

Youth Homelessness FAQs

What is youth homelessness?

Youth homelessness means people aged 13 -26 who are without stable accommodation and staying in hostels, temporary accommodation, couch surfing or rough sleeping. They are facing homelessness at a crucial point in their emotional, cognitive and social development while transitioning from adolescence to adulthood. Experiencing homelessness at a young age has profound and lifelong effects on a person's development and can disrupt their access to education and jobs. Young people under 18 who have left the home are recognised by the Childcare Act but those over the age of 18 are not recognised as a distinct category from other adults.

Who is facing this issue?

Many young people facing homelessness:

- have been in the care system
- are new parents who cannot remain in their family home due to overcrowding
- have recently left the Direct Provision system
- are students who have moved away from home to study
- have left their home due to family breakdown
- are LGBTQI and have not been able to remain in the family home as a result.

International evidence indicates that not all homeless young adults engage with the formal homeless system, and many are part of the 'hidden homeless'.

The number of young people aged 18-24 in emergency accommodation doubled between 2014 and 2019, and there is an unknown number rough sleeping or in unstable temporary arrangements with friends or relatives, also referred to as 'couch surfing'.

Why do we need a specific policy for young people facing homelessness?

Our current approach to homelessness does not recognise the additional unique challenges that young people face. Young people are bottom of the list for social housing, are six times [more likely to face discrimination](#) from private landlords, are more likely to be in low-income jobs and if unemployed, they receive a lower rate of social welfare. This means that often their only option is to couch surf or enter adult emergency accommodation with people who may have very complex needs including addiction.

Young people facing homelessness are very vulnerable and without intervention that is conscious of this, are likely to become long-term homeless. Young homeless people often have turbulent care histories or are leaving abusive and unstable family homes, leaving

them without the supportive network that is so crucial for learning to thrive as an independent adult. Being both out of home and at a crucial stage in their development requires specific youth homelessness interventions in order to allow them to engage in education, employment and a full independent life in their community.

The homeless system needs to recognise the different needs of different people who end up without a home, and this is not achieved by ‘treating everyone the same’. By failing to recognise the particular complexities of youth homelessness from a policy perspective, we create a structure for young people at risk which almost guarantees that they will become long-term users of emergency accommodation. This is preventable and should be a top political priority to ensure that the cycle of homelessness does not continue.

What should we do differently?

The Programme for Government committed to a national Youth Homelessness Strategy. Ensuring that this is an inclusive, prevention-focused strategy with measurable outcomes is the first step.

You can read about the changes needed here: [iceyh call for government action.pdf \(endyouthhomelessness.ie\)](https://www.endyouthhomelessness.ie/iceyh_call_for_government_action.pdf)

Where can I learn more?

Focus Ireland have produced several reports on youth homelessness, including recent research into preventing homelessness for [care leavers](#) and the experiences of [homeless LGBTQ+ youth](#) in Ireland. [Living in Limbo](#) presents a comprehensive longitudinal study on young people’s pathways into and out of homelessness.

Dillon Nolan, who entered Focus Ireland accommodation after leaving care, wrote about his own experiences and the effects of the housing crisis on young care leavers in [this blog post](#).

International resources on youth homelessness

- [The Canadian Homeless Hub](#)
- [The FEANTSA Youth Network](#)
- [Rock Trust Scotland](#)
- [End Youth Homelessness UK](#)