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# Family Homelessness in Dublin: Causes, Housing Histories, and Finding a Home

## Executive Summary

Challenging  
homelessness.  
Changing lives.

**FOCUS**  
Ireland

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|  
**60%**

**of families had stable  
housing histories with  
lengthy tenancies**

This study builds on previous research conducted by Focus Ireland on the causes of family homelessness. This full report is available at [www.focusireland.ie](http://www.focusireland.ie), along with all other Focus Ireland's Insights into Family Homelessness Series.

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# Acknowledgements

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Focus Ireland would like to sincerely thank Bord Gáis Energy for funding this research and report publication. Our partnership with Bord Gáis Energy focuses on two specific areas within Focus Ireland’s range of services; providing support to families who are homeless and preventing family homelessness. Our partnership also allows us to pursue research based and innovative projects.

Finally, the research team would like to extend their deepest appreciation to the research participants of this study who took the time to share some of their experiences with the team. Without their assistance, this research initiative would not have been possible.

|  
**68%**

reported that their last  
stable home was in the  
private rented sector

# Abbreviations

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<b>AHB</b>	Approved Housing Body
<b>Co-op</b>	Co-operative
<b>DHPLG</b>	Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
<b>DRHE</b>	Dublin Region Homeless Executive
<b>EA</b>	Emergency Accommodation
<b>Family HAT</b>	Focus Ireland Family Homeless Action Team
<b>HAP</b>	Housing Assistance Payment
<b>LAH</b>	Local Authority Housing
<b>PRS</b>	Private Rented Sector
<b>RS</b>	Rent Supplement

|  
**36%**  
of families became  
homeless due to landlord  
leaving the market

# Preface and Commentary

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This substantial study builds on and confirms a number of findings from previous Focus Ireland studies of family homelessness, published through the Focus Ireland Insights into Family Homelessness Series. This research series seeks to inform the organisation's service delivery in preventing homelessness and supporting families who are currently homeless to exit homelessness as quickly as possible. Furthermore, this evidence base helps to inform the wider debate on family homelessness and to offer effective solutions to one of the most urgent social problems in Ireland today. The consistency of data emerging across time and across different cohorts of families demonstrates the reliability of the research design and execution and, more importantly, yields an increasingly robust picture of family homelessness in the Dublin Region.

## **Families in private rented accommodation bear brunt of crisis**

While the roots of the current family homeless crisis are complex, implicating general housing policy and social housing policy, the consequences of the crisis continue to be experienced primarily by families living in the private rented sector (PRS). Seven out of every ten families becoming homeless rented their last stable home from a private landlord and this has remained remarkably consistent since our first study in 2015.

It is also notable that virtually all of the families living in the private rented sector (94% n=151) had been in those private rented homes for over a year, and 26% of families (n=42) had lived in those rented homes for over six years. In other words, these families were stably housed for long periods of time, suggesting that their tenancy agreements were successfully maintained and that, until the current crisis, the private rental sector had provided many families with what appeared to be a stable place to make their home.

Fifty-eight per cent of all the 237 families reported that their tenancies ended due to issues specifically related to their rental tenancies, such as rent affordability issues, landlords selling up, landlords giving property to family member, renovation, etc.

This consistent finding validates government attention to measures to increase the security of private rented tenancies and to control rents in (and subsequent to) the publication of *Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness*. Measures enacted in the Residential Tenancies Act 2019 – including longer notice periods and criminal sanctions on landlords who breach tenancy protections – are likely to address some of the issues which are currently resulting in homelessness (though we will not be able to assess their impact until 2020). However, thirty-six per cent (n=86) of the families whose last stable home was in the private rental sector reported that their

eviction related to Section 34 of the Residential Tenancies Act, which allows landlords to terminate a tenancy to sell the property, or for the landlord or family member to move into the property. As the current round of regulation includes few measures to mitigate this problem, its impact is likely to be limited.

## Vulnerable families being left behind

There also remains the smaller cohort of families who had more precarious or unsettled housing histories, in which we see families living in informal or unsuitable living arrangements for prolonged periods. Previous Focus Ireland research has identified that families who become homeless after such experiences are likely to remain homeless for longer than those with more stable housing histories. Focus Ireland has warned that the current policy emphasis on achieving *the maximum number* of families exiting homelessness to obtain the quickest outcome inevitably directs support towards those families who are already more likely to leave homelessness. If continued over time, this policy will result in an ever-increasing concentration of families with higher support needs spending longer and longer periods in emergency accommodation.

There is also a consistent cohort of families who were living in the family home but, due to affordability issues and lack of social housing, are unable to transition out of the family home and live independently with their children. This is particularly problematic for young parents whose housing options are restricted and who are at high risk of prolonged housing precariousness and homelessness.

The fact that two-thirds of the families surveyed in this study had been in emergency homeless accommodation for over a year is a grave cause for concern.

## Migrant families have lived in Ireland for long periods before becoming homeless

There has been recent public commentary on the proportion of households *originally born outside of Ireland* who are experiencing homelessness.<sup>1</sup> This report provides much-needed evidence to inform this debate, giving a clearer picture of families headed by migrant parents who are currently experiencing homelessness and what caused their homelessness. While the report confirms that a disproportionately high number of families of migrant origin are experiencing family homelessness, it also confirms the view that most of these families have lived in Ireland for many years during which time they maintained stable tenancies.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Kilraine, J. (31 March 2019) Plan calls for needs of non-Irish homeless to be addressed. Available at: <https://www.rte.ie/news/2019/0331/1039786-homeless-ireland/> [Accessed 24 April 2019]

2 Stanley, W. (20 July 2018) Non-Irish Homelessness in Dublin. Focus Ireland Blog. Available at: <https://www.focusireland.ie/non-irish-homelessness-dublin/> [Accessed 24 April 2019]

## Many parents continue in employment

A total of one in five respondents, or 20% (n=48), were in paid employment, of whom 35 (15%) were engaged in part-time employment and 13 (5%) in full-time employment. Furthermore, 9% (n=21) were studying. However, 69% (n=163) were unemployed, highlighting the link between families on low incomes and risk to homelessness. It is also worth noting that 58% (n=137) of the respondents were lone parents, a status that can directly affect capacity to engage in the labour market, particularly in a situation of precarious housing.

## Families are making extensive effort to find new homes

One of the new areas explored in this report relates to the efforts of the families to find new homes, notably in the private rented sector with the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). The data collected here demonstrates that over three-quarters (n=183) of the families have attempted to access HAP properties, with 61% (n=111) of these reporting having applied for over 20 different properties. Many report facing several barriers to accessing housing relating to lack of available and affordable private rental housing, and almost half (48%, n=88) of those surveyed reported that landlords were reluctant to rent their properties to HAP tenants.

A total of 20% (n=47) of families had no experience of looking for private rental accommodation through HAP, while two-thirds of these families (66%, n=31) reported that they were reluctant to enter the private rented sector due to a perceived insecurity of this tenure and/or negative experience in rental accommodation. Others reported that they were not looking for HAP as they had received reliable information that they were near the top of the social housing list, while a small number were moving to local authority housing (LAH) imminently.

Given the growing number of families who have exited homelessness using HAP, only to face a second eviction under Section 34,<sup>3</sup> these are not unreasonable concerns. Much more needs to be done to enhance access to affordable accommodation and reduce the risk to further housing insecurity for these families, who do not want to repeat their family's traumatic experience of eviction.

|  
**35%**  
of families did not seek  
advice or information before  
presenting to their local  
authority as homeless

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<sup>3</sup> Stanley, W. (8 March 2019) Opinion: 10% of homeless families have been made homeless for a second time. <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/opinion-last-year-approximately-10-of-families-who-became-homeless-had-been-homeless-before-4623204-May2019/> [Accessed 24 May 2019]

## Help-seeking prior to presenting as homeless

The report confirms the pattern revealed in previous studies in the Insights series of many families making temporary arrangements to live with wider family and friends before eventually entering homeless services when these arrangements prove unsustainable. This pattern belies recent commentary that emergency homeless accommodation is ‘attractive’ and creates a pull-factor for families. In fact, there appears to be a widespread recognition of the unsuitable nature of emergency accommodation, and many families go to great efforts to avoid it. This consistent finding suggests that there may be large numbers of families who have been evicted from their stable home and are continuing to live in temporary, informal arrangements with wider family and friends. Because they are not in formal homeless accommodation, such families are not counted in the homeless figures and, more significantly, are not in receipt of the support available to families in emergency accommodation. A better understanding of these ‘couch surfing’ families would help to develop support systems to reduce the risk of them eventually entering homeless services.

One of the findings of greatest concern is that, despite a number of initiatives to make advice and information available to families at risk of homelessness, 35% (n=82) of families did not seek any advice or support prior to entering homeless services. Of those who did seek support (n=130), the most common source of support was their local authority (41%, n=53), followed by Focus Ireland (16%, n=21) and Threshold (14%, n=18).

It is clear that, despite the considerable efforts put into advertising housing and homeless advice services, a more innovative and effective communications strategy is required, particularly for more hard-to-reach vulnerable families who could benefit from advice to prevent their homelessness.

This report offers a detailed picture of the key drivers of family homelessness in the Dublin Region and signals the demographic groups who are consistently most at-risk of ending up in emergency accommodation. To effectively support families out of homelessness and to prevent homelessness happening in the first place, Focus Ireland is committed to, and will continue to commit to, generating an evidence base on family homelessness that is timely, reliable and fully transparent.

### Mike Allen

Director of Advocacy, Focus Ireland

|  
**58%**

**became homeless due to  
issues directly related to their  
private rented sector home**



# Executive Summary

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Since 2015, Focus Ireland has embarked on a programme of research and analysis to investigate and understand family homelessness in Ireland with the objective of informing effective and appropriate service and policy responses. This commitment to gathering and publishing robust evidence has led to the publication of the *Focus Ireland Insights into Family Homelessness Series*.<sup>4</sup>

The current study explores a similar set of questions as previous reports; however, the research team have shifted from looking at cohorts of families that enter homelessness during a particular month to analysing a larger sample comprising families who are being supported by the Focus Ireland Family Homeless Action Team (Family HAT).<sup>5</sup> As in previous reports, this study used telephone surveys to explore the pathways that resulted in the families becoming homeless, their housing histories and their interaction with services prior to becoming homeless. In this study some of the families surveyed were no longer homeless and this allowed for the collection of data on their exit routes from homelessness and, specifically, their experience (if applicable) of sourcing private rented housing via the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme.

Data collection took place between January and February 2019 with a sample of families who were on the Family HAT caseload in 2018; the surveyed families had entered homelessness at different points in time. The following report provides a summary of key findings but the full report which includes additional details and extended analysis can be found at [www.focusireland.ie](http://www.focusireland.ie).

|  
**1/3**

**of families were living  
in their last stable home  
for over 6 years**

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4 Each report is available in full on the Focus Ireland website: <https://www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/research/>

5 The Family HAT provides support for families who are homeless in Dublin and accommodated in family hubs, hotels and B&Bs. Its core objective is to support families out of homelessness into secure homes, and it also helps families to negotiate the challenges and traumas of experiencing homelessness. The FHAT comprises Case Managers and Child Support Workers and currently supports over 450 families. It is funded by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) and by Focus Ireland fundraising. The HSE and Tusla fund the Child Support Workers.

## Context

Since 2014, the number of those experiencing homelessness in Ireland has grown rapidly, most notably in the Dublin Region. There was a record 10,264 individuals living in emergency accommodation in Ireland in February 2019,<sup>6</sup> a 163% increase compared to the same month in 2015 (n=3,908). In contrast to previous periods of homelessness, a large proportion of the households experiencing homeless are families with children. The number of families experiencing homelessness in Ireland increased from 429 in February 2015 to 1,707 in February 2019,<sup>7</sup> an increase of 298%. Similarly, the number of children living in emergency accommodation has quadrupled over the last four years alone (i.e. 938 children in February 2015 to 3,784 in February 2019).<sup>8</sup> A total of 1,707 families and 3,784 children/dependents were included in the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government's official figure in February 2019.<sup>9</sup>

Three-quarters of families in emergency accommodation are living in one of the four Dublin Region local authorities.<sup>10</sup> Changes in the definition of family homelessness<sup>11</sup> have made it hard to assess the rate of increase in recent months, but, while the trend continues to be upward, it appears that the increase may have been slower in 2018 than in earlier years.

## Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative methodology using a telephone survey. This enabled the research team to collect data from a greater number of families as well as minimise the impact of the research on families who were in crisis situations. The survey design closely followed previous reports, with additional questions concerning the families' efforts to exit homelessness. The target sample was larger for this study as it included all consenting families who were on the Focus Ireland Family HAT caseload in December 2018 and families who had consented to the pilot study, as opposed to surveying the families who entered homelessness in a single month in each quarter.



1/4  
of families became  
homeless due to landlords  
selling the property

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6 Data source: Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) homelessness data. Available at: <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 For a description of the changes to the homeless statistics, see 'Focus Ireland Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing Planning and Local Government'. Available at: <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Submission-to-OCH-Categorisation-of-Emergency-Accommodation-2018.pdf>

The data was collected during January and February 2019 and consisted of a 7-page survey instrument that was structured and targeted in design (see Appendix A of full report for the Telephone Survey Instrument).<sup>12</sup> However, some open-ended questions were included also to capture respondents' experiences in looking for accommodation. The surveyed families were on the Family HAT caseload during 2018. The survey targeted data on:

- current type of accommodation;
- length of time in emergency accommodation (EA);
- tenancy type and duration of stay in their last four accommodations<sup>13</sup> (if applicable) – to include whether respondents received rent supplement (RS) or HAP in these accommodations, and the main reasons for leaving each accommodation;
- the area of their last stable home (note: area of housing to protect confidentiality);
- information on help-seeking prior to homelessness;
- experiences of looking for accommodation, specifically with regards to HAP;
- demographic profile.

A pilot phase was integrated into this study to test for response rate and survey design (in particular with regards to the additional questions). This led to minor revisions to the survey; for example, in relation to the questions surrounding respondents' experiences of looking for accommodation with HAP.

All research conducted or commissioned by Focus Ireland is conducted with high ethical standards which prioritises the research participants including informed consent. Focus Ireland's ethical guidelines for conducting research<sup>14</sup> and data protection and customer confidentiality policies were adhered to in the completion of this study.

The results from this study relate to a sample of 237 families who completed the survey and are not necessarily representative of the Focus Ireland total caseload or necessarily generalisable to all families who experienced homelessness in the Dublin Region. However, the data provides valuable insights into a sizeable sample of families experiencing homelessness in terms of determining the factors resulting in their homelessness. There is a high degree of consistency in the findings of this study and earlier studies, indicating the reliability of the data generated.

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12 The survey was designed by the Focus Ireland research team with the guidance of the Focus Ireland Research Sub-Committee.

13 Questions pertaining to the last four accommodations, which sought to capture change and transition in the respondents' living situations and to (partially) identify the dynamics of their housing history.

14 For further details see <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Ethical-Guidelines-for-Conducting-Research.pdf>

# Key Findings

## 1 Demographic Profile of the 237 Respondents

- The average age of participants was 35 years; 43% (n=102) were aged 26–35 years, while 16% (n=39) were aged 20–25 years.
- Fifty-six per cent (n=132) of respondents were originally from outside of Ireland (but a majority had lived in Ireland for many years, during which time they maintained stable tenancies in the private rented sector).
- Most respondents were female (82%, n=195).
- A high proportion of families were one-parent (58%, n=137) and 41% (n=98) were two-parent families.
- The majority of families had one or two children living with them (69%, n=163); 16% (n=38) had three children; and 14% (n=33) of families had four or more children.
- Sixty-nine per cent (n=352) of the children were aged 0–10 years.
- Forty eight participants (20%) were in employment, with 35 (15%) respondents working part-time; while 163 (69%) of respondents stated that they were unemployed, of which 92% (n=150) were in receipt of a weekly social welfare payment.

## 2 ‘Last Stable Home’

Respondents were asked about the last four places the family had lived prior to entering emergency accommodation. This allowed the research team to establish the families’ last stable home, which was not necessarily the last accommodation they had lived in (referred to as ‘last living situation’), as many families transitioned to one or more informal temporary living arrangements in the period before entering emergency accommodation.

For 68% (n=161) of respondents, their last stable home was in the private rented sector (PRS). Seventy-five per cent (n=120) of these renters stated that they were in receipt of either rent supplement (70%, n=112) or HAP (5%, n=8). This is strongly consistent with research from 2016 and 2017, where 68% of the families surveyed had their last stable home in the private rented sector (203 of the total 297 families surveyed).

The second highest proportion of respondents (22%, n=52) reported that their last stable home was in the family home of their own parents or ‘with family’.

Most respondents (92%, n=217) had resided in their last stable home for 12 months or longer; 58% (n=138) had resided in their last stable home for 1-6 years; and a third of respondents (n=79) resided in their last stable home for over six years.

The most common areas these last stable homes were located in were Dublin 7, Dublin 15, County Dublin, Dublin 17, and Dublin 8.

### 3 Causes of Homelessness

Families were asked to identify the *primary reason* behind why they had to leave their last stable home and enter into housing precariousness, see Table 1.

In total, 58% of families (n=137) reported that they had to leave their last stable home due to their private rented property being removed from the market or private rented sector-related issues. This was followed by reasons related to family circumstances (30%, n=70) and other circumstances (13%, n=30). A breakdown of these causes is outlined below:

- Under the category Property Removed from the Market (36%, n=86), respondents cited the following triggers to homelessness:
  - Landlord selling (26%, n=62);
  - Landlord moving back in or giving the accommodation to family (6%, n=14);
  - Bank repossession of property (4%, n=10).
- PRS Related Issues (22%, n=51) included the following factors:
  - Overcrowding in the PRS (6%, n=15);
  - Rent increasing (3%, n=8);
  - Landlord renovating (3%, n=6);
  - Substandard rental accommodation (2%, n=5);
  - Unable to afford/meet rental payments (2%, n=5);
  - Fire (2%, n=5);
  - Contract not renewed (1%, n=3);
  - Rent arrears (1%, n=3);
  - Notice to quit (NTQ) (n=1).
- Where reasons for having to leave their last stable home were related to Family Circumstances (30%, n=70), the main triggers to homelessness most cited by respondents were:
  - Family fall out (including in-laws) (11%, n=25);
  - Overcrowding in the family home/with family (9%, n=21);
  - Domestic violence (partner) (5%, n=12);
  - Relationship breakdown (3%, n=8).
- Other circumstances for having to leave their last stable home were noted by 13% (n=30) of respondents. The main reasons cited included:
  - Having moved country (5%, n=12);
  - Other reasons (3%, n=7);
  - Anti-social behaviour (2%, n=5).

Once again, the main reasons for homelessness strongly mirror results from the Focus Ireland 2016–2017 report (N=297) on Causes of Family Homelessness. Across these data sets, the proportion of respondents for which reasons related to family circumstances were the trigger to homelessness stood at 30% (2016–2017: n=89; 2018: n=70), and the majority of respondents cited main reasons for having to leave their last stable home that were related to either the property being removed from the market or PRS related issues (2016–2017: 56%, n=167; 2018: 58%, n=137).

**Table 1: Respondents' Main Reasons for Having to Leave Last Stable Home, in 2016–2017 (N=297) and 2018 (N=237), by frequencies and percentages**

Main Reason for Having to Leave Last Stable Home		*2016–2017		2018			
		n	%	n		%	
<b>Property Removed from the Market</b>	Landlord selling	64	22%	62		26%	
	Landlord moving back in	17	6%	10	14	4%	6%
	Landlord giving property to family member			4		2%	
	Bank repossession	8	3%	10		4%	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>▲30%</b>	<b>86</b>		<b>36%</b>	
<b>Private Rented Sector (PRS) Related Issues</b>	Overcrowding (in PRS)	14	5%	15		6%	
	Rent increasing	22	7%	8		3%	
	Landlord renovating	6	2%	6		3%	
	Substandard (in PRS)	7	2%	5		2%	
	Unable to afford/pay rent	5	2%	5		2%	
	Property damaged in fire/fire	4	1%	5		2%	
	Contract not renewed	5	2%	3		1%	
	Rent arrears	4	1%	3		1%	
	Notice to quit (NTQ)	9	3%	1		●–%	
	Landlord dispute	2	1%				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>51</b>		<b>▲22%</b>	
<b>Family Circumstances</b>	Family fall out (including in-laws)	12	4%	25		11%	
	Overcrowding (family home/with family)	24	8%	21		9%	
	Domestic violence (DV) (partner)	19	6%	12	14	5%	6%
	Family violence			2		1%	
	Relationship breakdown (partner [not DV])	33	11%	8		3%	
	Bereavement			2		1%	
	Unsustainable care burden of relative	1	●–%				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>▲30%</b>	<b>70</b>		<b>30%</b>	
<b>Other</b>	Moved country			12		5%	
	Other	7	2%	7		3%	
	Anti-social behaviour	7	2%	5		2%	
	Overcrowding (other)	4	1%	3		1%	
	Neighbour conflict			2		1%	
	Substandard (not PRS)			1		●–%	
	Instability (i.e. frequent transitions between living situations)	9	3%				
	Loss of employment/reduced hours of employment	4	1%				
	Sought improved accommodation	1	●–%				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>▲11%</b>	<b>30</b>		<b>▲13%</b>	
<b>Missing</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3%</b>					
<b>Total</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>237</b>		<b>■100%</b>		

● <1%

▲ Due to rounding, percentages do not add up to sub-category total when counting specific main reasons within the sub-category.

■ Due to rounding, percentages do not add up to 100%.

\* The study designs differed and so data is not directly comparable.

## 4 Housing Trajectories and Routes into Homelessness

Through capturing respondents' previous four living situations in terms of tenure, duration in each accommodation, and main reasons for leaving each of these accommodations, the broad nature of their housing history (with a particular focus on length of time in each tenancy and reasons for leaving) could be established. This offered insight into the broad patterns of their housing histories *prior to entering* homelessness. The analysis revealed similar patterns to previous Focus Ireland publications in the Insights into Family Homelessness Series.

- Stable housing histories: over half (60%, n=142) of the participants were categorised as having had stable housing histories (i.e. with lengthy tenancies).
- Precarious housing histories: 16% (n=39) of respondents were classified as having had a precarious housing history and 8% (n=19) as having had a history of transience in housing and so were indicated as having had a highly unstable or 'chaotic' housing history.
- New family formations include those who had mainly been living in the family home/with family and upon having a baby or second baby, due to overcrowding and/or family conflict, had to leave their accommodation with family. This category accounted for 11% (n=26) of respondents.<sup>15</sup>
- Vulnerable migrant pathways (5%, n=11) represents a minority of the migrant sample who were considered 'vulnerable' due their relative housing exclusion when considering their housing histories. A proportion of this group reported hidden homeless situations, while some other respondents in this group had accessed accommodation but did not have long-term housing histories in Ireland prior to presenting as homeless.

## 5 Current Accommodation and Emergency Accommodation Usage

Capturing respondents' current type of accommodation and emergency accommodation usage showed that:

- 87% (n=206) of respondents were, at the time of the survey, residing in emergency accommodation (EA);
- 30 (13%) families had moved to tenancies: 13 to the private rented sector with HAP, 9 to local authority housing (LAH), and 8 to an approved housing body (AHB) or co-operative (Co-op) housing;
- 78 (33%) of the 237 survey respondents lived (or had lived) in EA for less than 12 months and 159 (67%) of the respondents for 12 months or longer.

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15 See Lambert S., O'Callaghan D. and Jump O. (2018) *Young Families in the Homeless Crisis: Challenges and Solutions*. Dublin: Focus Ireland. Available at: <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Lambert-et-al-2018-Young-Families-in-the-Homeless-Crisis-Full-Report-1.pdf>

## 6 Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Accommodation

As already outlined, this study sought to explore and better understand families' experiences of looking for accommodation with HAP. There is currently very little evidence on this dimension of attempts to exit homelessness, and the dynamics of trying to enter into a crowded and competitive private rented market.

The findings indicated that 183 (77%) of the 237 participants had experience of looking for accommodation with HAP, of which 13 had exited homelessness and were currently living in PRS accommodation with HAP. Forty-seven (20%) respondents stated that they did not have experience of looking for accommodation with HAP.

All respondents who had experience of looking for accommodation with HAP (n=183) were asked about the number of properties they had applied for with HAP, but only those interviewed in the post-pilot phase were asked the number of viewings they had attended (n=137).

- One hundred and eleven (61%) of these 183 respondents had applied to more than 20 properties with HAP.
- Of the 137 HAP-seekers who were asked how many viewings they had attended, over half (55%, n=76) had attended six or more viewings.

The top three items of feedback reported by respondents (n=182) in terms of barriers in accessing HAP accommodation were:

- 1 That they received no response; never heard back from landlords (57%, n=104);
- 2 That the experience is stressful/difficult (51%, n=93);
- 3 The unwillingness of landlords/agents to take HAP and/or HAP discrimination/prejudice (48%, n=88).

The respondents who reported that they had no experience looking for private rented accommodation with HAP were asked to describe their reasons for not following this option. The top three reasons given for not looking for HAP accommodation (n=47) were (multiple responses were allowed):

- 1 Lack of tenancy security in the PRS and/or prior negative experiences in the PRS (66%, n=31);
- 2 HAP accommodation is not conducive to raising children and family life (43%, n=20);
- 3 Name on LAH list/waiting as name on LAH list (38%, n=18).



## 7 Help-seeking Prior to Presenting as Homeless

An examination of whether respondents sought help prior to losing or having to leave their home noted that:

- Just over half of (55%, n=130) of respondents had sought help by contacting a person, organisation, or service prior to homelessness, while 35% (n=82) had not sought any assistance.
- Respondents who sought advice or information prior to presenting as homeless cited that they approached their local authority first (41%, n=53), followed by Focus Ireland (16%, n=21) and Threshold (14%, n=18).
- Younger participants (20–25 years) were the least likely to seek help prior to presenting as homeless (62%, n=24). In terms of country of origin, those of EU origin were least likely (43% of EU respondents, n=15) to seek help or advice and 40% (n=42) of the respondents of Irish origin. By contrast, only 26% (n=25) of non-EU respondents had not sought help before homelessness.

|  
over  
**1/2**  
of families who had searched  
for properties via HAP Scheme had  
attended more than 6 viewings

# Conclusion

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This study marks Focus Ireland's latest contribution on research into the key drivers and dynamics of family homelessness in Dublin. The evidence detailed in the report aims to not only inform Focus Ireland's service design and delivery in preventing homelessness and supporting them out of homelessness as quickly as possible, but also to support evidence-based policy responses at a government level.

Many families surveyed in this study had never been homeless before and more than half outlined notably stable housing histories. For a majority of the families, homelessness was triggered by issues experienced in the private rented sector and many were unable to source alternative housing resulting in their entry into homeless emergency accommodation. From looking at the demographic profile of the sample, it is evident that these issues disproportionately impact low income groups who appear to be consistently at a heightened risk of being pushed into precarious living situations and emergency accommodation in the context of competitive housing market. The current report also highlights the considerable effort many families go through in trying to exit homelessness through the HAP scheme, which families report being difficult to source and secure, sometimes resulting in prolonged stays in emergency accommodation.

Finally, the findings presented here are consistent with previous reports published by Focus Ireland *Insights into Family Homelessness Series*. Indeed, the consistency in data which continues to emerge across time and across different cohorts not only indicates the reliability of the data that is generated under this research design and execution, but more importantly, yields a clear picture of family homelessness in the Dublin Region.

|  
over  
**3/4**  
of families had experience  
of looking for a home  
through HAP Scheme





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