

**FOCUS**  
Ireland

**Survey of  
the families  
that became  
homeless during  
December 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 initial interaction with services.

This exercise is conducted on a quarterly basis by Focus Ireland in an effort to help inform policy and service responses to family homelessness in the Dublin Region. This is the fourth report which follows the same research design, methodology and structure in order to reveal change and consistency in trends over time.

For a full analysis of all surveys conducted in 2016, please refer to *Focus Ireland Insights into Family Homelessness No. 9* (soon to be available on Focus Ireland website) which aggregates or merges all the data across 2016.

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Summary of Key Findings ..... 3

December 2016 ..... 3

INTRODUCTION ..... 5

METHODOLOGY..... 6

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE – December 2016 Families..... 7

    Living Situation at Time of Survey ..... 7

    Age..... 7

    Nationality and Ethnic/Cultural Background..... 8

    Family Type..... 9

    Employment Status of Respondents..... 10

    Location of Last stable Home ..... 10

REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS – December 2016..... 11

    Last Stable Accommodation and Triggers to Homelessness ..... 11

    Housing Trajectories and Routes into Homelessness..... 12

    Help-Seeking before Becoming Homeless ..... 15

CONCLUSION..... 17

Appendix 1: Telephone Survey Instrument – December 2016..... 19

## Summary of Key Findings

### December 2016

- This study presents key findings from a short quantitative survey conducted by telephone with **23 families** who presented to Dublin family homeless services during December 2016. This represents 59% of the total number of families who presented as newly homeless in the Dublin region during the month of December (N=39). This compared to 66% of the sample captured in September; 65% in June 2016; and 83% in March 2016.
- This exercise does not claim to offer a complete picture 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, trends and patterns may emerge which will build our understanding of what is driving family homelessness over time.
- 6 (26%) of the respondents were aged between 18 and 25 years, 7 (30%) were 26 to 35 years and 10 (44%) 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 December 2016. This mirrors earlier surveys in terms of the proportion of parents under the age of 26 years presenting as homeless.
- Among the 23 respondents who were surveyed, 10 (43%) were born in Ireland and **13 (57%) were categorised as being of migrant origin** (i.e. born outside Ireland). 2 (9%) of the migrant families were from countries within the EU and 11 (48%) were from outside the EU. The December survey data, therefore, reveals a high proportion of migrant headed-households and in particular those who are originally from outside the EU. 4 respondents are from non-EU countries and had resided in direct provision accommodation in the past (i.e. congregate housing for those seeking asylum).
- Of the sample, 8 (35%) were experiencing homelessness with their partner and child(ren), while 15 (65%) were **lone parents** (reflecting both the September survey and also Department of Environment monthly statistics). Of the 15 lone parents there were no single fathers in the sample.
- 14 (61%) of the families constituted one or two **children**. The remaining 9 (39%) of the respondents had three or more children.
  - Of these 23 families, there were 53 children – 29 (47%) of these children were aged 4 years or younger.
- Mirroring previous surveys, 19 (83%) of the respondents were **unemployed**. 3 respondents were in part-time employment. One migrant parent was trying to access social welfare payments at the time of surveying. There were no students in December's sample.

- Notwithstanding the relatively small sample in this December cohort, there were some **divergences or differences** emerging when comparing to previous 2016 telephone surveys.

These included:

- **December families were less likely to report that their last stable home was in the private rented sector:** 12 (52%) of the respondents reported that their last stable home was in the private rented sector before becoming homeless. This 52% figure is lower than March, June and September in which 74%, 68% and 74% (respectively) of all families had their last stable accommodation in the private rented sector.
- **In contrast to previous surveys in 2016, the reasons for families leaving their last accommodation were more various in December:** 9 families reported having to leave their private rented property due to affordability issues (n=4), landlord selling (n=3), or they received a notice of termination (n=2). The remaining families reporting having to leave their accommodation for reasons included overcrowding, family conflict, anti-social behaviour, domestic violence, and relationship breakdown. The December families were, therefore, less likely to report landlord selling for reason of homelessness.
- **December families were less likely to engage with services before presenting as homeless:** In terms of patterns around help-seeking or early engagement with services, 12 (52%) of the respondents sought help or support before becoming homeless. This is lower proportion than previous surveys during 2016.

## INTRODUCTION

During December 2016, 39 families presented as newly homeless to their local authority across the four Dublin regions<sup>1</sup>. Across the country, there were a total of 1,205 families with 2,505 children living in emergency accommodation during December 2016<sup>2</sup>. This represents a 55% increase when compared to the 775 families who were homeless across the country during the same month in 2015.

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. There were 1,028 families residing in emergency accommodation in the Dublin region alone during December 2016 – comprising of 1,382 adults and 2,096 children<sup>3</sup>.

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>. During December 2016, 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. A majority are then referred to Focus Ireland 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 families who have presented as homeless that month (pending informed consent as will be outlined later). This regular reporting highlights key causes of family homelessness and how this may change over time<sup>5</sup>. These regular reports also capture the demographic profile of families presenting as homeless.

This report is the fifth of its kind which was conducted by Focus Ireland, and the fourth using the same approach and methodology. These data, analysis and discussion are then published within Focus Ireland’s *Insights into Family Homelessness Series*<sup>6</sup>. For an analysis of 2016 trends in the 2016 Quarterly Survey Data of Families Presenting as Homeless, please refer to *Insights into Family Homelessness No. 9* (forthcoming).

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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.

<sup>2</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 refuges nor does it include non-Section-10 funded facilities. Homeless figures for December 2016 can be found at:

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

<sup>3</sup> Monthly infographics on family homelessness in the Dublin (Dublin Region Homeless Executive):

<http://www.homelessdublin.ie/homeless-families>

<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> This exercise was originally recommended by 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/>

As will be detailed in this report, there were some divergences in the data during December 2016 – particularly with regards the reported housing histories of homelessness. This is likely to be associated with overall patterns (i.e. a rise and fall) in the numbers of families presenting as homeless each year. Since 2014, numbers of families presenting as homeless are consistently lower than other months; January, conversely, always demonstrates a spike in numbers. It has been surmised by experts and commentators that the dip in homeless presentations during December is linked to the fact that landlords are less likely to evict a family before Christmas and also that families may stay with friends and family over the festive period before presenting to homeless services in January (hence - a likely explanation for the spike in January numbers). The data which is presented in the following report validates this hypothesis.

## 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 used in December 2016).

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, 23 of the 39 families who became homeless in the Dublin region during December 2016 participated in the survey, representing 59% of the entire cohort of families newly presenting as homeless. The surveys were conducted during March/April 2017. In keeping with Focus Ireland Research Ethics Guidelines<sup>8</sup>, high ethical standards were maintained at all times in conducting this research.

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. Only 1 family declined to participate in the survey at this initial stage, and an additional 15 families were not contactable (phones were always engaged; continuously connecting to 'call catcher'; telephone numbers missing or families linking in with other organisations)<sup>9</sup>.

Upon making contact with the participants, Focus Ireland Research Officer stated the purpose of the telephone call and what was involved in taking part in the survey and the reasons behind the exercise were expanded upon (i.e. primarily to understand the causes of family homelessness).

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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> Focus Ireland Research Ethical Guidelines can be found here: <https://www.focusireland.ie/research/>

<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.

The surveys typically took around 5-10 minutes each, but like previous rounds of data collection, 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. 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).

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 (as already stated), 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>.

There were no minor changes made to the December survey instrument.

## **DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE – December 2016 Families**

All 23 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, 17 (74%) of the families were residing in private emergency accommodation (commercial hotels or B&Bs) and 6 (26%) of the families had exited homelessness. The proportion of families who had already exited homelessness by the time the survey was administered is broadly similar to June 2016 report (which was 19%)<sup>11</sup>. As mentioned previously, this survey was administered by telephone during March/April 2017.

### **Age**

Of the participants who were surveyed, 6 (26%) were aged between 18 and 25 years; 7 (30%) were between 26 and 35 years of age; and 10 (44%) were 36 years or older. See Table 1 below.

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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> As was the case in previous surveys, 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.

Table 1. Age Breakdown of Sample

Age Group (in years)	Number of Survey Respondents	Percentage of Total
18-25	6	26%
26-35	7	30%
36+	10	44%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

Once again, there were 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 December 2016 survey, 10 (43%) of the survey respondents were born in Ireland, while 13 (57%) were born outside of Ireland. Of the migrant-headed households, 2 (9%) were originally from an EU country while 11 (48%) were from outside the EU (see Table 2).

Table 2. Nationality Breakdown of Sample

Nationality Category	Number of Survey Respondents	Percentage of Total
Ireland	10	43%
EU	2	9%
Non-EU	11	48%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

The proportion of migrant-headed households increased since September's survey (i.e. from 43% to 57%) making it the highest proportion of migrant households across all 4 surveys conducted during 2016.

Of the non-EU migrants, a total of 4 respondents reported that they had a history of living in direct provision (DP) accommodation for those seeking asylum, which also featured in the previous data. Three of these individuals were in DP accommodation for less than a year; while one participant had lived in DP for five years. None of these families went straight from DP into homelessness; but rather lived in private rented accommodation for a number of years.

Like September 2016 data, ethnic and cultural background was captured in December. These are outlined in Table 3 below. It shows the high proportion of ethnic minorities in the December sample, including 9 respondents of black ethnicity – or almost 40%.

Table 3. Ethnic and Cultural Background

Ethnic and Cultural Background		Number of Respondents
<b>White</b>	White Irish	10
	Irish Traveller	0
	Another White Background	0
<b>Black / Black Irish</b>	African	8
	Any other black background	1
<b>Asian / Asian Irish</b>	Chinese	0
	Any other Asian Background	2
<b>Other/ Mixed</b>		2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>23</b>

## Family Type

In this September survey, 15 (65%) of the respondents were one-parent households and 8 (35%) were two-parent families. This proportion reflects September's survey when 65% of the respondents were headed by lone parents compared to 51% in June 2016. Of the 15 one-parent households, all families were headed by single mothers.

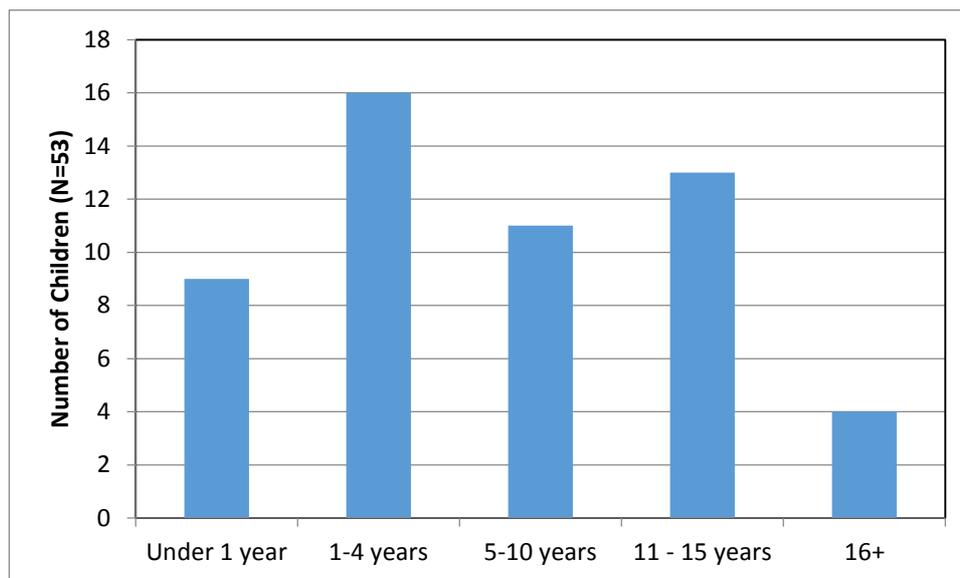
14 (61%) of the respondents had one or two children in their household. The remaining 9 (39%) of the respondents had three or more children. Additionally, 1 respondent was pregnant at the time of the survey.

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

	Number of Families		Percentage of Total
<b>Number of Children</b>	1	11	48%
	2	3	13%
	3	4	17%
	4	3	13%
	5+	2	9%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>23</b>	<b>100%</b>

As indicated earlier in this paper, the age of all children within the families were newly captured in September and December survey. In total, there were 53 children of the 23 families who participated. Of these, 9 children (17%) were under the age of 1 year, 16 children (30%) were between 1 and 4 years, 11 (21%) were between 5 and 10 years, 13 (24%) were between 11 and 15 years and 4 children (8%) were over the age of 16. Therefore, 47% of the children were under the age of 4, while 62% of children were under the age of 10. See figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Ages of Children – December 2016



### Employment Status of Respondents

The majority of the research participants (n=19, 83%) self-reported as unemployed – the same as previous surveys (85%, 84%, 79% respectively). An additional 3 respondents were in part-time employment (16%).

Once again, high levels of joblessness, limited income and dependency on rental supplements were disproportionately represented within families presenting as homeless.

### Location of Last stable Home

The survey included the location of the participant's last stable home. All (n=23) respondents reported Dublin city or county as being the area of their last stable accommodation. The areas cited in this section closely mirrored previous surveys conducted in 2016. These included Dublin 15 (specifically, Blanchardstown, Carpenterstown), Dublin 22 (Tallaght, Jobstown, Clondalkin), Dublin 13 (Donameade); Dublin 17 (Darndale), Dublin 5 (Raheny, Artane), Dublin 7; Dublin 11; Dublin 9 (Whitehall), Dublin 14 (Rathfarnham), Dublin 10 (Ballyfermot) . 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.

## REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS – December 2016

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

Just over half (n=12, 52%) of the respondents who presented as homeless during December reported that their last stable home was in the private rented sector. This is lower than survey responses in March, June and September 2016 in which 74%, 68% and 74% of the families (respectively) had their last stable home in the private rented sector. 8 of these 12 families were in receipt of rent supplement to support their rental payments.

9 families reported that their last stable home was staying with family; 8 of whom categorised this as their parental family home and the other one was staying with relatives. 1 family were living in an approved housing body unit and had to leave due to intolerable anti-social behaviour in their neighbourhood. Finally 1 family had never had a stable home since moving to Ireland.

A basic frequency analysis was conducted on reported 'triggers' to homelessness. The December surveys portrayed a wide range of reasons for leaving stable accommodation with issues surrounding the private rented sector being the most commonly cited. As highlighted in the Table 5 below, 10 families reported losing their accommodation due to problems within the context of the private rented sector. However, only 3 families reported having to leave their accommodation due landlords withdrawing properties from the market (which accounted for 40% of families in September survey, for example). Only 3 families (13% of the sample) became homeless specifically due to landlords selling their property. This compares to 33% of the September cohort of families and 38% in June.

Other explanations cited included issues around issues in the private rented sector, most notably a lack of financial resources to secure or maintain stable housing which resulted in housing instability. This included, for example, loss of employment or cutting down of the working hours. 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.

Table 5: Self-Reported Reasons for Leaving Last Stable Accommodation

Self-Reported reasons for leaving last stable accommodation		No. of Respondents
<b>Property being withdrawn from the private rented sector</b>	Landlord selling	3
<b>Other issues related to private rented sector</b>	Unable to make rent	2
	Loss of employment or hours cut	2
	Received notice of termination	2
	Overall housing instability	1
<b>Family or personal issues</b>	Overcrowding	3
	Family conflict	2
	Anti-social behaviour	2
	Relationship breakdown	1
	Caring for a relative	1
	Domestic violence	1
<b>Other</b>	-	3
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>

A predominant issue in December’s survey data was personal and family issues. This included overcrowding (n=3) and family conflict (n=2) which often went hand-in-hand. One lone mother cited domestic violence as the reason for leaving the last stable accommodation and had resided in hidden homeless situations with her children for almost a year before presenting to her local authority.

## 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 the nature of their housing (in)stability over time. There were four broad analytical groupings emerging from December 2016 data, which reflected trends in previous surveys:

1. Previous Stability in the Private Rented Sector (n=11, 48%)
2. Housing Instability and Hidden Homelessness (n=7, 30%)
3. Young People who have Never Lived Independently (n=2, 9%)
4. Migrant families who have not had Stable Housing in Ireland (n=3, 13%)

1. **Previous Stability in the Private Rented Sector** – There were 11 families (48% 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 with stable housing histories closely mirrored previous surveys (e.g. 48% in March; 53% in June; 56% in September).

These families reported stable tenancies in the private sector, typically remaining for several years in each tenancy. 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.

Reasons for homelessness were, unlike previous surveys, somewhat more diverse and went beyond landlords leaving the market. While 3 of the families reported having to leave because landlords were selling the property, others reported affordability problems, family conflict and relationship breakdown. 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.

#### Key Characteristics of Group One:

- 10 of this group of 11 families were of non-EU origin – all of whom were ethnic minorities. This suggests that despite their stable housing history, black or ethnic minority populations – regardless of immigration status (all but one parent had legal status to remain in the State) – may be at increased risk of housing instability and difficulties in sustaining residential stability.
- Only 2 of these families in this group had already exited homelessness by the time they were surveyed in March/April 2017. The remaining 9 families were in hotel accommodation.
- 8 of the 11 families were lone parents.
- Only 4 of the 11 families resided with friends or family before they became homeless. The remainder transitioned straight from their stable accommodation and into homeless hotels.
- 8 of the 11 families sought advice and information from a support service or organisation prior to presenting as homeless – these primarily included statutory agencies such as local social welfare office; social workers; and the RTB.

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

Abigail is a 42-year-old single mother with 1 child in their early teens. She is originally from outside of Europe but has lived in Ireland for thirteen years. She has been living in the private rented sector for all of the time that she has lived in Ireland. Her previous tenancies in the private rented sector ranged from 1 – 5 years. Reasons for leaving these accommodations included moving into a larger accommodation; lease had expired; and conflict with landlord. She has never experienced homelessness before. She has never been in receipt of rent supplement as she was always been employed - currently she has a part-time job.

In December 2016, she had to leave her accommodation where she had been living for a few months because her landlord was selling the property and present to her local authority. She was unable to find an alternative rental accommodation for her and her children before her tenancy ended. She was told by a friend to contact Focus Ireland which she did, but was unable to avoid homelessness due to sale of the house, nor was she able to find alternative accommodation due to limited financial resources. At the time of survey, she was sharing a hotel room with her 12 year old child and continued to search for move-on accommodation she could afford in the private rented sector.

- 2. Prolonged Housing Instability and Hidden Homelessness** – There were 7 families who reported significant housing precariousness, instability and lengthy spells in hidden homelessness living situations (i.e. where they were living in overcrowded or 'doubling up' with others, or in inadequate / insecure housing).

This instability in housing was characterised by often unsatisfactory or inadequate private rented accommodation tenancies. These families in this group often relied on family or friends for several years. Family conflict was sometimes cited over this time, which was often related to overcrowded situations.

Key Characteristics of Group Two:

- All 7 of the families housing histories were punctuated by long periods of time in unsuitable and overcrowded situations with family or friends.
- 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.
- 3 of the 7 families reported that their last stable accommodation was in the private rented sector and 2 reported living in social housing but had to leave due to anti-social problems in the community.
- All 7 families were white Irish.
- 5 of the 7 families were headed by lone parents.
- 3 of the 7 families were under the age of 25.
- 3 of the 7 families had exited homelessness by the time they were surveyed.
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**Case Study Group 2 – Precariousness in the Private Rented Sector**

Claire is an Irish-born 25 year old single mother with 3 children – all under the age of 7 years. She is in receipt of lone parent payment. She described her housing history as having “always moved around”.

When she was 18, she left the family home to live with her partner. Over the years, she and her partner and children moved between private rented accommodation and friends’ houses. She described her private rented accommodations as being low cost and substandard and the tenancies were usually insecure. She has since separated from her partner.

Three years ago, she was allocated social housing unit where she remained for three years with her children. She described extensive anti-social behaviour in the local community which she described as intolerable and impacted on her sense of safety.

She decided to present as homeless to her local authority, where she was not accepted as homeless due to intentionally leaving her social housing. To avoid her house, she slept in a car for two months while her children stayed with relatives. She described being “sent around like a parcel” between different offices while she was trying to be accepted as homeless, which she ultimately was.

When she was surveyed, she had since transitioned into another social housing unit which was allocated to her by an approved housing body and is settling into her new home. She described the whole experience of homelessness as “very mental” and has gone on anti-depressants. She said only for the support of a close family member, she would not have been able to withstand the stress.

**3. Specific Pathways to Homelessness** – There were 5 families in the December cohort who described a youth or migrant pathways to homelessness.

– Youth / New Family Formation:

- Identical to previous waves of data collection in 2016, a quarter (n=6, 26%) of all the families in December sample were headed by a parent 25 years or under. Their living situations were often strained as they spent considerable periods of time in the family home with their young children.
- Several young people had no experience of living independently in stable housing, citing that they were unable to access the private rented housing market.
- One young mother spent the last two months in a domestic violence refuge before being transferred to the homeless system where she was moved to hotel accommodation.

– Migrant Pathway:

- 3 migrant-headed families had never lived in independent accommodation or stable housing since moving to Ireland.
- All were originally from outside Europe.
- They relied on friends, family members, and unsuitable living situations for long periods of time before they presented as homeless.
- One mother did not have a valid immigration status and was self-accommodating between hotels.

**Case Study Group 3 – Migrant Household who had Never Had Stable Housing**

Angela is 42 years old, originally from a non-EU country and arrived in Ireland in 2014 and now has legal right to remain. Since this time, she has lived with friends for a couple of months at a time with her teenager. She is a single parent and is dependent on social welfare payments. She said she has always had difficulties being able to access affordable accommodation given her limited income. She relies heavily on members of her community for housing support and also found the staff of the school her child attends as being a vital support when it came to accessing relevant information on presenting as homeless.

She was still living in hotel accommodation when she was surveyed.

## Help-Seeking before Becoming Homeless

12 of the 23 (52%) sought information or advice prior to presenting as homeless. This is less than previous surveys (81%; 72%; 63% in the respective months) which indicates another divergence with the December data. This suggests that this cohort of families may be more hidden from services.

Several families from the December sample approached statutory bodies as their first port-of-call, including their local social welfare office; their social worker; or most commonly, their local authority. Other families approach voluntary organisations such as Focus Ireland Advice and Information services, Threshold and Crosscare.

Like previous surveys, 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.

Below are some examples of experiences with regards help-seeking. This was captured at the open ended question at the end of the survey<sup>12</sup>:

- Lack of support received from services *prior* to becoming homeless.
- Distressing experiences when family was sent around multiple agencies and offices. The number of referrals and appointments could often be overwhelming.
- Initially some families were not accepted as homeless at first, but after subsequent paperwork submitted, these decisions could be reversed. This was sometimes supported by advocacy work from a relevant support worker (e.g. social worker, service support worker).
- Difficulties getting through to different agencies by the telephone; many don't respond to calls.
- Local TD sign-posted to relevant housing office or service.
- Some families reported receiving support through housing and homeless activist groups.
- Unable to stop evictions in many cases, as many notices were valid.
- Lack of empathy reported against some professionals.
- Importance of familial support was highlighted (e.g. from a parent or grandparent).

Finally, it was apparent that those with more precarious or hidden housing histories were *less* likely to engage with service and/or have limited knowledge of services available to them. This suggests that services are not sufficiently meeting the needs of some families, making them more vulnerable to unresolved homelessness and perhaps worsening support needs.

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<sup>12</sup> Names of services / agencies which received both negative and positive feedback are withheld as these comments represent a small sample and the survey does not allow for a contextualised analysis of service experiences.

## 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, 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.

Below are the key themes emerging from December 2016 survey, together with some discussion on the similarities and divergences with the previous surveys of March, June and September 2016. Indeed, it is only at a point when four survey data collection phases completed we can start to determine emerging trends which indicate some of the key factors in homelessness among families. For a visual analysis of 2016 trends in the survey data together with a comparison with wider data sets, please refer to Insights into Family Homelessness No. 9 (available on Focus Ireland website under Publications and Partnerships, forthcoming).

Looking at the December 2016 survey data specifically, there is a great deal of consistency across previous data cohorts which are worthy of note. These include:

### 1. **Structural and Economic Causes of Homelessness Continues**

Homelessness among families in Dublin is consistently impacting on unemployed households; households **dependent on rent supplement** and those who have limited financial resources more broadly. This can be seen in the December data in which 83% of the respondents were unemployed. This follows from the 84%, 83% and 79% in March, June and September samples who were also **unemployed**. The vast majority are dependent on rent supplement which puts them at a significant disadvantage when trying to source alternative accommodation in a **highly competitive and unaffordable private rented housing market**. The lack of social housing options is ultimately a key dynamic in the barriers families face in securing stable housing.

### 2. **Continued presence of young parents**

Mirroring previous surveys in 2016, a high proportion of young parents continue to present as homeless. In December 2016, 6 (26%) of the respondents were aged between 18 and 25 years. Across each quarterly survey conducted in 2016, **approximately a quarter of all families were headed by parents under 25 years**. 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. **Migrant families again being disproportionately represented:**

Families of migrant origin, that is, respondents who were not born in Ireland (but may have Irish citizenship), feature in even higher numbers in December 2016 survey data. Across the three surveys completed in 2016, **migrant families** constituted between 40% in March 2016 and topping 59% in December among all families entering homelessness. 4 of the December families had histories of **Direct Provision** – a characteristic that continues to feature in each wave of data collection.

However, there were also some divergences in the data during December 2016 – particularly with regards families’ housing histories. Since 2014, the numbers of families presenting as homeless are consistently lower than other months (ref: DoE data); January, conversely, always sees a ‘spike’ in numbers of families presenting – which is likely to be linked to the **dynamics of the private rented market** and the lower likelihood of evictions upon approaching Christmas. The above hypothesis would be played out in the (limited) data presented in this report. For example:

- There were a **lower proportion of families who reported that their last stable home was in the private rented sector** being last stable home. 12 (52%) of the respondents reported that their last stable home was in the private rented sector - lower than March, June and September in which 74%, 68% and 74% (respectively). They were also far less likely to report becoming homeless due to a landlord leaving the market during December.
- There were higher incidents of **prolonged hidden homelessness** and housing instability. In contrast to previous surveys in 2016, the reasons for families leaving their last accommodation were more various. Nine families reported having to leave their private rented property due to affordability issues (n=4), landlord selling (n=3) or they received a notice to quit (n=2). The remaining families reporting having to leave their accommodation for reasons including overcrowding, family conflict, anti-social behaviour, domestic violence and relationship breakdown.
- In terms of **patterns around help-seeking** or early engagement with services, 12 (52%) of the respondents sought help or support before becoming homeless. This is lower proportion than previous surveys during 2016.

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 seemingly culminating in this acute family homelessness crisis. December’s variances in data reveal a particularly hidden group of families who are more likely to have experienced a greater exclusion from the housing market previously. Migrant families, and particularly non-EU families, must be recognised as a key group who are persistently at a distinct disadvantage in the Irish private housing market.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Appendix 1: Telephone Survey Instrument – December 2016

### SECTION I: Accommodations Prior to Homelessness

<b>Q.1</b>	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.)														
<b>Q2</b>	<b>Please describe your previous 4 accommodations BEFORE you entered emergency accommodation (note: No.4 relates to accommodation IMMEDIATELY BEFORE entering Hotel/B&amp;B accommodation)</b>																		
	<b>Tenure Type</b>	<b>Duration of Stay</b>	<b>Primary Reason for Leaving</b>		<b>If you were in PRS:</b>														
					a) were you in receipt of rent supplement? (Y/N)	b) did you receive a RS supplement increase from social welfare?													
<b>1</b>																			
<b>2</b>																			
<b>3</b>																			
<b>4</b>																			
<b>Q3</b>	How long would you say it has been since you last had a 'stable' accommodation?	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;"><b>&lt; 1 month</b></td> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;"><b>1-6 months</b></td> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;"><b>7 months – 1 year</b></td> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;"><b>1-2 years</b></td> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;"><b>3+ years</b></td> <td style="width: 12.5%; text-align: center;"><b>N/A</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>						<b>&lt; 1 month</b>	<b>1-6 months</b>	<b>7 months – 1 year</b>	<b>1-2 years</b>	<b>3+ years</b>	<b>N/A</b>						
<b>&lt; 1 month</b>	<b>1-6 months</b>	<b>7 months – 1 year</b>	<b>1-2 years</b>	<b>3+ years</b>	<b>N/A</b>														
<b>Q4</b>	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>	

Q9	Are you single or in a couple? (✓)	Single		In a couple		
Q10	How many children do you have? (✓)	1	2	3	4	5+
Q11	What age are your children?  (insert number of children in relation to age categories)	Age in Years	Number of Children	Insert ages of children		
		Under 1 year				
		1-4				
		5-10				
		11-15				
		16+				

### **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		
		RTB		
		Local Social Welfare Office		
		Friend/Family member:		
		Non-Statutory organisations:	Focus Ireland	
			Threshold	
	Simon Community			
	Other (please state):			



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