

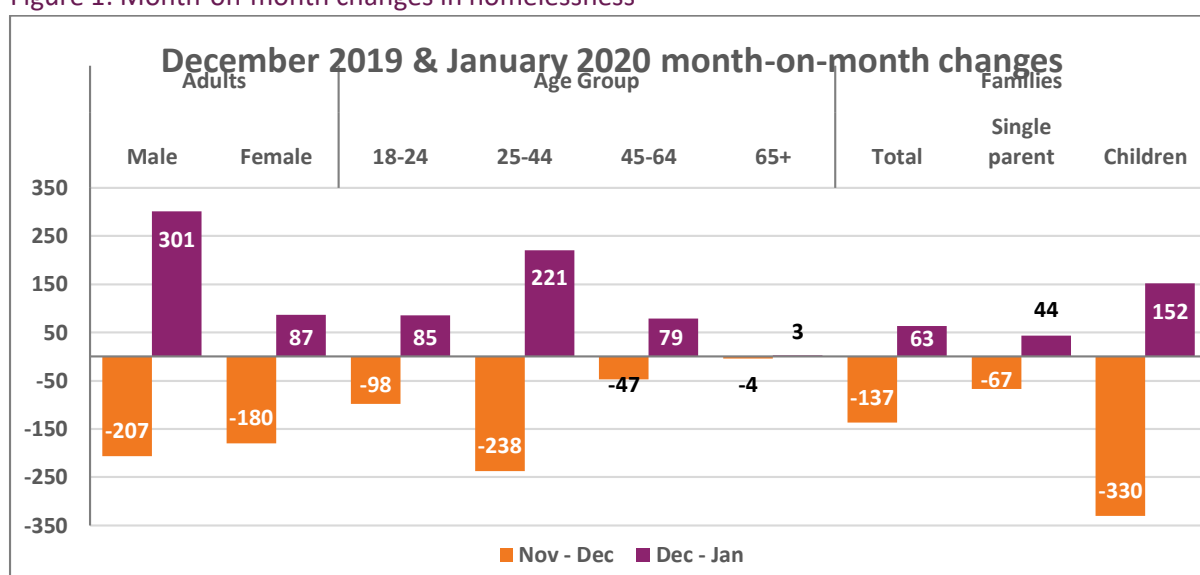
Analysing the December 2019 homeless figures: Part 2

Introduction

Following on from [our detailed analysis of the December 2019 homeless figures](#), this paper will look at the emerging trends indicated by the January 2020 data published by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) in February.

Overall, the January figures indicate a return to trend we have seen since figures were first published monthly in 2014, after an irregular December. The rise in homelessness in January, announced in the DHPLG release, has reversed the December fall across all demographic categories, as seen below:

Figure 1: Month-on-month changes in homelessness



In previous years, January has seen a spike in the number of people in emergency accommodation after some reduction in December. Family homelessness has tended to drop in December due to families staying with their wider family over Christmas. On the other hand, the number of single adults tends to increase reflecting the additional shelter beds which have been made available each year in the run up to Christmas. This upward trend in single people's homelessness and the downward trend in family homelessness in December have tended to balance each other out, resulting in an overall slight dip in December. In January, the typical pattern has been for family homelessness to rise as the Christmas arrangements end, while single adult homelessness also increases slightly resulting in an overall increase which can be very large.

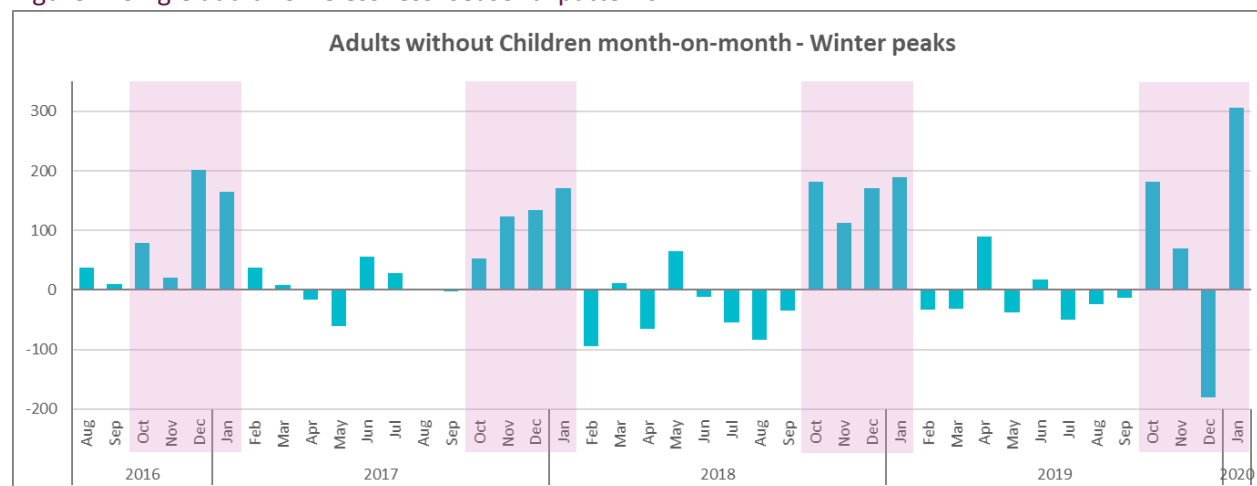
In December 2019, family homelessness fell in line with the established pattern, but single adult homelessness broke with previous patterns by falling significantly - leading to a much larger drop in the overall December homeless figures (-7%) than in previous years. In January, single persons' homelessness reverted to patterns with a very substantial rise bringing single persons' homelessness to the highest level ever.

We will now look in more detail at the different patterns in single persons' homelessness, family and youth homelessness over the period.

Single Adults

As noted, the usual December rise in single adult homelessness did not materialise in the 2019 figures, and in fact saw a significant drop of -180 compared with November 2019. In January 2020, this figure rose by 306, more than reversing the December drop. The graph below shows how unusual this is compared to previous 2inters.

Figure 2: Single adult homelessness: seasonal patterns



Even considering that Dublin always accounts for the majority of homeless people, the January rise was disproportionately driven by Dublin. Out of a national increase of 306, the number of single adults homeless in Dublin increased by 279. Most other areas saw modest increases or further falls in their homeless figures in January.

Table 1: Month-on-month change in single adult homelessness

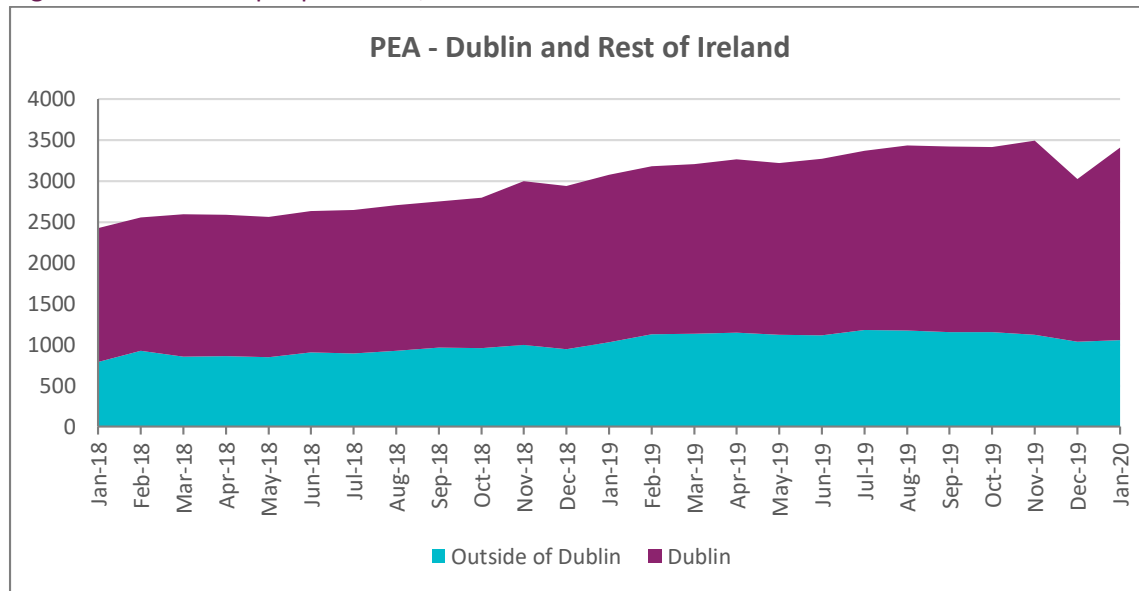
	Dec '19 – Jan '20	
Dublin	279	↑
South-West	19	↑
South-East	13	↑
North-West	9	↑
Midlands	7	↑
Mid-East	-1	↓
Mid-West	-4	↓
West	-6	↓
North-East	-10	↓
Total	+306	

Given January's dramatic increase, it is unlikely that the fall in December was driven by a sudden rise in successful exits from homelessness. There were 306 more homeless single adults in January than in December, bringing the total to its highest ever at 4,400 single adults in emergency accommodation.

Accommodation Type

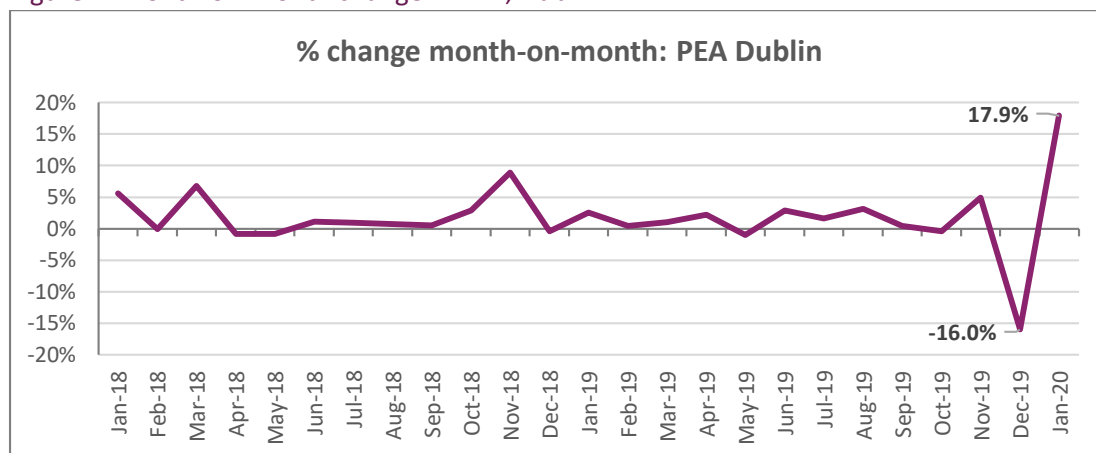
The number of people in Private emergency accommodation (PEA) in December 2019 fell by 467, then rose again by 379 in January. This was almost entirely driven by Dublin, and there was no such dramatic change in PEA in the rest of the country or in other types of accommodation within Dublin¹.

Figure 3: Number of people in PEA, Dublin and Rest of Ireland



The number of people in PEA tends to be relatively stable, making this sudden bounce even the more significant. December saw the number of people in PEA in Dublin dropped by 380, a 16% drop in one month. The next largest month-on-month change was less than half this, +164 (9%) in November 2018.

Figure 4: Month-on-Month change in PEA, Dublin

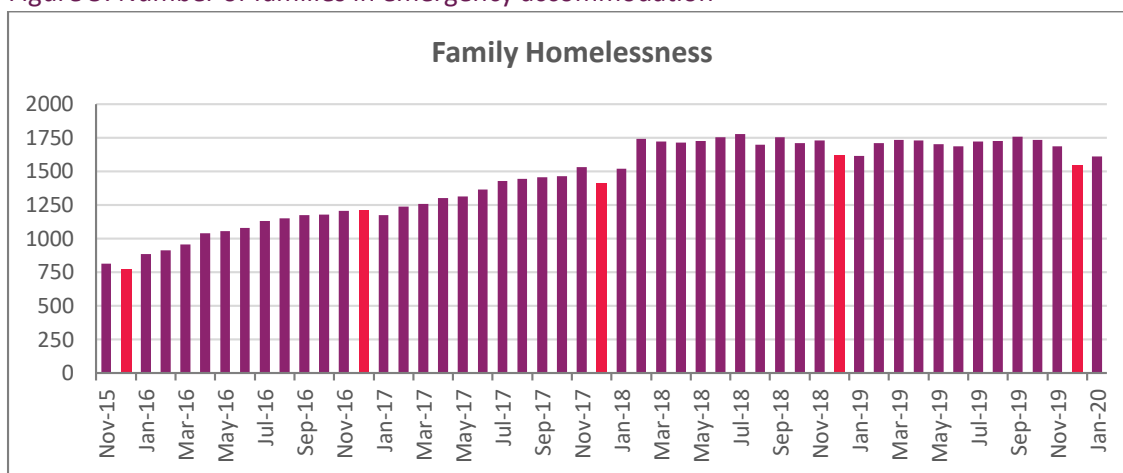


¹ The initial DHPLG release for December 2019 indicated much larger variations in PEA and TEA numbers, but these were subsequently revised in an updated release. The analysis here, and the unexplained December/January dip and rise in use of PEAs in Dublin, is based on the revised release.

Children and Families

As noted above, the number of child dependents in homeless families tends to drop in December as people are accommodated by their extended families over the Christmas period. In addition, there may be a decline in evictions in the immediate run up to Christmas. The reversal of these trends tends to be spread over January and February, with no sudden bounce (Stanley 2018).² December figures are highlighted in red on the graph below, where we can see the annual rise into the Spring.

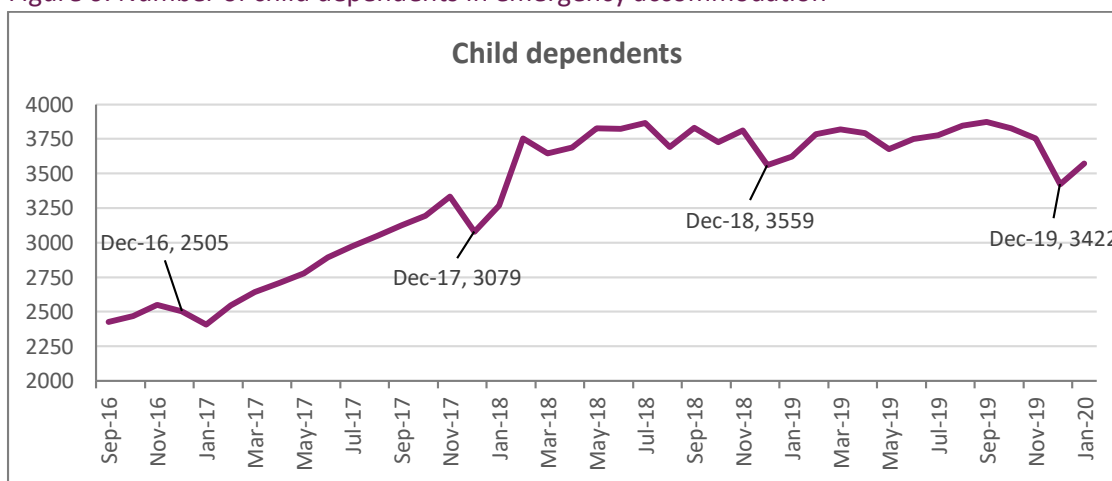
Figure 5: Number of families in emergency accommodation



In December, child homelessness saw the largest decrease since the current crisis began, with 330 fewer children in emergency accommodation in December than November. This brought the number of homeless children in Ireland to the lowest level since January 2018.

However, January 2020 saw almost half of this decline reversed, with a rise of 152 homeless children. On the basis of previous years we can expect a further increase in February.

Figure 6: Number of child dependents in emergency accommodation



² Stanley and Allen (2018), Family Homelessness End of Year Review 2017, Insights into Family Homelessness 13, Focus Ireland <http://bit.ly/FamilyHomelessness2017>

Young people

Youth homelessness has less of a winter seasonal pattern than other demographic categories. The sudden drop of -98 (-11%) young people in emergency accommodation in December was highly unusual, and has been almost completely reversed by the January increase of 85 (+11%).

Figure 7: Youth homelessness, Dublin and rest of Ireland



Two thirds of homeless young people in Ireland are in Dublin, but the December drop in youth homelessness was disproportionately driven by the rest of the country. In January, youth homelessness has returned to pre-Christmas levels in Dublin, but not elsewhere.

The complete reversal of the December drop is not seen outside of Dublin apart from in the Midlands and North-West, which are the two regions with the fewest homeless young people to start with (22 and 14 young homeless people respectively in January 2020). On their own, these regional decreases are small, but together tentatively point to a positive development in youth homelessness.

Table 2: Month-on-month change in youth homelessness by region

	Month-on-month change				Youth homelessness Jan 2020
	Nov - Dec		Dec - Jan		
Dublin	-47	↓	67	↑	577
Midlands	-9	↓	11	↑	22
North-West	-2	↓	5	↑	14
South-East	-14	↓	5	↑	35
South-West	-13	↓	5	↑	73
Mid-East	-2	↓	-1	↓	40
North-East	-5	↓	-1	↓	18
Mid-West	2	↑	-3	↓	48
West	-8	↓	-3	↓	42

Conclusion

Given the extent to which January reversed the sudden December decrease, it is unlikely that sustainable exits from emergency accommodation were the main cause of the fall in figures.

The Department of Housing Quarterly Report for Q4 2019 stated that 1,582 adults and their dependents exited homelessness in the last quarter of the year. This is a 14% increase on last year and is “the highest number of exits recorded in any single quarter since 2016”. However, this is just 18 more exits than in Q3 2019 (1,564), where we saw no corresponding decrease in the homeless figures.

It is important to note that this commonly reported figure for ‘exits’ from homelessness includes people who have never entered homeless services. A total of 1,007 families³ and 729 single people⁴ were assessed as ‘homeless’ under the terms of the Act, usually because they had received a Notice of Termination which was to come into force in the next few weeks, as a consequence they were able to access Homeless HAP and so find alternative accommodation without having to enter homeless services. This inclusion of this group as ‘exiting homelessness’ mixes two completely different definitions. Although assessed as ‘homeless’ for the purposes of obtaining HHAP, they have never fallen under the definition of homelessness used in the official homeless statistics (i.e. having stayed at least one night in Section 10 funded emergency accommodation during the reference week). To add further confusion, families living in ‘own door’ emergency accommodation are *excluded* from the homeless figures published each month but *included* in the ‘exits from homelessness’. Counting these groups as ‘exiting homelessness’ while not counting them as ‘entering homelessness’ in the first place, hinders reliable analysis of trends both in prevention and sustained exits from homelessness. For more discussion of the confusion caused by amendments to the calculation of homelessness see the Focus Ireland Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government (2018) <http://bit.ly/ConfusingTheStats> .

In any case, on the basis of previous years, exits for Q1 2020 will most likely be in sharp contrast to this combined prevention/exit high. Family and child homelessness has risen every February for the last 5 years, and there is no reason to expect 2020 to break the trend. The winter spike in single adult homelessness has lasted from October to January in previous years so we can expect to see a fall or at least a stabilisation, but 2020 has so far diverged from previous years so could be less easy to predict.

Overall, regrettably, the December figures cannot be seen as indicative of a secular decline in homelessness. Many areas are showing a stabilisation in the figures, such as youth and child homelessness, but whether this is sustained over the coming year depends on the policies of the incoming Government. Likewise, the unprecedented fluctuations in private emergency accommodation in December and January raise further questions, which cannot be answered by analysis of the numbers alone.

³ Figure quoted in the DHPLG Summary Analysis of Homelessness Quarterly Performance Reports - Quarter 4 2019 <http://bit.ly/38PpU0G>

⁴ Figure quoted in Report to Housing SPC, Wednesday 11th March 2020, Item No.ii, Table 6 <http://bit.ly/2WIGoLN>