelessness in more detail.

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<sup>7</sup> The survey was designed by the advocacy team and was shared with Focus Ireland Research Advisory Group for feedback.

<sup>8</sup> There are three studies focusing on different dimensions of family homelessness which will be completed and launched by Focus Ireland during 2016. This includes a study on families who have exited homelessness, prevention of family homelessness, and food access and nutritional health of families living in hotel accommodation.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

In cases where information was requested by the family in relation to their homelessness or housing situation, the relevant contact number of the Family HAT team was provided to the participant.

All data was inputted and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22.

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 participate. All details emerging from the research were anonymised and this was also explained to the respondents<sup>10</sup>.

Based on emerging findings from previous surveys, there were some minor changes to September's survey in relation to feedback from Focus Ireland's Research Advisory Group. These included the inclusion of ethnic and cultural background; age of children; history of direct provision (and for how long); and any reports of recent rent supplement increases based on measures introduced in July 2016<sup>11</sup>. The question on whether the respondents satisfied the Habitual Residency Condition was removed as this was not yielding anything significant in previous surveys<sup>12</sup>.

## DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

All 43 of the respondents were adult parents (i.e. over the age of 18 years) and were accompanied by one or more of their children.

### Living Situation at Time of Survey

At time of survey, 31 (72%) of the families were residing in private emergency accommodation (commercial hotels or B&BS), 3 (7%) families were living with friends of family members, and 9 of the families (21%) had exited homelessness. The proportion of families who had already exited homelessness by the time the survey was administered is very similar to June 2016 report (which was 19%)<sup>13</sup>. As mentioned previously, this survey was administered by telephone during January 2017. In comparison to the previous surveys conducted during 2016, there was a greater delay in carrying out the September survey.

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<sup>10</sup> Contact details and names were destroyed once the telephone surveys were completed and all identifiable details were removed.

<sup>11</sup> Rent Supplement & Housing Assistance Payment to increase in both Rural & Urban Areas  
<https://www.welfare.ie/en/pressoffice/Pages/pr280616.aspx>

<sup>12</sup> This is due to the fact that families residing in the mainstream emergency accommodation system all satisfy HRC as per the requirements at their local authority officers. Families who do not satisfy the HRC are generally routed through Homeless Persons Unit which accommodates the needs of all non-nationals in housing need.

<sup>13</sup> As was the case in the June 2016 survey, these surveys were administered at least 3 months after families first entered homelessness (as opposed to 2-4 weeks after March 2016 survey). This is likely to result in a higher number of families who had exited homelessness upon being contacted by the researcher.

## Age

Of the participants who were surveyed, 10 (23%) were aged between 18 and 25 years; 19 (44%) were between 26 and 35 years of age; and 14 (33%) were 36 years or older. See Table 1 below.

*Table 1. Age Breakdown of Sample*

Age Group (in years)	Number of Survey Respondents	Percentage of Total
18-25	10	23%
26-35	19	44%
36+	14	33%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100%</b>

Once again, high levels of young parents presenting as homeless; reflecting both March and June 2016 in which roughly a quarter of all families becoming homeless were under the age of 25 years.

## Nationality and Ethnic/Cultural Background

In September 2016 survey, 26 (60%) of the survey respondents were born in Ireland, while 17 (40%) were born outside of Ireland; 9 (21%) of the migrant-headed households were originally from an EU country while 8 (19%) were from outside the EU (see Table 2).

*Table 2. Nationality Breakdown of Sample*

Nationality Category	Number of Survey Respondents	Percentage of Total
Ireland	26	60%
EU	9	21%
Non-EU	8	19%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100%</b>

The proportion of Irish-born respondents mirrored March's survey (66%), while it represented an increase from June's survey (49%). It is worth noting, that the Census 2011 shows that a significant proportion of the migrant population live in the private rental accommodation and make up some 44% of those renting from a private landlord<sup>14</sup>.

An additional question which was inserted into September's survey was on ethnic and cultural background. These are outlined in Table 3 below.

Of the non-EU migrants, a total of 5 respondents reported that they had a history of living in direct provision accommodation for those seeking asylum. This could be considered a high number considering the relatively small sample. Time spent in direct provision ranged from a number of months to several years.

*Table 3. Ethnic and Cultural Background*

<sup>14</sup> Central Statistics Office [[www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)]

Ethnic and Cultural Background		Number of Respondents
<b>White</b>	White Irish	24
	Irish Traveller	2
	Another White Background	9
<b>Black / Black Irish</b>	African	6
	Any other black background	0
<b>Asian / Asian Irish</b>	Chinese	0
	Any other Asian Background	2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>43</b>

## Family Type

In this September survey, 28 (65%) of the respondents were one-parent households. Again, this proportion reflects March's survey when 67% of the respondents were headed by lone parents compared to 51% in June 2016. The remainder 15 (35%) in September were two-parent families. Of the 28 one-parent households, 4 families were headed by single fathers. The remaining 24 one-parent households constituted of single mothers.

In terms of the number of children in the family unit, the majority of the respondents had either one or two children in their household (n=30, 69%). The remaining 31% of the respondents had three or more children. One family had 7 children. Across the sample, 4 respondents were pregnant.

*Table 4. Breakdown of Number of Children as per Each Family unit*

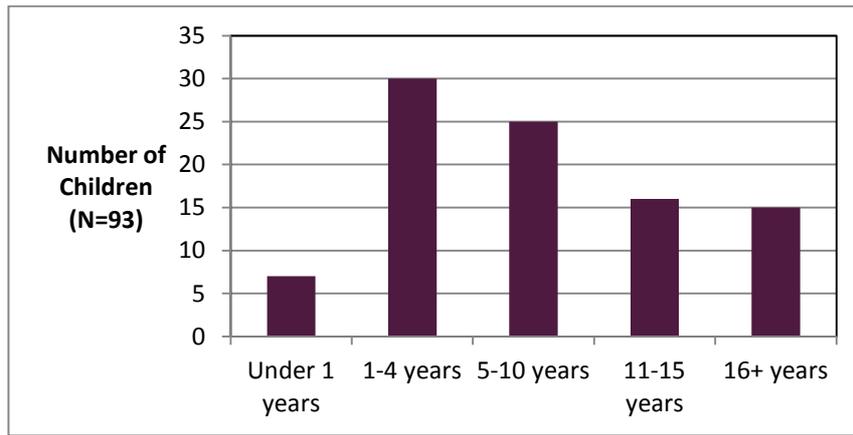
	Number of Families	Percentage of Total	
<b>Number of Children</b>	1	16	37%
	2	14	32%
	3	7	16%
	4	4	9%
	5+	2	6%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>43</b>	<b>100%</b>

The numbers of children in families also reflects March and June data, in which 66% and 69% (respectively) of the respondents were accompanied by either one or two children.

As indicated earlier in this paper, the age of all children within the families were newly captured in September's survey. In total, there were 93 children of the 43 families who participated in the survey. Of these, 7 children (8%) were under the age of 1 year, 30 children (32%) were between 1 and 4 years, 25 (27%) were between 5 and 10 years, 16 (17%) were between 11 and 15 years and 15 children (16%) were over the age of 16.

Therefore, 40% of the children were under the age of 4, while 67% of children were under the age of 10. See figure 5 below.

Figure 5. Ages of Children



## Employment Status of Respondents

The majority of the research participants (n=34, 79%) described themselves as unemployed or full-time parents, slightly fewer than captured in March and June 2016 surveys (85%, 84%). Eight of the respondents were in either part-time employment (n=6, 14%) or full-time employment (n=2, 2%). One respondent was a student.

Once again, high levels of joblessness, limited income, dependency on rental supplements were associated to an 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 areas cited in this section broadly mirrored previous surveys conducted in 2016. These included Dublin 15 (specifically, Blanchardstown, Castleknock, Ongar, Clonee and Ongar), Dublin 22 (Tallaght, Firhouse), Dublin 17 (Coolock, Darndale), Dublin 5 (Harmonstown), Dublin 7 (Phibsboro), Dublin 9 (Drumcondra), Dublin 8, Dublin 11 (Finglas), Dublin 13 (Baldoye), Dublin 18, Co. Dublin and other areas cited were Lucan, Dún Laoghaire, Blackrock, Ballymun, and Swords. As in previous surveys, these areas of Dublin (though not all) would generally be considered as having high proportion of rental accommodation, particularly for individuals and families on average or below average incomes.

Five families reported that their last stable accommodation was outside of Dublin, mostly surrounding counties around Dublin. In the case of four of these families, they had previously lived in Dublin in the past and returned to Dublin when they became homeless. The other family was not able to secure emergency accommodation in their county of origin and they had to relocate to Dublin upon becoming homeless.

## REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS

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 picture of the participants' recent housing history and it revealed the various triggers or events 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 and Triggers to Homelessness

Mirroring both March and June 2016 telephone survey data, the majority (n=32, 74%) of respondents who presented as homeless during September reported that their last stable home was in the private rented sector (68% in June; 73% in March).

25 of these 32 families were in receipt of rent supplement in their last stable home, while 7 were meeting rental payments through their own income, income from a partner or from a family member. This compares to June 2016 when 3 families were meeting their rent through their household's own income.

10 families reported that their last stable home was staying with family; 7 of whom categorised this as their parental family home and three others were staying with relatives.

Due to mortgage arrears, 1 family had to leave their own home prior to entering homelessness.

A basic frequency analysis was conducted on reported 'triggers' to homelessness. Table 5 below highlights the self-reported reasons why families had to leave their last stable home. It is worth noting that these triggers did not always directly precede their initial entry into homelessness; many families relied on informal arrangements for accommodation before they presented as homeless with their local authority, as will be discussed at greater length in the following section.

*Table 6: Cited Reasons for Leaving Last Stable Accommodation*

Reasons cited for leaving last stable property		No. of Respondents
<b>Property being withdrawn from the private rented sector</b>	Landlord selling	14 (33%)
	Landlord moving in / giving property to family member	2
	Bank repossession of landlord's property	1
<b>Additional issues related to private rented sector</b>	Rent increase	6
	Insecure tenancies	3
	Landlord renovating property	2
	Rent arrears	1
<b>Other</b>	Family conflict	4
	Overcrowding	4
	Domestic violence	1
	Relationship breakdown	1
	Mortgage arrears	1
	Fire	1
	Personal difficulties relating to alcohol misuse	1
	Loneliness	1
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>43</b>

A recurrent theme of each of these telephone survey reports is the relevant properties being withdrawn from the rental market. As highlighted in the table above, 14 families cited that their landlord selling was the main trigger to their homelessness. Furthermore, 2 families reported that their landlord was either moving in to the property or giving it to a family member, while an additional family reported that their accommodation was repossessed by the bank due to their landlord's mortgage arrears.

Thus, a total of 17 families (40% of the sample) became homeless due to the property being withdrawn from the market. This compares to 38% of the June cohort of families who cited landlord selling (n=17) or landlord moving back into the property (n=1).

Targeted analysis of the subgroup of those who cited rental increases as the cause of their homelessness, revealed how 4 of the 6 families had entered homelessness between one and five years previously. Only 2 families had become homeless as a result of rental increases *immediately* before presenting as homeless. This suggests that rent regulations introduced by Minister Kelly of the previous government may have assisted in preventing some families entering emergency accommodation during 2016. However, as can be seen from this analysis, there are other factors which still persist and result in homelessness.

## Housing Trajectories and Routes into Homelessness

An additional objective of this regular research exercise with families presenting as homeless is to understand their accommodation trajectories – that is, to capture their previous four living situations and the reported reasons why they left each of those accommodations. This data yields a somewhat rudimentary, yet concise, analysis of their housing trajectories.

Emerging from this were four broad analytical groupings:

1. Previous stability in the Private Rented Sector
2. Precariousness in the Private Rented Sector
3. Prolonged Housing Instability and Hidden Homelessness
4. Young People who have Never Lived Independently

These groupings broadly mirror previous surveys in terms of the proportion of the respondents' recent housing histories. However, in September's survey, there were a significant number of young families who had no history of living independently and had transitioned straight from living in the family home or with relatives and into homelessness and so a fourth trajectory type was added. These groupings will now be expanded upon, together with a brief case study of a housing trajectory of one family<sup>15</sup>.

- 1. Previous Stability in the Private Rented Sector** – There were 24 families (56% of the sample) who reported no prior experience of homelessness and very little time living with friends or family (apart from after they became homeless when they often relied on informal arrangements before presenting to their local authority as homeless).

The proportion of families who reported notably stable housing histories (n=24, 56%) mirrored previous surveys (e.g. June's survey found that 53% of families had a stable housing history).

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<sup>15</sup> All case studies are fully anonymised and identifiable details are removed.

These families reported stable tenancies in the private sector, typically remaining for several years in each tenancy. Reasons for leaving previous tenancies in the past were usually associated with changes in family structure such as getting married, having a child, or frequently, landlords selling.

Their relative housing stability would strongly indicate that these families had previously complied with tenancy agreements and were able to pay their rent. The majority of this group, but not all, were also supported with rent supplement.

#### Key Characteristics of Group One:

- 12 of these 24 families became homeless due to the landlord leaving the sector (9 of which were due to landlords selling). An additional 2 families reported that they had to leave the landlord reported that they wanted to renovate the property.
- 15 of the 24 families were migrants; 8 of whom were of a black or ethnic minority background.
- 15 of the 24 families were lone parent families.
- 5 of the 24 families resided with friends or family before presenting as homeless, the remainder transitioned directly from 'stable' accommodation and into emergency hotel or B&B accommodation.
- The majority of this group (n=19, 80%) sought advice and information from a support service or organisation prior to presenting as homeless, 6 of whom approached their local TD or councillor.
- 6 of the families in this group had already exited homelessness by the time they were surveyed in January/February 2017. The remaining 18 families were in hotel accommodation (n=16) or were staying with friends or family (n=2).

#### **Case Study Group 1 – Private Rented Sector**

Jane is a 45-year-old single mother with 4 children between the ages of 8 and 20 years. She is in receipt of job seekers' allowance. She has lived in the private rented sector for more than fifteen years and each tenancy lasting for several years. Over the last ten years, she has been in receipt of rent supplement.

During Summer 2016, her landlord informed her that he intended to sell the property. She was unable to find an alternative rental accommodation for her and her children before her tenancy ended. During this time, she approached her local TD for advice. The TD gave her the relevant information on presenting to her local authority. Since beginning her accommodation search in the private rented sector, she said that she has viewed precisely "36 properties" without success. She attributes this block to a resistance to Homeless Assistance Payment Scheme on the part of private landlords.

She described being highly stressed living in the hotel and so after three months she and her children went to live with friends instead. She stated that at the end of January, she intended to present to her local authority again.

2. **Precariousness in the Private Rented Sector** – There were 8 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).

This instability in housing was characterised by often unsatisfactory or inadequate private rented accommodation tenancies. This group also demonstrated a certain level of reliance on family or friends for accommodation, sometimes for months or even years.

Family conflict was sometimes cited over this time, which was often related to overcrowded situations.

Key Characteristics of Group Two:

- 7 of the 8 families reported that their last stable accommodation was in the private rented sector and 3 had to leave due to landlord selling.
- 7 of the 8 families lived with friends or family for a duration ranging from a month to a number of years prior to presenting as homeless. These situations ultimately became unsustainable for the families in question and they considered they had no other choice than to approach their local authority.
- 7 of the 8 families were White Irish and 6 were single parent households.
- None of the families who were categorised in Group Two had exited homelessness by the time they were surveyed.

**Case Study Group 2 – Precariousness in the Private Rented Sector**

Amanda is a single mother who has two children – both under the age of 10 years. She is on jobseekers' allowance and has received rent supplement for the last several years.

Five years ago, she moved to a larger property as she needed more space for her two children. After three years in this property, the landlord decided to sell. She was unable to find a follow-on property which accepted rent supplement.

In 2015, she presented as homeless and was placed in a hotel room with her two children for four months. Upon securing a rented property which accepted rent supplement, she moved to her new home and remained here for one year.

In September 2016, once again, her landlord informed her that he intended to sell the property. She was unable to find alternative housing again and had to re-present to her local authority. She is currently living in a hotel. This time around, she was more familiar with the services and supports available to her. She continues to look for another affordable house for her and her children but is so far unsuccessful.

3. **Prolonged Housing Instability and Hidden Homelessness** – There were 4 families in the September cohort who reported more extensive marginalisation from the housing market. Significantly, this compared to a quarter of the families in the June survey who had more chaotic housing histories.

These families had little or no experience of living in independent or stable tenancies, they were heavily reliant on friends or families, typically for lengthy periods of time and reported difficulties in accessing private rental accommodation. Some had previous histories of homelessness.

Key Characteristics of Group Three:

- 3 of these 4 respondents had spent time in hostel accommodation or rough sleeping in the past.
- All 4 had spent time moving between the homes of family, friends and relatives and lived in significant housing precariousness for many years.
- All 4 respondents were Irish.
- None of the families in this group had exited homelessness by the time they had been surveyed.

### **Case Study Group 3 – Prolonged Housing Instability and Hidden Homelessness**

Joe is a 26 year old father of three. Together with his partner and children, Joe entered homelessness following a year living with a relative. He left this accommodation because it was severely overcrowded and stressful.

Joe's housing history is notably unstable and he and his family have been moving accommodation for many years now, moving between relatives and at one point, he was rough sleeping for two months. He did live in private rented tenancies for short periods of time in the past but these always broke down after a number of months. He did not approach any service before presenting as homeless because he did not know where to go and felt that nobody would be able to help. He currently lives with his partner and children in emergency accommodation.

- 4. Young People who have Never Lived Independently** - Identical to March and June 2016 samples, almost a quarter of all the families in September were 25 years or under. Of the 10 respondents in this young cohort, 7 were categorised as being significantly marginalised from the housing market.

These 7 young people had no experience of living independently in stable housing, citing that they were unable to access the private rented housing market. Their living situations were often strained as they spent considerable periods of time in overcrowded conditions with their young children. Family conflict was commonly reported and typically went hand-in-hand with overcrowding. These young families often shared a single room in their family homes, with some sharing beds or sleeping in common areas in the home. These young respondents expressed a desire to live independently but found it extremely difficult to secure adequate and affordable housing.

#### Key Characteristics of Group Four:

- 6 of the 7 respondents were Irish-born.
- 5 of the 7 respondents were lone parents.
- One respondent had two children while the rest had one baby. Of these parents, 2 of these young people were pregnant with their second child.
- All but one of these respondents were unemployed.
- This group were more likely to support help from their local authority or local council as a first point-of-call.

### **Case Study Group 4 – Youth Pathways into Homelessness**

Alison is a 22 year single mother with one child. She is in part-time employment. She left the family home when she was 19 and lived with a relative for one year. She was not happy here and returned to the family home.

After 2 to 3 years back in the family home, family conflict worsened due to overcrowding. Alison shared a double bed with her child and her sibling's child during this time. While she doesn't consider this period to be homelessness, she stated that "stable isn't the word either". She is unable to afford rents in the private rented market that going into a homeless hostel was the only option for her.

She presented to her local authority after doing research on what to do online. When she presented here, they accommodated her in a hotel room, where she remained at the point of telephone contact.

## Help-Seeking before Becoming Homeless

27 of the 43 (63%) sought information or advice prior to presenting as homeless. This is slightly less than June's survey in which 72% of respondents had approached a service. Families found out about these services through various means including word-of-mouth, Google searching, and through other agencies such as their local social welfare office. Some families already had the knowledge of which service to approach.

Interestingly, 9 of the families approached their local TD or councillor as their first action in seeking help. Through this contact, TDs advised families to present to their local authorities or city council offices, or offered other relevant information and advice. An additional 9 families approached their local authority office as a first port-of-call, while 7 families approached either Threshold or Focus Ireland. In several cases, organisations were in a position to advise a family which resulted in an extension of their date of tenancy termination (for example, when there was an invalid notice given previously). Such intervention does not ultimately prevent homelessness, however, notably in cases where a landlord intends to sell.

Like previous months, 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. One respondent suggested more billboards and adverts which target families at risk of homelessness could assist in ensuring families at risk know which services to approach.

In terms of prominent feedback of services or support, several families said that when they were in hidden homeless situations – such as staying with friends or family – they were not taken seriously by the relevant authorities. A small number of respondents commented that they felt that in order to get adequate supports and provision, it was necessary to declare as homeless and enter emergency accommodation, which they had tried to avoid for some time.

The majority of families said finding private rented accommodation which accepted rent supplement or HAP payments was extremely challenging. While several respondents said that while they had attended viewings, upon the landlord learning that the family was on rent subsidies, they were not considered for the tenancy.

Of the families who had exited homelessness and were residing in private rented accommodation, some described how HAP payments were sometimes delayed and there were bureaucratic difficulties across this process. Furthermore, not all families felt particularly secure in their new accommodation.

## 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 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 may slowly build a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon.

As such, below are the key themes emerging from September 2016 survey, together with some discussion on the similarities and divergences with the previous surveys of March and June 2016. Indeed, it is only at this point with three survey data collection phases completed can we start to determine emerging trends which indicate some of the key factors in homelessness among families. Notwithstanding some slight variations – for example in terms of the demographic profile of families entering homelessness – however, there is a great deal of consistency across phases which are worthy of note.

1. **Private rented properties being withdrawn from the market:** Once again, the high prevalence of landlord withdrawing their properties from the market was identified. In total, 40% of the sample reported that either their landlords were selling or taking the property out of the market. This reflects an ongoing trend across each wave of data collection and raises key insights into the primary drivers of why families continue to present as homeless.
2. **Continuing prevalence of young parents entering homelessness:** Mirroring previous surveys in 2016, a high proportion of young parents continue to present as homeless. The majority of these young people have little or no experience living in independent tenancies and appear to be extremely marginalised from the private rented sector due to lack of affordable rents. Many of these young parents lived in highly stressed and overcrowded home environments prior to presenting as homeless.
3. **Persistent link between joblessness and homelessness:** Families entering homeless are more likely than not to be unemployed and dependent on social welfare jobseekers' allowance. While 8 of the respondents had a job, only two were in full-time employment. The majority were dependent on rent supplement to meet their rental payments. Across the March, June and September samples of families, the proportion of unemployed respondents were 84%, 83% and 79% respectively.
4. **Continued Prevalence of migrant families:** Families of migrant origin, that is, respondents who were not born in Ireland (but may have Irish citizenship), continue to feature in high numbers in September's cohort. Across the three surveys completed in 2016, migrant families constituted between 40-56% of all families entering homelessness. 5 of these families had histories of direct provision, a high number given the small sample.
5. **Families initially approaching TDs for advice and support:** An interesting characteristic of September's sample was that 9 of the families (21%) approached their TD as the first port-of-call when seeking help or advice on their homelessness or housing instability. This may indicate potential areas of future prevention work in collaboration with members of Oireachtas or local councillors.

In conclusion, this telephone survey indicates the key trends and processes which are impacting on the continual inflow of families into emergency accommodation month-on-month. These trends appear to reflect broader structural and systemic issues which disproportionately impact on families who are on low incomes and who are dependent on social welfare and rent supplement. High rents, low take up of tenants on rental subsidies on the part of landlords, together with extraordinary competition on private sector units in urban areas – are culminating in this family homelessness crisis. Young people and those of migrant origin face distinct risk factors in their becoming which also must be recognised.

### **Acknowledgements**

Sincere thanks to the staff of Focus Ireland Family HAT, and in particular to Majella Byrne and Nadine Fowler, who provided ongoing assistance across the data collection phase. 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.

Appendix 1: Telephone Survey Instrument

Telephone Survey with Families - September 2016

SECTION I: Accommodations Prior to Homelessness

Q.1	What type of accommodation are you <u>currently</u> residing in? (✓)	Hotel / Emergency Accommodation (✓)	With Friends/Family (✓)	Moving between Accommodations (✓)	Have Exited Homelessness (include details on tenure type and, where appropriate, tenancy scheme, HAP, RS, etc.)		
Q2	Please describe your previous 4 accommodations BEFORE you entered emergency accommodation (note: No.4 relates to accommodation IMMEDIATELY BEFORE entering Hotel/B&B accommodation)						
	Tenure Type	Duration of Stay	Primary Reason for Leaving	If you were in PRS:			
				a) were you in receipt of rent supplement? (Y/N)	b) did you receive a RS supplement increase from social welfare?		
1							
2							
3							
4							
Q3	How long would you say it has been since you last had a 'stable' accommodation?	< 1 month	1-6 months	7 months – 1 year	1-2 years	3+ years	N/A
Q4	In what area/location was your last stable home? (please specify):						

<b>Q</b>	<b>Would you describe this as the first time you have experienced homelessness? (✓)</b>	<b>First Time Homeless</b>	<b>Have experienced homeless before</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	

## SECTION II: Demographic Profile

<b>Q5</b>	<b>What age are you?</b>					
<b>Q6</b>	<b>What country are you originally from? (✓)</b>	<b>Irish</b>	<b>EU</b>	<b>Non-EU (go to Q3b)</b>		
<b>Q6b</b>	<i>If you are originally born outside Ireland, have you ever resided in Direct Provision Accommodation in Ireland?</i>  <i>If yes, for how long? _____</i>	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>		
<b>Q7</b>	<b>What is your ethnic or cultural background? (✓)</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Irish</b>			
			<b>Irish Traveller</b>			
			<b>Another White background</b>			
		<b>Black /Black Irish</b>	<b>African</b>			
			<b>Any other Black background</b>			
		<b>Asian/Asian Irish</b>	<b>Chinese</b>			
			<b>Any other Asian background</b>			
	<b>Other / Mixed</b>					
<b>Q8</b>	<b>What is your current employment status? (If unemployed, ask Q4b) (✓)</b>	<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>P/T Employment</b>	<b>F/T Employment</b>	
<b>Q8b</b>	<i>If unemployed, are you in receipt of a weekly social welfare payment? (✓)</i>	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>		
<b>Q9</b>	<b>Are you single or in a couple? (✓)</b>	<b>Single</b>		<b>In a couple</b>		
<b>Q10</b>	<b>How many children do you have? (✓)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5+</b>
<b>Q11</b>	<b>What age are your children?</b>  (insert number of children in relation to age categories)	<b>Age in Years</b>	<b>Number of Children</b>			
		Under 1 year				
		1-4				
		5-10				
		11-15				
		16+				

### SECTION III: Help-seeking PRIOR to becoming homeless

<b>Q13a</b>	<b>Did you contact anyone BEFORE you became homeless? (✓)</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	
<b>Q13b</b>	If yes, who did you contact? (✓ all that apply)	<b>Local councillor/TD</b>			
		<b>Local Authority</b>			
		<b>CWO</b>			
		<b>Citizens advice</b>			
		<b>MABS</b>			
		<b>RTB</b>			
		<b>Local Social Welfare Office</b>			
		<b>Friend/Family member:</b>			
		<b>Non-Statutory organisations:</b>	<b>Focus Ireland</b>		
			<b>Threshold</b>		
			<b>Simon Community</b>		
			<b>Other (please state):</b>		
		<b>GP</b>			
<b>Your landlord</b>					
<b>Other (please state):</b>					
<b>Q14</b>	<b>Was there a service/support that you felt you particularly need(ed) living in emergency accommodation? (please give details)</b>				

**Thank you very much for taking part in this survey. We really appreciate it.**

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