

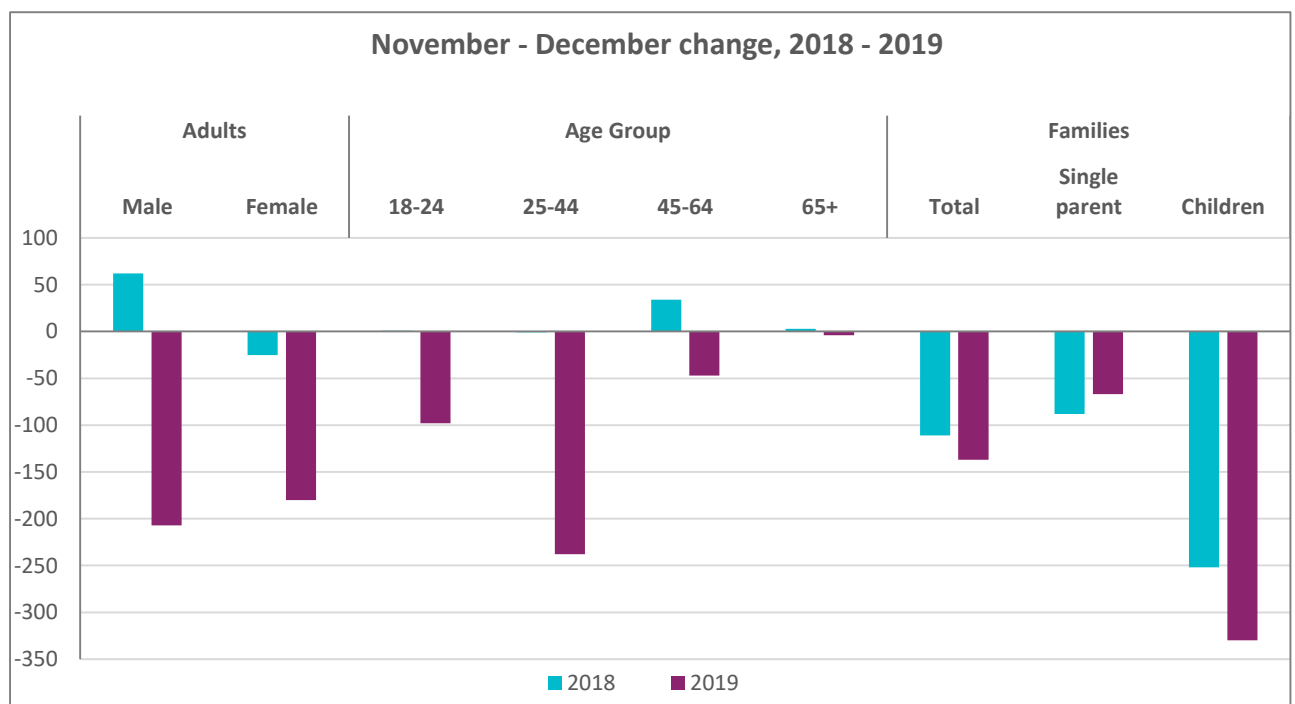
Analysing the December 2019 homeless figures: Part 1

Introduction

December saw the largest monthly drop in the number of people in emergency accommodation since figures started being recorded in 2014. Both in numerical (-717) and percentage (-7%) terms, this is an unusually large decrease from November's report. This paper looks into where this decrease is coming from and what is driving it.

While some of the changes were dramatic, there were month-on-month decreases across all demographic and accommodation categories represented in the DHPLG reports:

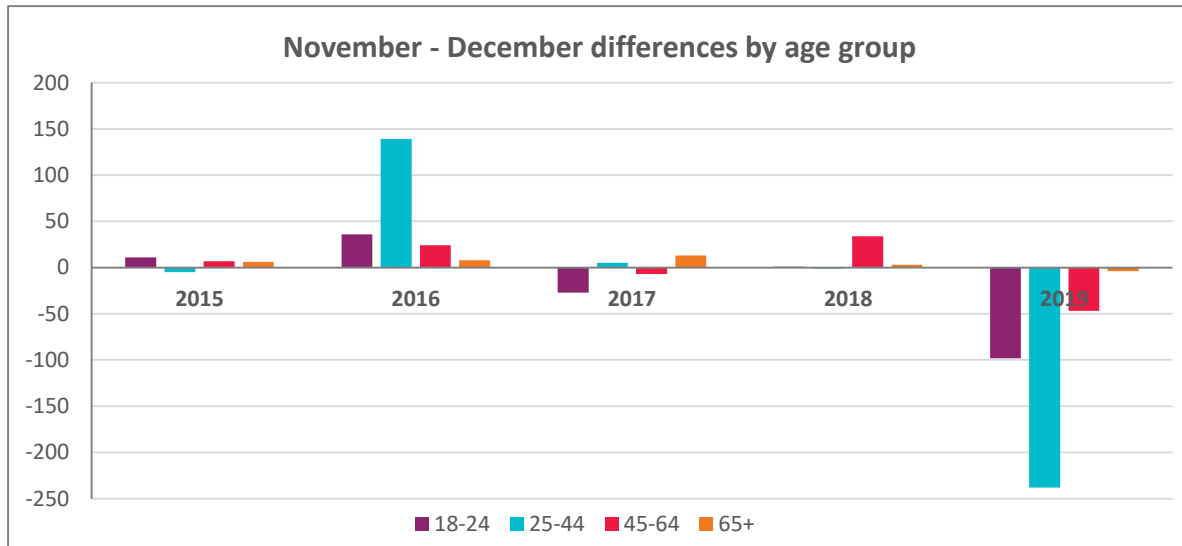
Figure 1: Number of people in emergency accommodation, November – December difference 2019



If we dig into and compare these categories with previous years, it is clear that this change does not just follow a seasonal pattern.

Homelessness among all age groups decreased month-on-month in December 2019.

Figure 2: Annual November-December difference, by age group



Compared to previous years, this shows an unusual decrease across all age groups, most notably a huge drop in the number of homeless 25-44 year olds.

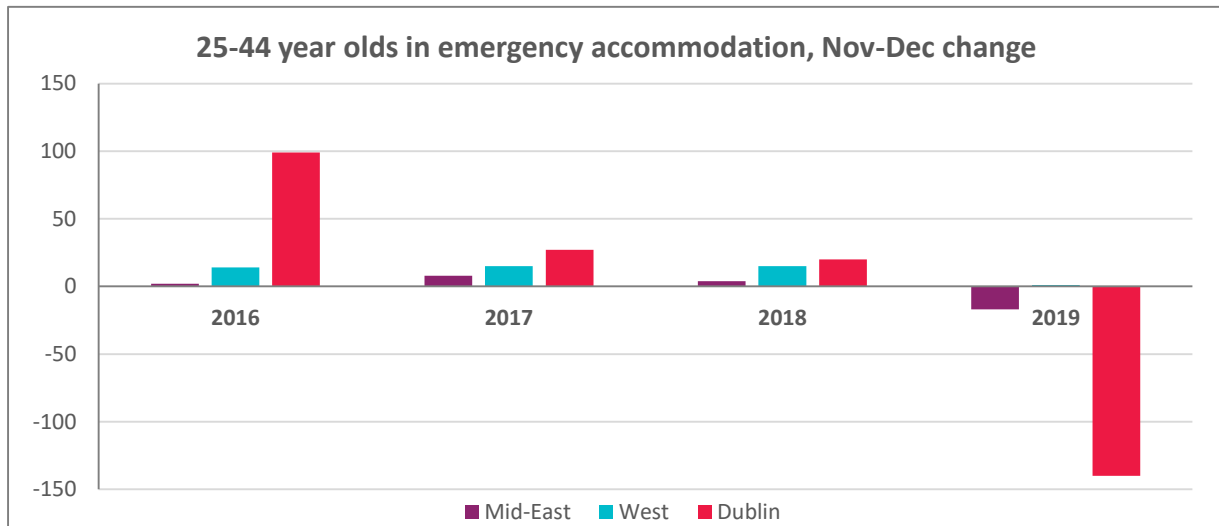
When we break this down by region, we can see that most regions were already seeing a gentle downward trend for homelessness among 25-44 year olds. But, in Dublin, the West and Mid-East regions, homelessness among 25-44 year olds saw very sudden and dramatic falls in December 2019.

Table 1: Number of adults aged 25-44 in emergency accommodation by region, November – December difference 2019

Adults aged 25-44	2016	2017	2018	2019
Dublin	99	27	20	-140
Mid-East	2	8	4	-17
West	14	15	15	1
Midlands	-12	3	-1	-2
Mid-West	19	-7	-24	-35
North-East	1	-5	-8	-11
North-West	5	-9	-2	-7
South-East	5	-8	-2	-8
South-West	6	-19	-3	-19

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Figure 3: Number of adults aged 25-44 in emergency accommodation, yearly November – December differences



Dublin

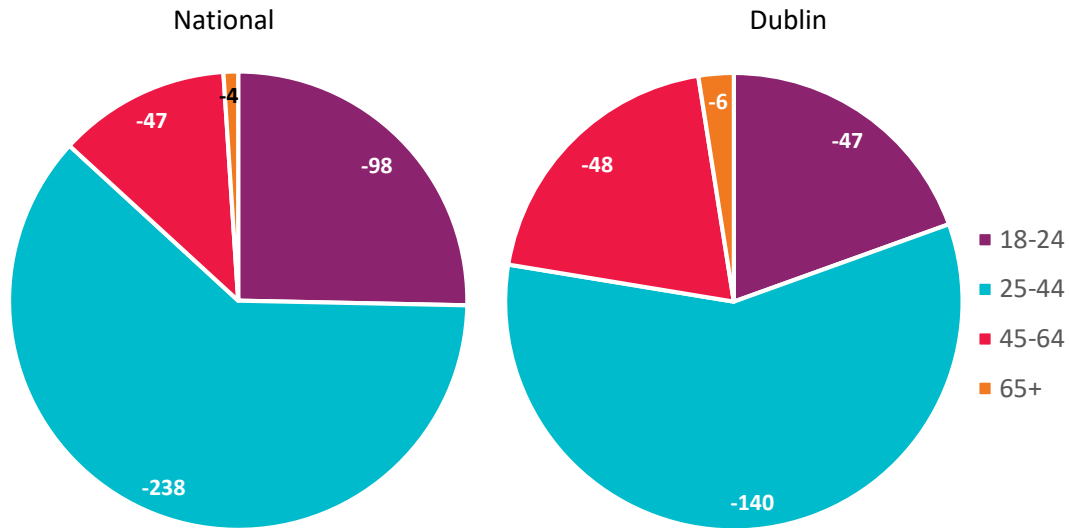
The overall drop is mainly driven by Dublin, which had 241 fewer adults in emergency accommodation in December than November.

Table 2: Adult Homelessness by County

County	Nov 19	Dec 19	Difference	County	Nov 19	Dec 19	Difference
DUBLIN	4509	4268	-241	MAYO	29	25	-4
CORK	437	405	-32	SLIGO	36	33	-3
LIMERICK	290	267	-23	OFFALY	35	34	-1
WATERFORD	86	63	-23	WESTMEATH	36	35	-1
KILDARE	203	184	-19	LEITRIM	3	2	-1
KERRY	155	143	-12	ROSCOMMON	6	5	-1
CLARE	79	68	-11	MONAGHAN	3	3	0
CAVAN	11	1	-10	TIPPERARY	35	35	0
KILKENNY	51	44	-7	LONGFORD	7	8	1
DONEGAL	28	23	-5	LAOIS	19	21	2
WEXFORD	37	32	-5	CARLOW	29	31	2
WICKLOW	28	24	-4	GALWAY	326	330	4
LOUTH	127	123	-4	MEATH	91	102	11

Of these 241 adults who left homelessness in Dublin, 101 were adults without children. 140 were aged 25-44.

Figure 4: November-December 2019 change by age group, nationally and in Dublin



Children

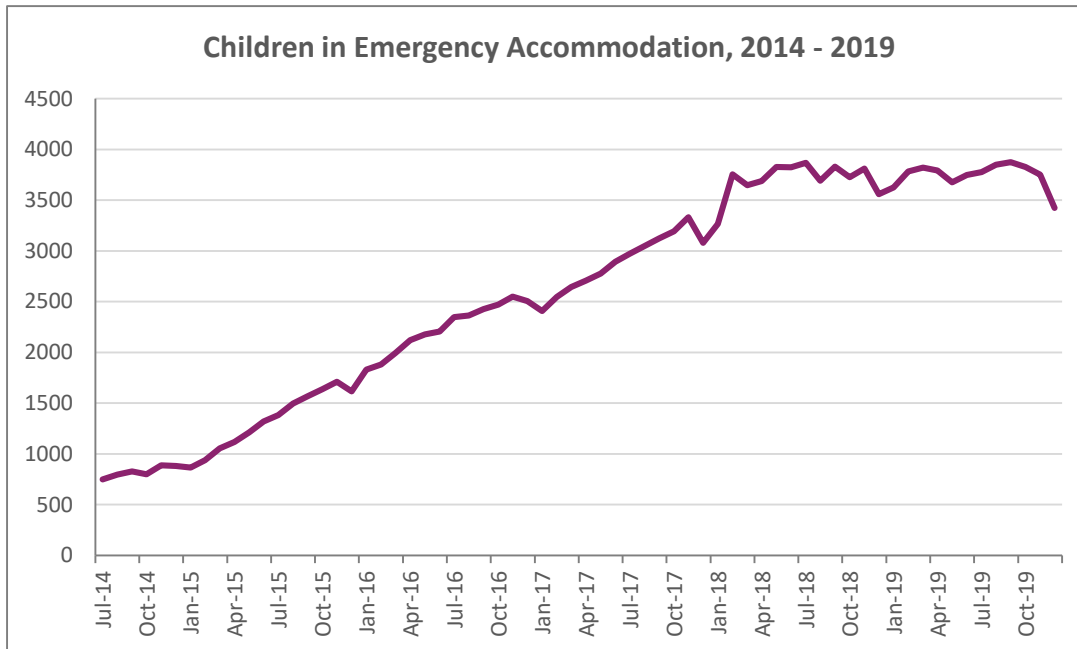
The number of children in emergency accommodation dropped by 330 overall between November and December 2019, and 229 of these were in Dublin.

Figure 5: November-December changes in child homelessness, 2016 - 2019

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Dublin Children	-14	-148	-130	-229
Children Total	0	-254	-252	-330

The number of children in emergency accommodation rose dramatically since the start of the crisis, but has levelled off since around February 2018. The drop in December, while unusually large, is likely a combination of this overall slowdown and the usual seasonal December drop in figures.

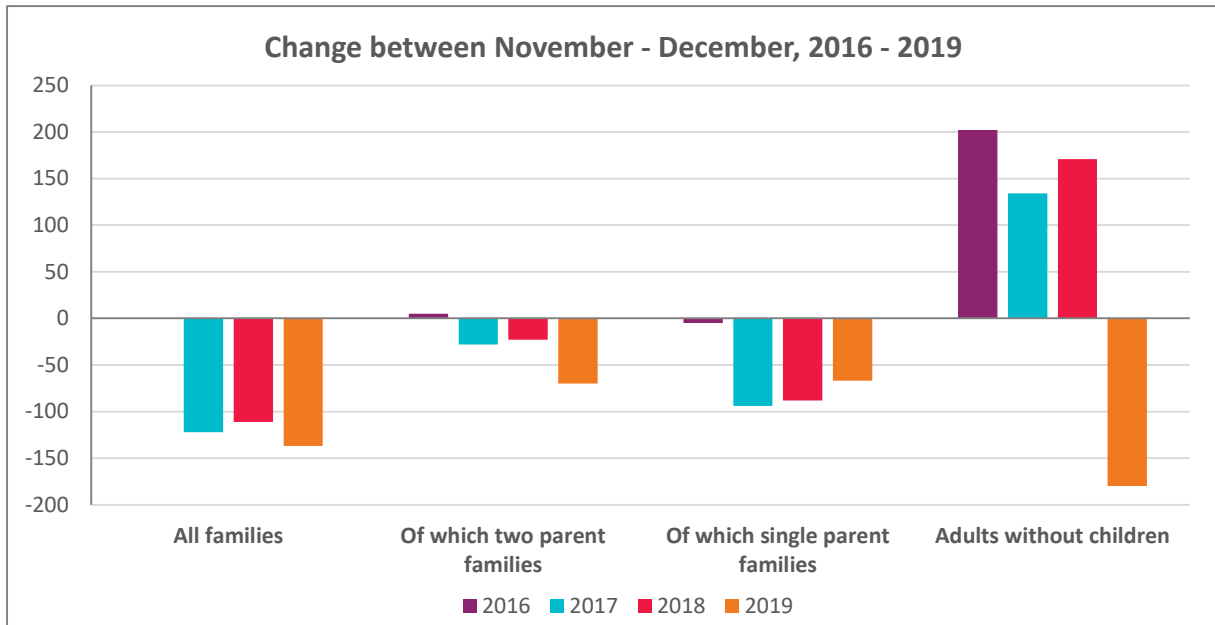
Figure 6: Number of children in emergency accommodation, 2014 - 2019



Adults without children

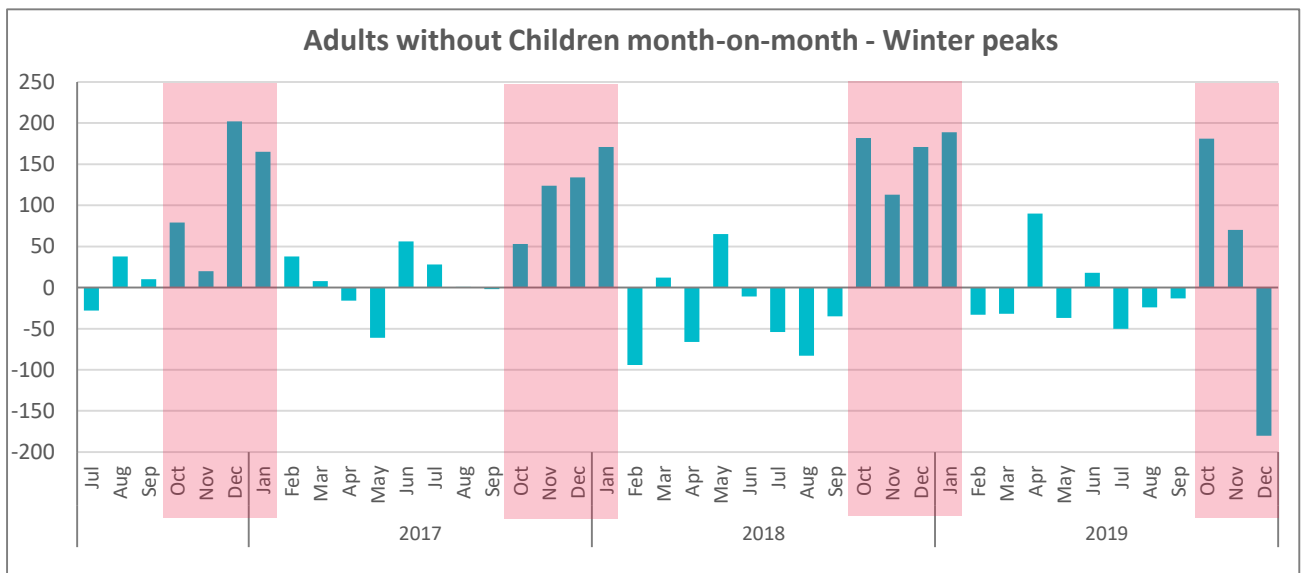
The drop in family homelessness in December 2019 is not particularly unusual compared with previous Decembers. In the past 3 years there has been a similar overall drop in the number of families in emergency accommodation between November and December, but this is usually cancelled out by increases in January and February.

Figure 7: Family and Adult homelessness, yearly November-December change



However, the decrease in the number of adults without children is highly unusual.

Figure 8: Adults without children in emergency accommodation, month-on-month difference



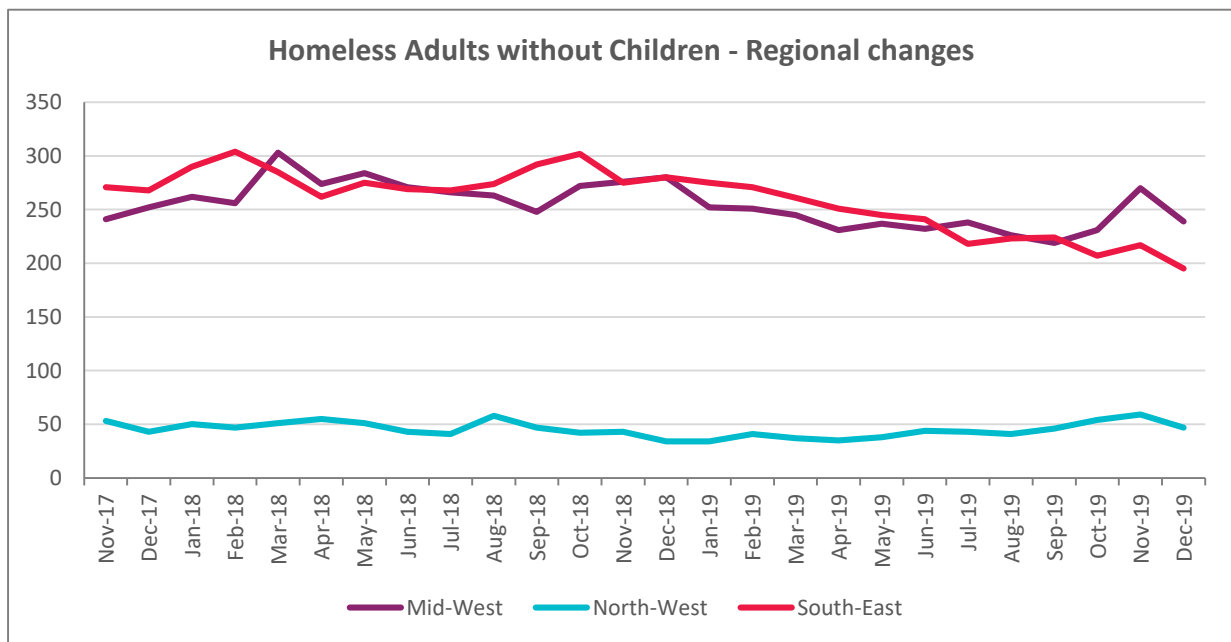
The number of adults without children in emergency accommodation spikes over the winter months each year, largely due to additional shelter beds being opened. This pattern is usually reversed for families, with family homelessness dropping notably each December.

On average, the number of adults without children rises by 169 between November and December. This December, on the other hand, saw a sudden decrease of 180 after the usual October and November increases.

Dublin accounted for most of this, with 101 fewer adults without children November to December. This is a complete reversal of the usual trend. In 2018 this figure rose by 102 and in 2017, rose by 91.

The Mid-West, North-West and South East regions saw the largest month-on-month percentage decreases. The Mid-West and South-East regions both fell by over 10% between November and December 2019. Both these regions have seen gradual decreases over the past year, -15% and -30% since last December respectively. The North-West fell by 20%, although this represents a fall from just 59 to 47 and is in the context of a rise of 38% since 2018.

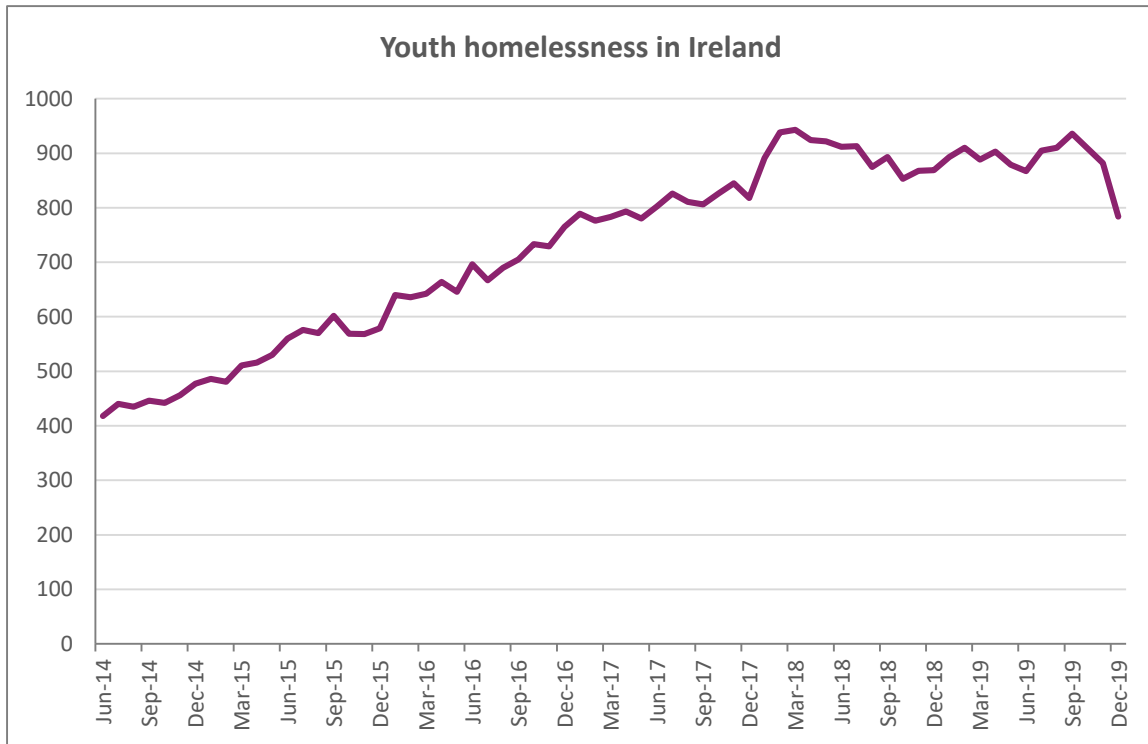
Figure 9: Adults without children in emergency accommodation, 2017 - 2019



Youth

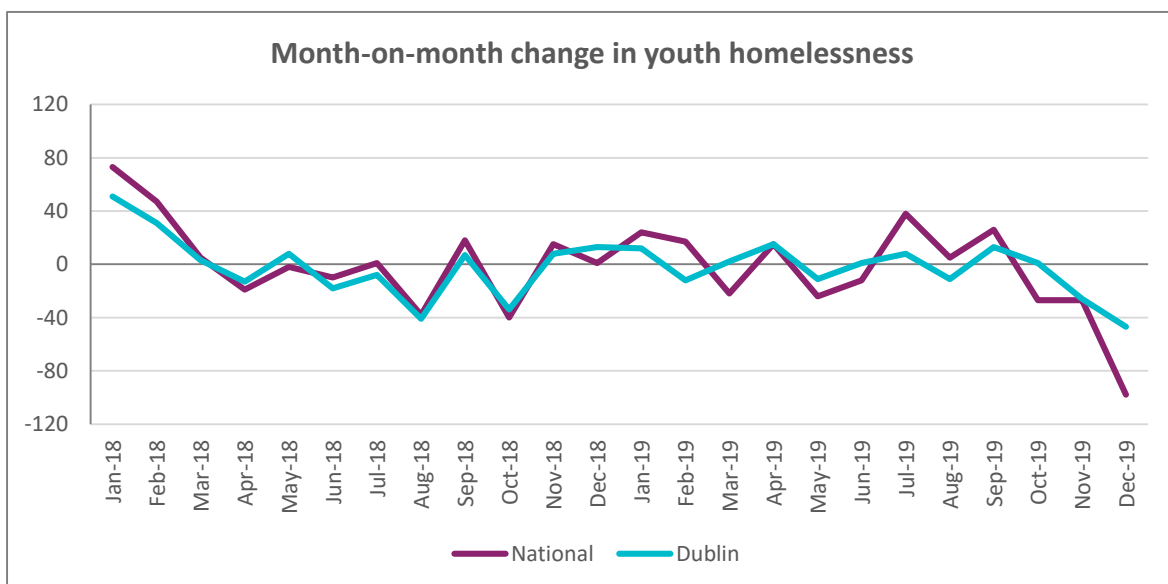
There were 98 fewer young people in emergency accommodation in December compared to November. This is a drop of 11% in just one month and brings youth homelessness to its lowest level since May 2017.

Figure 10: Number of young adults (aged 18-24) in emergency accommodation



Although Dublin has by far the highest number of young people in emergency accommodation, this overall decrease in youth homelessness was disproportionately driven by decreases outside of Dublin.

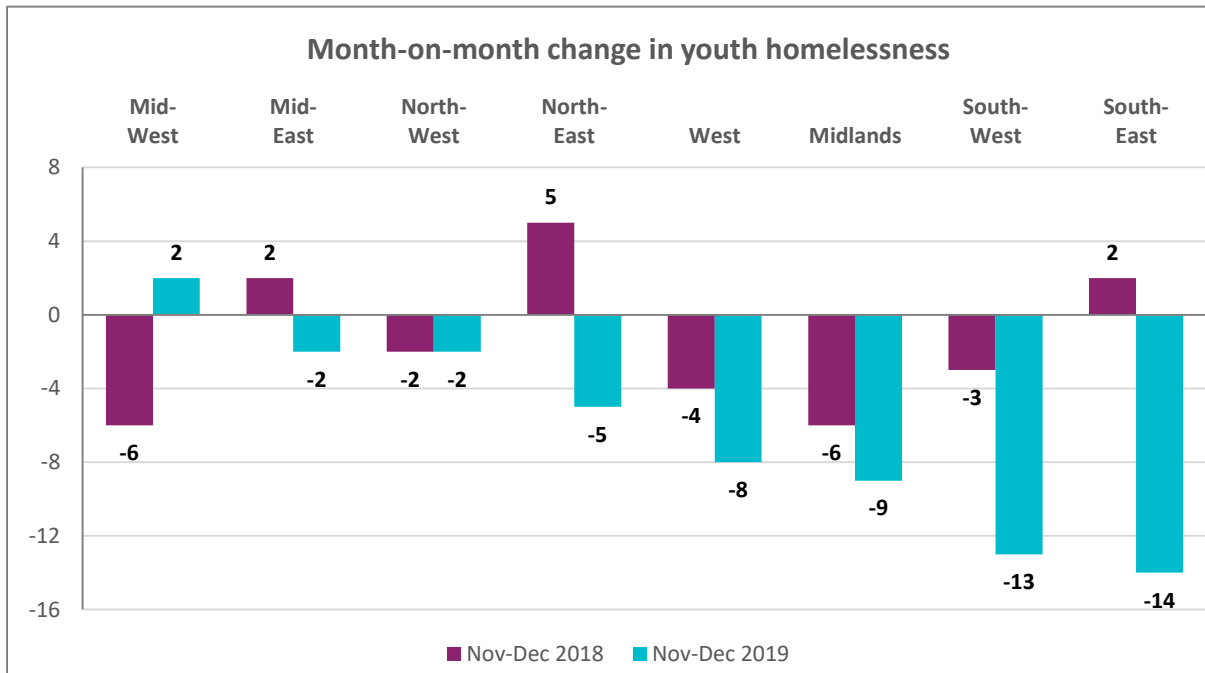
Figure 11: Month-on-month change in youth homelessness, Dublin and nationally



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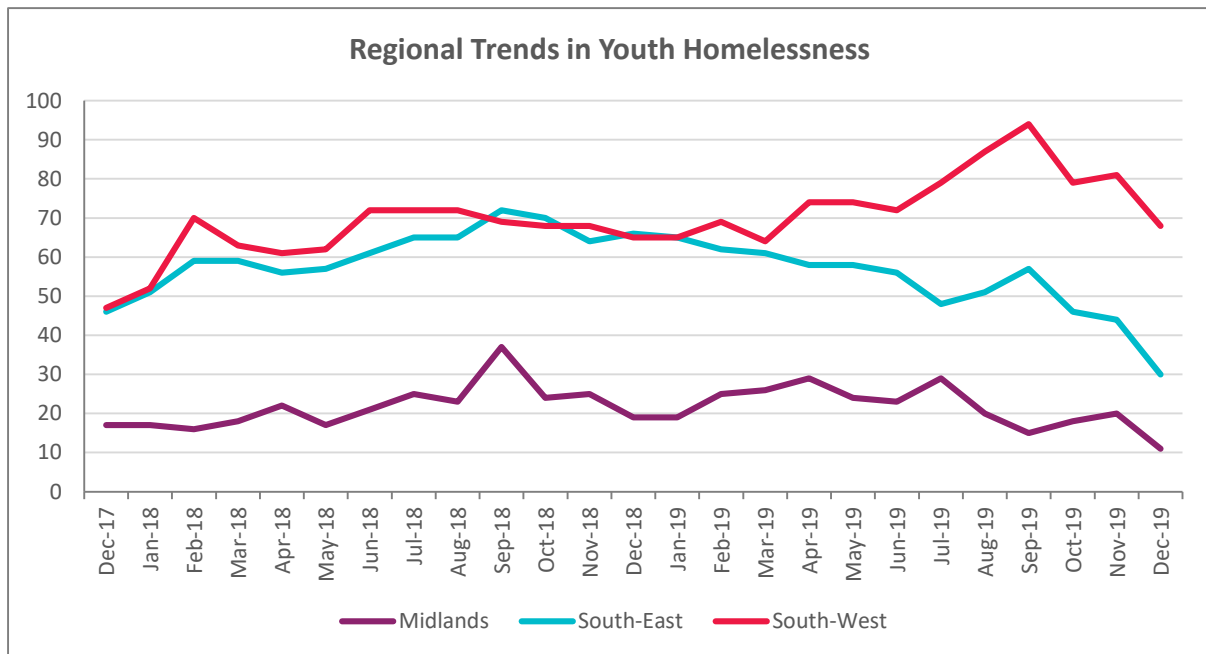
The Midlands, South-West and South-East regions made up a disproportionate amount of this drop. These areas account for 37% of the national drop in youth homelessness, despite containing only 14% of the overall homeless population.

Figure 12: November – December change in youth homelessness outside Dublin, 2018 and 2019



However, while these add up to a dramatic drop in the overall figures, they do not represent an equally dramatic change of pace within each region. The Midlands and the South-East are seeing gradual downward trends in youth homelessness already, while the South-West's drop this month is coming after a peak last September.

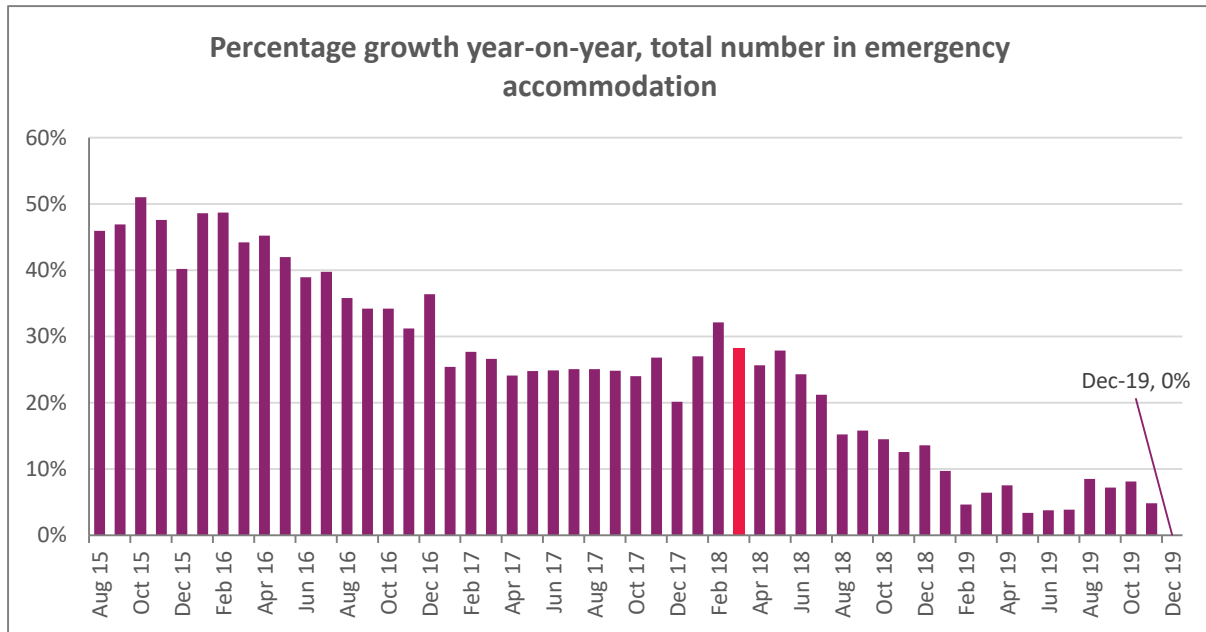
Figure 13: Trends in youth homelessness, 2017 - 2019



Is this a turning point?

December 2019 is the first month of the current crisis in which the total number of people in emergency accommodation has not risen since this time last year. However, year-on-year growth has been steadily declining – things have been continuing to get worse but at a slower pace. While the fact that it has now hit 0% does not dramatically buck that overall trend, and the real question is whether from this point onward we can expect to see the number of people homeless actually start to fall on a regular basis.

Figure 14: Year-on-year growth in total homelessness figures



It needs to be noted that from March 2018 (highlighted in red), this series of figures excludes an unknown number of homeless families who are in ‘own door’ emergency accommodation. This means that between March 2018 and 2019, this metric is not comparing like with like. The impact on the trend of treating such families inconsistently is unknown.

Ultimately, we can’t know whether the December figures are an outlier or a sign of a turning point until we see how these trends continue in the coming months.

Child and family homelessness seem likely to rise after their seasonal decreases as usual, although the overall trend of decline in these areas might temper the post-Christmas bounce.

It will also be important to monitor the level of youth homelessness outside of Dublin to see whether the regions continue to drive a downward trend.

Likewise, with the number of adults without children, whether it returns to the usual pattern of a Winter spike in the January report (and makes up for the December drop) or not will be a good indicator of whether we have started to turn a corner or if December was a once-off anomaly.