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Causes of family homelessness in the Dublin region during 2016 and 2017

Letizia Gambi, Sarah Sheridan and Daniel Hoey

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Causes of Family Homelessness in the Dublin Region during 2016 and 2017

This research briefing presents an overview of the aggregate data of all telephone surveys which were conducted with families presenting as homeless across 2016 and 2017.

For greater detail of the findings emerging from each of these surveys, please refer to *Insights into Family Homelessness Series* on our Publications and Partnership page on the Focus Ireland website.

Authors: Letizia Gambi, Sarah Sheridan, Daniel Hoey

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INTRODUCTION

During 2016 and 2017, the number of families in emergency accommodation in the Dublin Region increased at an alarming pace. Between January 2016 and January 2018, the numbers of families homeless increased by 72% (from 884 families in January 2016 to 1,517 in January 2018[1]). The number of families in emergency accommodation increased by 33% in 2016 and 30% in 2017 and 80% of all families experiencing homelessness across Ireland were living across the four Dublin local authorities (DRHE stats for December 2017).

Focus Ireland operates Dublin's Family Homeless Action Team (HAT) and serves families across the Dublin region[2]. When a family presents as homeless to their local authority as homeless, they are provided emergency accommodation either in commercial hotels, B&Bs or 'Family Hubs' (i.e. congregate emergency accommodation). A majority of the families who are allocated private emergency accommodation (i.e. hotels and B&Bs) are then referred to the Focus Ireland HAT who make contact with the family as soon as possible to set up an initial assessment. The family is later assigned a case manager who works to support the family out of homelessness as quickly as possible. Currently, the team are actively case managing an average of around 450 families. Since 2016, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Community has developed a programme of expansion of the 'Family Hub' style of accommodation (which has resulted in other NGOs also working with families in Dublin).

Rationale for Collecting Data on Family Homelessness

In late 2015, Focus Ireland identified a need to collect timely data on the causes of family homelessness in order to understand and respond to family homelessness as the problem continues to unfold. The current Focus Ireland research team initiated a research exercise that followed two core objectives:

1. To get a better understanding of the processes and events which ultimately led to families' homelessness;
2. To capture families' housing histories, demographic profile and their help-seeking patterns prior to presenting as homeless.

Focus Ireland decided – together with the advice of our Research Advisory Group[3] (RAG) – to conduct a targeted telephone survey every three months with a sample of families presenting as homeless to their local authority[4] in the Dublin region. This collection of data

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[1] Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government data on Homelessness: http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data

[2] While Focus Ireland is the principle service who assists families experiencing homelessness in Dublin region, other homelessness organisations also work with families.

[3] Focus Ireland's Research Advisory Group consists of leading experts and researchers in the area of homelessness and social policy which consists of leading experts in the area of homelessness and research (representatives from the University of Dublin Trinity College, University College Dublin, NUI Maynooth, National Economic and Social Council, and the Housing Agency). It operates as a sub-committee to the organisation's Board of Directors and provides ongoing guidance and feedback to Focus Ireland's research programme of work.

[4] This number represents the number of families who had not previously reported as homeless during the previous two years.

and related discussion was then presented through separate publications as part of Focus Ireland's *Insights into Family Homelessness Series*[5].

The current report provides a full and comprehensive analysis of *all data* collected of those families who entered homelessness in March, June, September, and December during both 2016 and 2017 – comprising a total of eight waves of data collection.

The data presented in this report does not represent the total number of families who presented as homeless during this time, rather a sample of families collected on a quarterly basis. The graph below shows the total number of families who presented as homeless for the first time in the Dublin region since 2015, with the targeted waves of telephone survey data collection denoted in red.

Figure 1 – Number of families becoming newly homeless in Dublin Region and point of telephone survey contact, 2015 - 2018
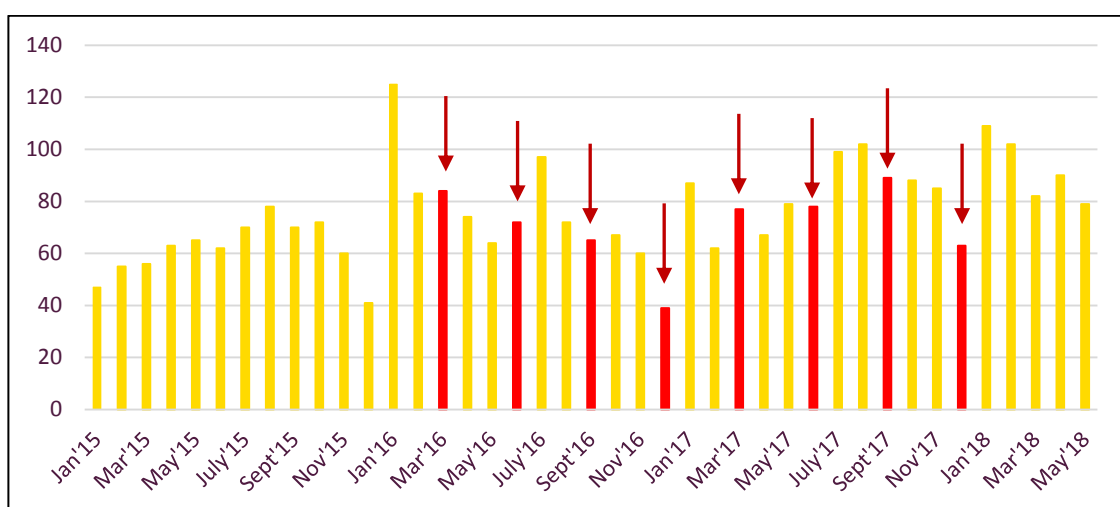
METHODOLOGY

Data was collected through a 3-page telephone survey that was concise, tightly structured and targeted in design[6]. This enabled the team to collect data more efficiently, to maximise the response rate, and most importantly, to minimise the burden on families in crisis situations (see Appendix 1 for survey instrument).

The survey captured reason for leaving their last stable home, demographic profile of respondents[7], their accommodation trajectories and interaction with services prior to their presenting as homeless. Questions pertaining to the last four accommodations were the

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[5] Each report is available in full on the Focus Ireland website: https://www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/research/
[6] The survey was designed by Focus Ireland research team with the guidance of Focus Ireland Research Advisory Group.
[7] Demographic information includes age, marital status, employment status, country of origin of the participant, and number of children. Respondents are also asked questions about ethnic and cultural background; age of children; history of direct provision (and for how long); and any reports of recent rent supplement increases based on measures introduced in July 2016.

main component of the survey – which sought to capture change and transition in the respondents' living situations and (partially) identify 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 relating to rental supplements. The survey concluded with questions pertaining to service use prior to becoming homeless among the families.

The surveys were conducted with 297 of the 567 families who became newly homeless in the Dublin region in 2016 and 2017 during March, June, September, and December. This represents 53% of the entire cohort of families presenting as homeless during these months. Completion rate of surveys with the remaining 270 families were impacted by a range of reasons, including:

- Focus Ireland did not have contact details because the families might have left homelessness very quickly or another organisation was assisting them;
- The telephone number did not appear to be in service or the participants did not answer their phone or return voicemail messages[8];
- In a small number of cases, families declined to participate in the study.

Prior to the Focus Ireland Research Team making contact with the respondents, a member of the Family HAT team attained consent from respondents during the assessment with the family. The Family HAT member made it clear that participation in the study was entirely voluntary and their service support would not be impacted in any way if they declined to participate.

Focus Ireland's Research Officers conducted all telephone surveys[9]. In cases where information was requested by the family in relation to their homelessness or housing situation, the telephone number of the Family HAT team was provided to the individual.

While the survey was structured in design and the questions were posed in a consistent way, in many cases, the families expanded on their answers[10]. Research notes were recorded in these instances. The interviews typically took around 5-10 minutes each but were sometimes 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. All data was inputted and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22 & 24.

Focus Ireland's Data Protection and Customer Confidentiality policies, as well as the organisation's Ethical Guidelines for Conducting Research, were adhered to at all times in the completion of this study. The respondents were made aware again at point of survey that involvement in the study was entirely voluntary and that they were under no obligation to

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[8] The researcher attempted to make contact a total of four times with each family over the course of two weeks. In cases where families had a message service activated on their mobile phone, one voicemail was left. This was to minimize any perceived annoyance or disturbance to the participant.
[9] Focus Ireland received the telephone numbers of the families to be supported after they presented to their local authority.
[10] No leading questions were used in these discussions to ensure methodological rigor.

participate[11]. All details emerging from the research were anonymised and this was also explained to the respondents[12].

During 2017, the sample size decreased due to several reasons. Firstly, due to the larger number of families presenting as homeless, there were more organisations engaging with them – which makes it more difficult to directly reach families and obtain consent. Also, the Family HAT team were negotiating increase in service support demands as more families entered homelessness than were exiting at that time. Figure 2 describes the sample size by year as a proportion of the total number of families presenting as homeless in the correspondent year. Overall, 297 out of 567 families participated in the survey.

Figure 2 – Proportion of families presenting as homeless surveyed in March, June, September, and December 2016-2017 (Dublin Region)

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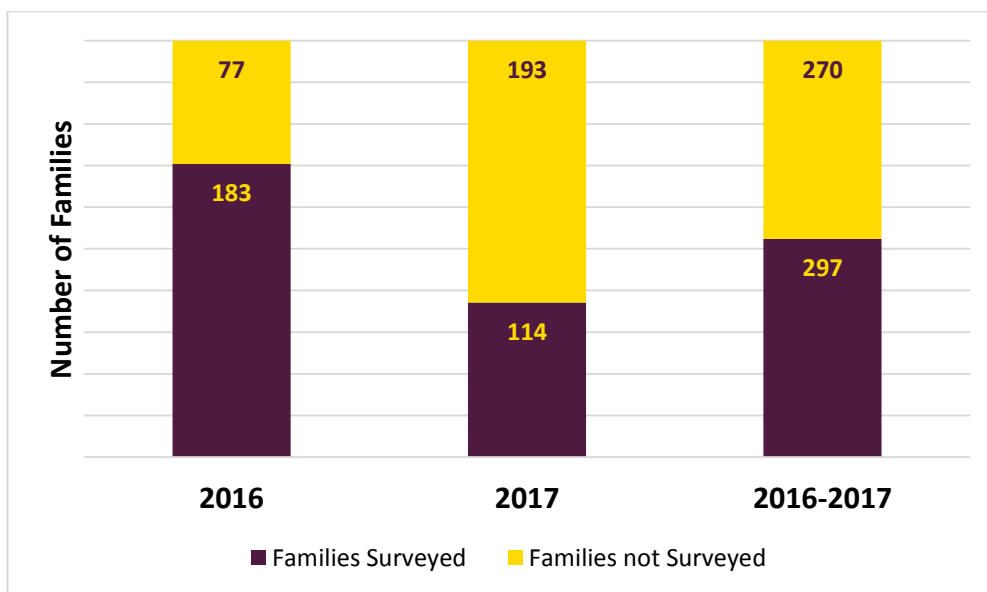
[11] Importantly, families also explained that their participation or non-participation would not in any way impact on the Family HAT service support offered by Focus Ireland. Moreover, the Family HAT would not have been aware of those families that ultimately did not participate in the survey.
[12] Anonymisation of data was achieved by destroying the contact numbers and names of participants once the telephone surveys were completed. Also, all identifiable details were removed in order to ensure further anonymity.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Age

The majority of those families who became homeless (n=128, 43% of full sample) were aged 26-35 years, while 34% (n=101) were adults aged 36 or older. Figure 3 below shows the age breakdown of survey participants. A considerable number of families entering homelessness are headed by young people (n=68, 23% of full sample) in the age range 18-25. This cohort is significantly over-represented among families newly presenting as homeless, given that only 12% of the general population were classified in the age group 15-24, according to the national census[13].

Figure 3 – Age breakdown 2016-2017 (by percentage of respective sample)
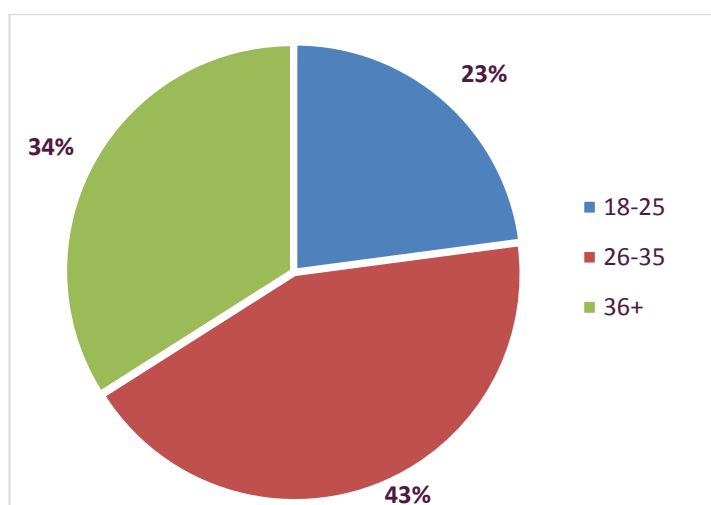
Nationality

During 2016-2017, 178 (60%) of the survey respondents were born in Ireland, while 119 (40%) respondents were born outside of Ireland. Among migrant households[14], 73 (25%) were from a non-EU background, while 46 (15%) were from an EU country (see table 1).

Table 1 – Nationality Breakdown of Sample

Nationality Category	No. of Survey Respondents	Percentage of Total
IRISH	178	60%
EU	46	15%
NON-EU	73	25%
Total	**297**	**100%**

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[13] Data available on CSO website under "Table 7 Estimated Population classified by Sex and Age Group, 2011 – 2017":
https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2017/

[14] Migrant households refers to households which are headed by a parent who was not originally born in Ireland (as opposed to citizenship status). This is in an effort to understand whether ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented.

The proportion of migrant households decreased over the sampling period – from 42.6% in 2016 to 36% in 2017. Therefore, migrant households are still significantly over-represented among families newly presenting as homeless, given that only 17.3% of the general population were born outside of Ireland according to the Census 2016[15]. Though, it is not known why they are overrepresented without further analysis. Some possibilities include migrants represent 40% of the total number of tenants in the private rental market which may explain their higher numbers or the predominance of Non-EU migrants could represent experiences of discrimination or perhaps some failures in formal family reunification processes.

It is worth noting that across these migrant families, there were 26 families with histories of residing in Direct Provision[16] (19 families in 2016 and 7 families in 2017 respectively). This represents 8.8% of the total 297 families. A majority of these families lived in direct provision some years ago and had subsequently reported stable housing histories before presenting as homeless.

Family Type

One-parent families represented the most common family type in both years 2016 and 2017[17], with an average of 60%. Two-parent families represented 39%, as shown in the table below. This reflects data as reported by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government which reported and average of 64.5% of one-parent households across the same periods of time[18].

Table 2 – Marital Status

Marital Status	Number of Survey Respondents	Percentage of Total
SINGLE	179	**60%**
COUPLE	117	**39%**
Missing	1	-
Total	**297**	**100%**

Only a small number of male-headed households were surveyed; almost all households are female-headed, highlighting the substantial risk to homelessness among lone mothers[19]. This echoes other commentators' views that there is a 'feminisation of homelessness' occurring in Ireland[20].

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[15] Central Statistics Office 2016 Census, available at: www.cso.ie.
[16] Asylum seeker congregate accommodation in the past.
[17] These figures are in line with the homelessness statistics reported by the Department of Housing, which show that around 60-65% of families in emergency accommodation are made up of one-parent households. Data available at:
https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data.
[18] Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government data on Homelessness:
http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data
[19] "Complete Analysis of All Telephone Surveys with Families that Became Homeless During 2016" available on Focus Ireland website: https://www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/research/
[20] Mayock, P. & Bretherton, J. (Eds) (2016) Women's Homelessness in Europe. London: Palgrave Macmillan; Eoin O'Sullivan, 2016. "Ending Homelessness in Ireland: Ambition, Adversity, Adaptation?". European Journal of Homelessness.

In terms of the number of children in the family unit, 65% of the respondents had either one or two children in their household (n=193), 29% (n=85) had three or four children and the remaining 6% (n=19) had more than five children.

Figure 4 – Number of children per family unit
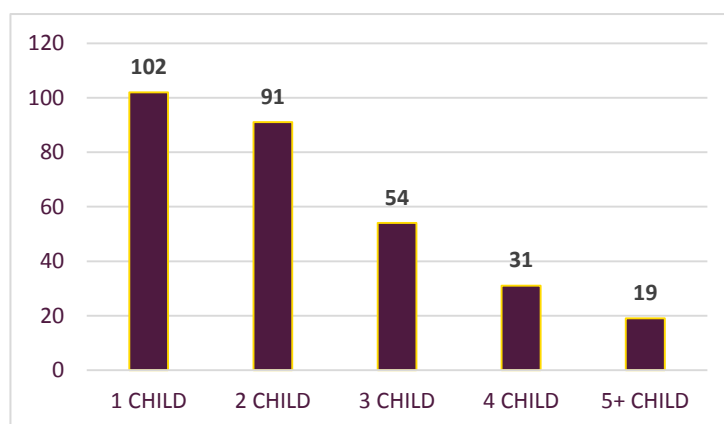
Of these 297 families, there were at least 665 children. Indeed, according to national statistics, there were between 3,500 and 4,000 children living in emergency accommodation during 2018 and this number had risen by approximately 1,000 children since 2017[21]. These numbers (and in particularly the increase in numbers) is alarming. Existing research shows how homelessness can negatively affect children's wellbeing, educational needs, and attendance in school[22].

Since September 2016, the respondents were asked to disclose the age of their children[23]. As such, information about a total of 385 children was gathered: 43 of whom were under the age of 1 year; 120 children were between 1 and 4 years; and 102 were between 5 and 10 years; 67 were between 11 and 15 years; 53 were over the age of 16. See Figure 5 below.

Figure 5 – Ages of children (n=385)

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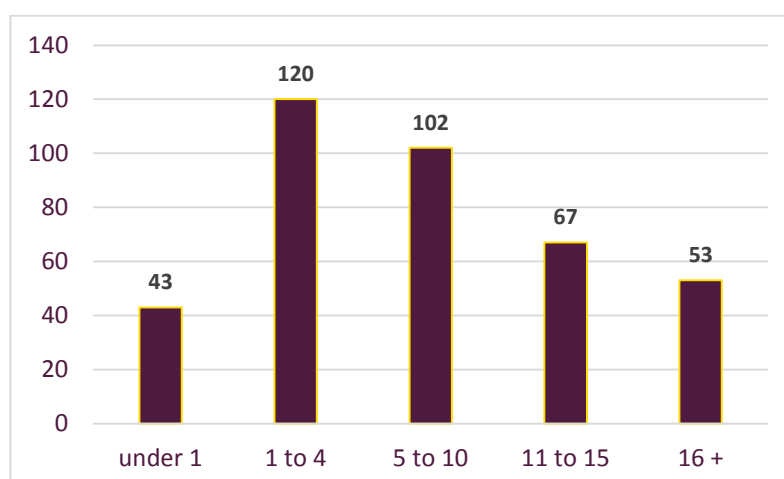
[21] "Homelessness Report June 2018", Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government: http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data

[22] "Home works: A Study on the Educational Needs of Children Experiencing Homelessness and Living in Emergency Accommodation", Children's Right Alliance: https://www.childrensrights.ie/resources/home-works-study-educational-needs

[23] Data is missing for March and June 2016 waves. Also, several families chose not to disclose the ages of their children.

Employment Status of Respondents

Across all 8 waves of data collection, the vast majority of the respondents (n=236, 80%) described themselves as unemployed and in receipt of social welfare support. 29 (10%) out of 297 respondents were in part-time employment, 13 (4%) were in full-time employment and 10 (3%) were students. The employment status for 9 respondents was missing or unclear due to language difficulties at time of survey (See Figure 5).

Figure 5 – Number of respondents in employment
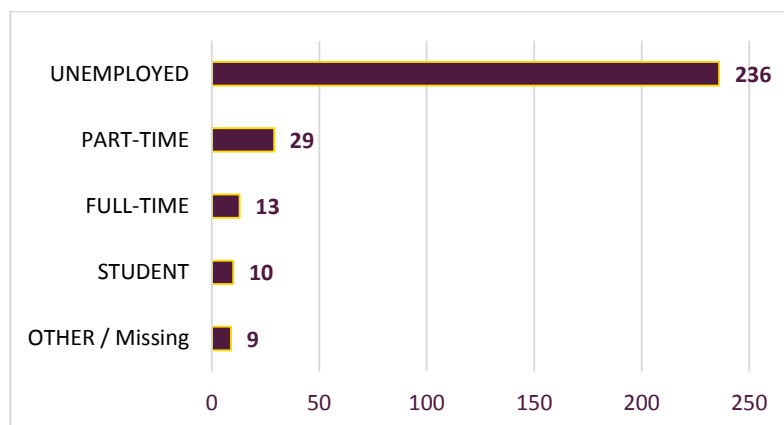
Once again, high levels of joblessness, limited income, and dependency on rental supplements[24] have been found to be disproportionately represented among the families surveyed.

In a recent blog post for Focus Ireland[25], Dr Mary Murphy unpicks the impact that recent changes to social protection and employment policies might have on one parent families – which is worth considering here since almost two thirds of families in homeless accommodation are lone parents. Dr Murphy finds that lone parent families' ability to meet parenting commitments *and* engage in part-time employment is reduced based on these changes. These policies are based on the assumption that families are 'nesting' between social welfare, part-time work, and in-work protection. Yet based on existing evidence on the topic, Dr Murphy argues that lone parents base decisions on long-term considerations of "both child well-being and social networks which are needed for social and economic inclusion". And importantly, these policy changes may serve to push lone parents further into poverty and social exclusion rather than incentivising greater levels of full-time employment. Evidence of deprivation and poverty among lone parents can be found elsewhere. The ESRI found in a recent report that lone parents are at greatest risk of persistent deprivation in Ireland[26] (33% of lone parents were found to be 'persistently deprived' compared to an average of 23% across SILC data across 11 EU countries). Furthermore, employment among parents whilst also living in homeless accommodation with their children is likely to be extremely challenging or simply unfeasible for parents. These considerations are important in contextualising the high rates of joblessness among homeless households data presented here and elsewehere.

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[24] Rental supplements will be discussed in greater detail in the next session.
[25] Murphy, M. (2018) 'Nesting and Gaming' article on Focus Ireland Blog. Access here: https://www.focusireland.ie/nesting-and-gaming/
[26] Watson, D., Maitre, B., Grotti, R., and Whelan, C. (2018) Poverty dynamics of social risk groups in the EU: An analysis of the EU statistics on Income and Living Conditions, 2005 to 2014. Dublin: ESRI. Accessible here: https://www.esri.ie/publications/poverty-dynamics-of-social-risk-groups-in-the-eu-an-analysis-of-the-eu-statistics-on-income-and-living-conditions-2005-to-2014/

HOUSING HISTORIES AND CAUSES OF HOMELESS-NESS

The survey captured the details – including duration, tenure, and reasons for leaving – of *the previous four* accommodations prior to their presenting to their local authority as homeless. Gleaning this information enabled two principle areas of insights: participant's recent housing history; and the various triggers or events which resulted in their loss of accommodation. 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

By capturing the last four accommodations for families in the survey instrument, the root causes of homelessness are revealed. In other words, it seeks to capture the families' last "stable home" as opposed to last living situation.

Emerging clearly from this analysis, is that over two thirds of families entering homelessness had their last stable accommodation in the private rented sector (n=203, 68%). Of them, 136 of 203 families (67% of renters) were in receipt of rent supplement in their last stable home, while 67 were meeting rental payments through their own income, or their rental payments were supported by a partner or from a family member.

Additionally, there were 70 families (23%) that reported that their last stable home was staying with either family or friends – 51 of whom categorised this as their parental home, while 19 as staying temporarily with relatives or friends.

Figure 6 – Last Stable Accommodation by Tenure 2016 – 2017
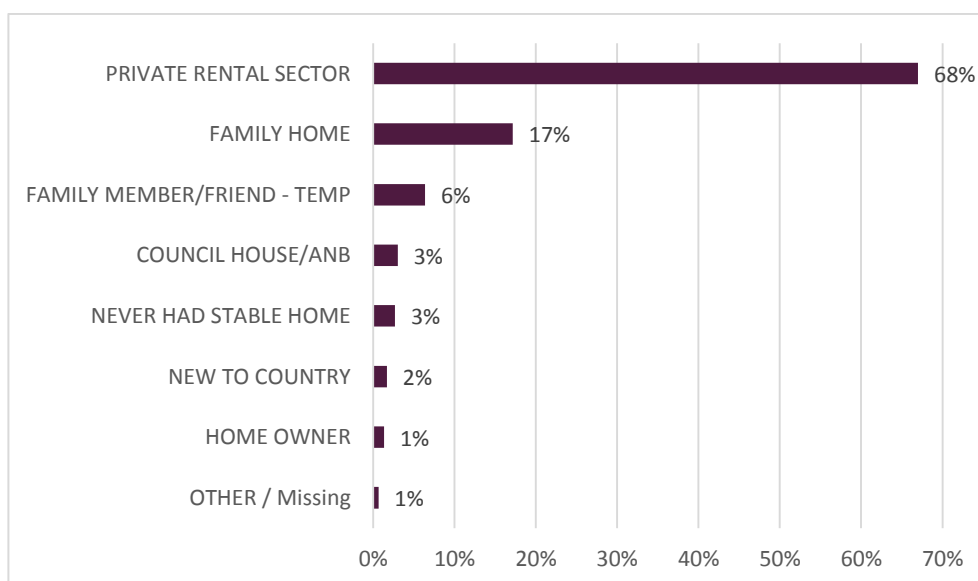
Reasons for leaving Last Stable Accommodation

Survey respondents were asked to provide further details about the reasons behind their tenancy ending and a basic frequency analysis was conducted on reported 'triggers' to

homelessness. As Table 3 (below) outlines, the most commonly reported reasons for leaving their last stable accommodation are related to either 'properties being withdrawn from the market' (n=89, 31%) or 'PRS-related issues' (n=78, 26%). These issues are broken down in Table 3. These include 'landlord selling' (n= 64, 22%) and 'rent increase' (n=22, 7%) as the most commonly cited reasons, followed by 'landlord moving back in or moving in with a family member' (n=17, 6%) and 'notice to quit property' (n=9, 3%).

Importantly, these triggers to homelessness are consistently captured across each wave of data collection. Family circumstances were cited in 30% of cases (n=89, 30%). These included relationship breakdown (n=33, 11%), family violence (n=19, 6%), family conflict (n=12, 4%), and care of a relative (n=1).

Table 3 – Most Commonly-Cited Reasons for leaving Last Stable Accommodation across 2016 – 2017

	Most Commonly-Cited Reasons	**No. of families (n=297)**	**Percentage across 2016-2017**
PROPERTY REMOVED FROM MARKET **(31%)**	**Landlord selling**	**64**	**22%**
	Landlord moving back in or moving in a family member	17	6%
	Bank repossession	8	3%
PRS[27]-RELATED ISSUES **(26%)**	**Rent increase**	**22**	**7%**
	Overcrowding (in PRS)	14	5%
	Notice to quit property	9	3%
	Substandard	7	2%
	Landlord renovating	6	2%
	Contract not renewed	5	2%
	Unable to afford rent	5	2%
	Property damaged in fire	4	1%
	Rent arrears	4	1%
	Landlord dispute	2	1%
FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES **(30%)**	**Relationship breakdown**	**33**	**11%**
	Overcrowding (in family/member of family home)	24	8%
	DV/family violence	19	6%
	Family conflict	12	4%
	Care of relative	1	1%
OTHER **(13%)**	**Instability (i.e. frequent transitions between living situations)**	**9**	**3%**
	Anti-social behaviour	7	2%
	Other	7	2%
	Loss of work/hours	4	1%
	Overcrowding (hidden homelessness situation)	4	1%
	Sought improved accommodation	1	1%
	Missing data[28]	9	3%

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[27] PRS stands for Private Rented Sector.
[28] Data relating to this question was not captured at time of survey

Only **30%** of families became homeless due to family circumstances according to this survey data of 297 families. This is considerably lower than Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DHRE) analysis, which finds that 49-51% of families, become homeless due to family circumstances[29]. This difference in data is likely due to the distinct research design wherein the DRHE data records the reasons for leaving last living situation while the Focus Ireland data provides an insight into housing histories by inquiring about the previous four living accommodations and thus seeks to uncover the loss of *last stable housing* (which may not necessarily be last living situation). In other words, losing private rented accommodation may have triggered housing instability for a family and – over weeks or months of living in hidden homeless situations – ultimately led to the family living in emergency accommodation. These distinctions both in research design and in emerging data are crucial to recognise in forming effective and targeted policy and service responses in preventing family homelessness.

Interestingly, more recent DRHE analysis[30] (data pertaining to January to June 2018) aligns to Focus Ireland data to a certain extent, and shows that a slightly lower 41% of families presented as homeless due to 'family circumstances'.

HOUSING TRAJECTORIES AND ROUTES INTO HOM-LESSNESS

57% (n=168) of the families reported that they had a very stable housing history. 16% (n=49) reported that their housing history was somewhat more precarious; while 15% (n=45) had what was defined as 'chaotic' housing histories. A fourth category was created which included families who reported being 'locked out' of the housing market and reported particular housing marginality (n=35, 12%). These were broken down to two sub-categories in which 9% (n=26) of the sample reported a specific 'youth pathway' into homelessness while 9 (n=3%) were migrant families who lived in hidden homeless situations prior to presenting as homeless.

These housing trajectories are broken down below, together with typical 'triggers' to homelessness which were reported.

1. **Stable housing history (n=168, 57% of total)**

   - First experience of homelessness
   - History of lengthy and stable tenancies within Private Rental Sector (PRS)
   - Some stayed temporarily with friends/family immediately before presenting as homeless
   - Specific triggers to homelessness:
     - ➢ Landlord selling

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[29] Morrin, H., O'Donoghue, B., 2018. A report on the 2016 and 2017 families who experienced homelessness in the Dublin Region. DRHE
[30] Dublin Region Homeless Executive Update. DRHE. Report available at:
https://www.dublincity.ie/councilmeetings/documents/s20097/Dublin%20Region%20Homeless%20Executive%20Update%20Sept%202018.pdf

> - Landlord moving back into property or giving to family member
> - Rental increases or inability to meet rent
> - Being unable to find alternative, affordable rental accommodation.

Key characteristics of Group One:

- 76 of the 168 families became homeless due to the landlord leaving the sector (53 of which were due to landlords selling). An additional 5 families reported that they had to leave as the landlord reported that they wanted to renovate the property.
- 88 of the 168 families were from a migrant background; 52 of whom resided outside of the EU before coming to Ireland.
- 136 families sought help prior to presenting as homeless; 52 of whom approached their local authority as first point of contact.
- 92 families were lone parent families.
- This was the first experience of homelessness for 146 families in this group.
- 12 families in this group reported becoming homeless due to domestic/family violence

2. Precarious housing history (n=49, 16%)

- Broadly stable housing histories in PRS with some degree of housing instability in the past
- Have experiences of substandard or insecure tenancies in PRS.
- Greater reliance on informal arrangements for longer periods (several months or longer)
- Triggers to homelessness:
    - Landlord selling
    - Landlord moving back into the property or giving to family member
    - Rental increases or inability to meet rent
    - Personal crises (e.g. bereavement, relationship breakdown, health problem, job loss, etc.)
    - Larger families and lack of housing.

Key characteristics of Group Two:

- 26 of the 49 families became homeless due to family circumstances: 16 of whom were due to either relationship breakdown or family conflict; 7 families reported that they became homeless due to overcrowding in either the family home or home of a family member.
- 39 of the 49 families were from an Irish background.
- 28 families sought help prior to presenting as homeless; 11 of whom approached their local authority as first point of contact.
- 31 families were lone parent families.
- 16 families in this group had experienced homelessness before.

3. Unstable/ chaotic housing history (n=45, 15%)

- Little or no experience of living in independent tenancies
- History of transience in housing
- Extensive periods of hidden homelessness (sometimes lasting for years)

- Some have experienced homelessness in the past
- Triggers to homelessness:
    - Family conflict and overcrowding
    - Personal crises
    - Difficulties in accessing PRS tenancies.

Key characteristics of Group Three:

- 24 of the 45 families became homeless due to family circumstances (13 of which were due to overcrowding in either the family home or home of a family member).
- 34 of the 45 families were from an Irish background.
- 30 families sought help prior to presenting as homeless; 11 of whom approached their local authority as first point of contact.
- 33 families were lone parent families.
- 25 families in this group had experienced homelessness before.

4. 'Locked out' of housing market (n=35, 12%)

➤ New Family Formation Youth Cohort (n=26, 9%)

This cohort of families was considered to be particularly marginalised from the housing market. They were between 18-24 years, usually lived in the family home and after having a baby (or second baby), the situation became untenable and they entered hidden homelessness, or directly to emergency accommodation[31].

- Under the age of 25 (many under 21).
- No experience of living independently
- Triggers to homelessness:
    - Having a baby or a second baby leading to overcrowding and family conflict
    - Difficulties accessing private rented sector
    - Affordability problems and unable to access any form of housing.

Key characteristics of Group:
- 20 of the 26 families became homeless due to family circumstances: 11 of which were due to relationship breakdown/family conflict; and 9 were due to overcrowding in either the family home or home of a family member.
- 22 of the 26 families were from an Irish background.
- 17 of these families did not seek help prior to presenting as homeless.
- 25 families were lone parent families.
- This was the first experience of homelessness for 23 families in this group.

➤ Hidden migrant pathway (n=9, 3%)

- Family headed by a parent who was not originally born in Ireland.
- Have only lived in hidden homeless situations since arriving to Ireland and unable to access affordable housing.

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[31] Given the paucity of research and information about this group, Focus Ireland commissioned a more comprehensive study on this particular cohort. This study has been published in December 2018: Lambert et al (2018) *Young Families in the Homeless Crisis: Challenges and Solutions*. Dublin: Focus Ireland. Full PDF can be accessed here: https://www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/research/

- A number of this group became homeless following formal family reunification and not being able to afford a family home[32].
- Triggers to homelessness:
    - Overcrowding
    - Inability to find alternative accommodation.

Key characteristics of Group:
- 5 of the 9 families became homeless due to family circumstances; 3 of which were due to overcrowding in either the family home or home of a family member.
- 4 families sought help prior to presenting as homeless; 2 of whom approached their local authority as first point of contact.
- 5 families were lone parent families.
- This was the first experience of homelessness for 7 families in this group.

HELP-SEEKING BEFORE BECOMING HOMELESS

78% of all respondents stated that this was their first experience of homelessness (averaged across the eight waves of data collection) (Table 4 below). The concept of what constituted homelessness was subjective to each family - some families conceptualised their homelessness as living in 'hidden' homeless situations (sofa surfing, doubling up with family members, and insecure housing) and not necessarily living in emergency homeless accommodation. This may explain why the percentage of families who are 'first time homeless' is lower than the **92%** corresponding figure outlined in the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) analysis emerging from PASS[33] analysis, which captures families new to the emergency homeless system.

Table 4 – Respondents first time homeless (percentage)

First time homeless	2016	2017	AVERAGE
YES	70%	87%	**78%**

Overall, 208 families (71% of participants in both 2016 and 2017) sought help or advice from a support organisation or body *prior* to presenting as homeless (see Table 5 overleaf). This percentage varied over the two years by 7%. Perhaps this is due to the increase of early prevention measures rolled out by Dublin Region Homeless Executive in working with families at an early point and channelling a greater number of families to HAP accommodation before they have to enter emergency accommodation[34]. However, it may

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[32] The issue of poor family reunification process has recently been highlighted by Crosscare. https://www.worldmeeting2018.ie/WMOF/media/Texts/Danielle-McLaughlin-Crosscare-Refugee-Service.pdf
[33] PASS provides real-time information for homeless presentation and bed occupancy across the Dublin Region
[34] See https://www.homelessdublin.ie/info/publications?type=quarterly-reports&year=&keyword= for quarterly performance reports published by Dublin Region Homeless Executive which captures rates of exit to HAP as a preventative measure.

also signify lack of prevention services and/or decreased awareness of available services among families.

In total, 29% of all of the 297 families did *not* receive advice or information before presenting as homeless (and this number remained consistent two years in a row). Across each wave of data collection and in cases where families did not contact any service, it was typically related to a lack of knowledge about what type of services were available and how they could potentially help. This finding also suggests that more needs to be done in the area of prevention and reaching out to families at risk at a much earlier point. Focus Ireland's Prevention Pilot Campaigns such as Dublin 15 and Dublin 24[35] are examples of potential initiatives which target private rented tenants at an earlier point.

Table 5 - Respondents who contacted support service before homelessness (percentage)

Contact Support Service?	2016	2017	AVERAGE
YES	75%	68%	71%

The most common agencies which were approached by the families included: Local Authority offices (most common), voluntary organisations such as Threshold and Focus Ireland, and the Citizens Information Service. Respondents also sought information through informal networks (i.e. word-of-mouth), website searches/Google, and their local representatives (TDs/Local councillors). The families frequently described that their notice to quit was such that there was little recourse for appeal (i.e. landlord selling up) so there was no service who could support them.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this entire research initiative in Focus Ireland is to generate robust evidence – for the organisation and indeed for the sector – on the accommodation trajectories, demographic profile, and help-seeking patterns of families entering emergency accommodation over time.

As previously emphasised within this document, the findings do not necessarily pertain to all families experiencing homelessness; instead, they relate to a sample of families during any given month. Nonetheless, repeating this exercise on a quarterly basis can yield relevant and timely analysis of the key drivers or causes of family homelessness and which profile or demographic groups are disproportionally represented.

Perhaps the most important and insightful element of this research is capturing families' last four living situations which can uncover not only the cause of losing the last stable home for a family, but also the nature and duration of these living situations.

The key findings emerging from 2016-7 surveys reveal the following core themes:

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[35] See https://www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/publications-and-partnerships/service-evaluations/ for evaluations of these pilot campaigns.

1. **Demographic profile of families presenting as homeless**

    a. **One-parent households (single parents) -** The average percentage of single parents across the eight waves of data was **60%.** The vast majority of these were **female-headed households** demonstrating how lone mothers are disproportionately at risk of homelessness.

    b. **Joblessness and homelessness** – The average percentage of unemployed respondents across the four waves was **80%.** This was a consistent finding across each data set and is likely to intersect with parental commitments and duties, particularly among lone parents.

    c. **Young parents** - The average percentage of parents in the age category of 18-25 years across the four waves was **23%**, which means that a high proportion of young people continue to present as homeless.

    d. **Migrant parents** - The average percentage of parents from a migrant background across the four waves was **40%**. This fluctuated over time, with a higher proportion of migrant parents presenting in December cohorts. This demonstrates that migrant parents are grossly overrepresented in families presenting as homeless.

2. **Causes of Homelessness and Housing Histories.**

    a. **68**% of all families reported that their last stable accommodation was in the **private rented sector**. The majority of them were dependent on Rent Supplement to meet their rental payments (67% of all renters). This is significantly higher than DRHE data which places 2016 and 2017 data at 48% of all families as becoming homeless due to private rented sector reasons. The difference in research design, as discussed in this report, is a likely cause for the divergent data. The most common cause of homelessness of becoming homeless was properties being withdrawn from the market (31% of full sample).

    b. 23% of the families reported that their last stable home was in the family home (17%) or a family member or relative (6%). These families reported that the cause of their homelessness was likely to be caused by a range of overlapping issues including relationship breakdown, family conflict, overcrowding, etc.

    c. **Over half of the families (57%) demonstrated very stable housing histories**. 16% reported that their housing history was somewhat more precarious; while 15% had what was defined as 'chaotic' housing histories. A fourth category included families who reported being 'locked out' of the housing market and reported particular housing marginality. 9% reported a specific 'youth pathway' into homelessness triggered by new family formation, while 9 (n=3) were migrant families who lived in hidden homeless situations prior to presenting as homeless.

    d. Housing histories of families demonstrate overall **marginality** from the housing market due to a lack of affordable housing options.

3. **Service Utilisation**

Participants were asked in the survey did they contact anyone or any organisation before becoming homeless. A local authority (88; 28%) and Focus Ireland (77; 25%) were the most contacted organisations by families in their time of need. Other organisations families contacted were Threshold (32; 10%), the RTB (13, 4%), a local social welfare office (8; 3%), and Citizens Advice (6; 2%). 32 families (10%) reported that they contacted a local councillor or TD before becoming homeless.

4. **Final Comments**

The core objective of this research initiative is to uncover the root causes of family homelessness in Ireland. The emerging analysis also reveals broad housing histories, demographic profile information and service utilisation prior to presenting as homeless.

This evidence collected across these quarterly surveys indicate that most families entering emergency accommodation have broadly stable housing histories and their routes into homelessness are closely related to broader structural and systemic problem in the housing market. In particular, the lack of affordable housing and the weak tenancy protection for private rented tenants if a landlord decides to sell or withdraw properties from the market.

Furthermore, these housing market dynamics disproportionately impact on families who are on low incomes and who are dependent on social welfare and rent supplement. Lone mothers, young parents and migrants are all disproportionately impacted. These categories are often overlapping with families sometimes presenting two or more risk factors.

Finally, evidenced-based responses are crucial. Ongoing data collection and analysis can help us understand the key drivers of family homelessness and, in particular, whether these trends may (or may not) change over time.

APPENDIX 1: Telephone Survey Instrument

SECTION I: Accommodations Prior to Homelessness

Q.1	What type of accommodation are you **currently** 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.)*	

Q2	Please describe your previous 4 accommodations BEFORE you entered emergency accommodation (note: No.4 relates to accommodation IMMEDIATELY BEFORE entering Hotel/B&B accommodation)					
	Tenure Type	**Duration of Stay**	**Primary Reason for Leaving**	**If you were in PRS:**		
					a) were you in receipt of rent supplement? (Y/N)	b) did you receive a RS supplement increase from social welfare?
1						
2						
3						
4						

Q3	How long would you say it has been since you last had a 'stable' accommodation?	< 1 month	1-6 months	7 months – 1 year	1-2 years	3+ years	N/A

Q4	In what area/location was your last stable home? (please specify):	

Q	Would you describe this as the first time you have experienced homelessness? (☐)	First Time Homeless	Have experienced homeless before	Don't know	

SECTION II: Demographic Profile

Q5	What age are you?				

Q6	What country are you originally from? (☐)	Irish	EU	Non-EU (go to Q3b)	

Q6b	If you are originally born outside Ireland, have you ever resided in Direct Provision Accommodation in Ireland? If yes, for how long? _____	Yes	No

Q7	What is your ethnic or cultural background? (☐)	White	Irish	
			Irish Traveller	
			Another White background	
		Black /Black Irish	African	
			Any other Black background	
		Asian/Asian Irish	Chinese	
			Any other Asian background	
		Other / Mixed		

Q8	What is your current employment status? (If unemployed, ask Q4b) (☐)	Unemployed	Student	P/T Employment	F/T Employment	

Q8b	If unemployed, are you in receipt of a weekly social welfare payment? (☐)	Yes	No	

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
		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):			
		GP				
		Your landlord				
		Other (please state):				

Q14	Was there a service/support that you felt you particularly need(ed) living in emergency accommodation? (please give details)

Thank you very much for taking part in this survey.
We really appreciate it.

Challenging homelessness. Changing lives.

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