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

Executive Summary

Challenging
homelessness.
Changing lives.

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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, along with all other Focus Ireland's Insights into Family Homelessness Series.

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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.

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68%

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

Abbreviations



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

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

Preface and Commentary



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.¹ 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.²

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 34,³ 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.

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

3 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

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*.⁴

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).⁵ 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.

|
1/3

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

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 2019,⁶ 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 2019,⁷ 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).⁸ 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 2019.⁹

Three-quarters of families in emergency accommodation are living in one of the four Dublin Region local authorities.¹⁰ Changes in the definition of family homelessness¹¹ 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

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).¹² 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 accommodations¹³ (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 research¹⁴ 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.

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		%	
Property Removed from the Market	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%	
	Total	89	▲30%	86		36%	
Private Rented Sector (PRS) Related Issues	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%				
	Total	78	26%	51		▲22%	
	Family Circumstances	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	●–%				
Total		89	▲30%	70		30%	
Other	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	●–%				
	Total	32	▲11%	30		▲13%	
Missing		9	3%				
Total		297	100%	237		■100%	

● <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.¹⁵
- 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.

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.



Conclusion

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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FOCUS
Ireland

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

Full Report

Challenging
homelessness.
Changing lives.

FOCUS
Ireland

This study builds on previous research conducted by Focus Ireland on the causes of family homelessness. This report and all previous publications are available through Focus Ireland's Insights into Family Homelessness Series which can be found at **www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/publications-and-partnerships/**.

The Executive Summary of this report is also available on the Focus Ireland website.

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Abbreviations



AHB	Approved Housing Body
Co-op	Co-operative
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DHPLG	Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
DP	Direct Provision
DRHE	Dublin Region Homeless Executive
EA	Emergency Accommodation
EU	European Union
Family HAT	Focus Ireland Family Homeless Action Team
HAP	Housing Assistance Payment
LAH	Local Authority Housing
NGO(s)	Non-Governmental Organisation(s)
PRS	Private Rented Sector
RS	Rent Supplement

Preface and Commentary



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 *born outside of Ireland* who are experiencing homelessness.¹ 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.²

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 efforts 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 34,³ 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.

3 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

1 Introduction

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*.⁴

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).⁵ 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 full account of key findings and extended analysis. The executive summary can also be found on the Focus Ireland website.

1.1 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 2019,⁶ 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

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

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.

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>

February 2015 to 1,707 in February 2019,⁷ 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).⁸ 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 2019.⁹ Three-quarters of families in emergency accommodation are living in one of the four Dublin Region local authorities.¹⁰ Changes in the definition of family homelessness¹¹ 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.

The housing and homelessness situation in Ireland has been noted as having several 'equality and human rights concerns',¹² with the European Commission stating that 'urgent action' is required to address the growing levels of people experiencing homelessness;¹³ and the chronic levels of family homelessness are deeply concerning when considering the stress of daily life whilst homeless for families and the impacts on both children and parents.¹⁴ It is well documented that homelessness has detrimental impacts and can cause issues in relation to physical and mental health, employment, relationships and family life, children's development, education, and behaviour.¹⁵

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>

12 Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), 2017. *The provision of emergency accommodation to families experiencing homelessness*. Dublin: IHREC. p. 11.

13 European Commission, 2019. *Country Report Ireland 2019: Including an In-Depth Review on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/2019-european-semester-country-report-ireland_en.pdf

14 Focus Ireland, 2015. *'Come back when you're homeless': Preventing family homelessness through assisting families to stay in their homes or to find alternative affordable accommodation*. Dublin: Focus Ireland; O'Sullivan, E. 2016. Ending Homelessness in Ireland: Ambition, Adversity, Adaptation? *European Journal of Homelessness*, 10 (2), pp. 11–39.

15 For example, see: Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN), 2019. *Schools becoming a safe haven for Ireland's 4,000 homeless children*. [press release] 21 February 2019; Nowicki, M., Brickell, K. and Harris, E., 2018. *Home at Last: Life in Dublin's Rapid Build Housing*. Dublin: Dublin City Council; O'Reilly, F., Barror, S., Hannigan, A., Sriver, S., Ruane, L., MacFarlane, A. and O'Carroll, A., 2015. *Homelessness: An Unhealthy State. Health status, risk behaviours and service utilisation among homeless people in two Irish cities*. Dublin: The Partnership for Health Equity; Scanlon, G. and McKenna, G., 2018. *Home Works: A Study on the Educational Needs of Children Experiencing Homelessness and Living in Emergency Accommodation*. Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance; Share, M. and Hennessy, M., 2017. *Food Access and Nutritional Health among Families in Emergency Homeless Accommodation*. Dublin: Focus Ireland; Walsh, K. and Harvey, B., 2017. *Finding a Home: Families' Journeys out of Homelessness*. Dublin: Focus Ireland.

1.2 Focus Ireland and Current Policy Responses to Family Homelessness

In the context of the current housing crisis and the associated shortage of social housing in Ireland, there is a ‘major reliance’¹⁶ on subsidising low-income households in the private rental sector through schemes such as Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), Rent Supplement Scheme (RS) or the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS).¹⁷ HAP is the primary rental subsidy scheme and has expanded significantly since commencing in 2014 (with Homeless HAP an additional scheme operating in the Dublin Region only, providing discretion to exceed set HAP rent limits in order for homeless households to source suitable accommodation). A key challenge is not only the lack of supply in rental properties, particularly affordable housing in urban areas, but also the scarcity of properties which accept HAP and the related demand on these properties. This structural exclusion to the housing market is exacerbated by documented discriminatory practices by landlords towards HAP recipients.¹⁸ In the current study, Focus Ireland has incorporated targeted questions on efforts to exit homelessness, including experiences in securing HAP accommodation, given the current paucity of data on this.¹⁹

Focus Ireland operates the Family HAT which serves families across the Dublin region. When a family presents as homeless to their local authority, they are provided with emergency accommodation (EA) either in commercial hotels, B&Bs or, increasingly, ‘Family Hubs’ (i.e. designated congregate emergency accommodation for families). Focus Ireland Family HAT receives referrals from the local authority detailing families who are placed in emergency accommodation, after which point an initial assessment is conducted by a Focus Ireland worker. The family is subsequently assigned a Case Manager who works to support the family out of homelessness as quickly as possible.

At the time this study was conducted, Family HAT was actively case managing approximately 450 families across the four Dublin local authorities. While Focus Ireland works with the largest number of families in the Dublin Region, with the expansion of ‘Family Hub’ accommodations, there are several other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also providing support to families.

16 Hearne, R. and Murphy, M., 2017. *Investing in the Right to a Home: Housing, HAPs and Hubs*. Kildare: Maynooth University. p. 3.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid. pp. 19–22.

19 As noted by Grotti, R., Russell, H, Fahey, É. and Maître, B., 2018. *Discrimination and Inequality in Housing in Ireland*. Dublin: ESRI and IHREC. p. 80. Previous research conducted on HAP, see: Hearne, R. and Murphy, M., 2017; Threshold, 2019. *Topping up – the Cost of HAP: A Survey on the Housing Assistance Payment*. Available at: https://www.threshold.ie/download/pdf/toppinup_survey.pdf

1.3 Focus Ireland Research Programme and Evidence-Based Practice

Focus Ireland operates an active research programme that is committed to producing and publishing robust evidence to understand the dynamics and drivers of homelessness, to inform the design and effectiveness of service delivery, and to recommend policy solutions.

In late 2015, Focus Ireland identified a need to collect timely data on the causes of family homelessness as the problem continued to unfold. With the advice from the Focus Ireland Research Sub-Committee,²⁰ Focus Ireland conducted telephone surveys every three months with a sample of families newly presenting as homeless in the Dublin region.²¹ The two core objectives of this effort were:

- 1 To document the processes and ‘triggers’ which led to families entering into emergency accommodation (i.e. the root causes of their homelessness);
- 2 To capture families’ housing histories, demographic profile, and their help-seeking patterns prior to presenting as homeless.

The research output from this consisted of ten publications since 2015 which have formed the basis of *Focus Ireland’s Insights into Family Homelessness Series* (all free to access on the Focus Ireland website).

20 Focus Ireland’s Research Sub-Committee consists of leading expert researchers and academics in the area of homelessness, housing, social policy, and research (including 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.

21 The sample of families represents those who had not previously reported as homeless during the previous two years.

1.4 Objectives of Current Study and Structure of Report

This study follows on from previous research initiatives but, instead of conducting the exercise every three months with a smaller sample of families over time, it set out to conduct a larger-scale analysis of families case managed by the Family HAT who entered into homelessness at different points in time.

The report details findings on the following key items:

- The last four accommodations or living situations of respondents, to include length of time and tenure. The nature of their housing history and the cause of losing their last stable home were regarded as being particularly important or relevant items;
- Demographic profile of families;
- Attempts to exit via HAP;
- Respondents' help-seeking patterns prior to homelessness.

The following section offers a detailed overview of the methodology, research procedures, and ethical protocol. The demographic profile of the sample will then be outlined, followed by families' reasons for leaving their last stable home and families' help-seeking patterns prior to presenting to their local authority as homeless. The housing histories of the families will then be outlined, with additional analysis on demographic profile in relation to these trends. For the first time, the report also includes analysis on families' attempts to exit homelessness, with specific reference to exits to private rented sector via the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme²². The report concludes with a summary of key findings as well as the implications for policy.

22 Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a payment administered by local authorities to meet part of the cost of renting in the private rental sector for those on low incomes with a long-term housing need. The recipient must secure the rental property in the private market. There are two types of HAP. The general HAP scheme administered by local authorities uses privately owned (as well as housing association-owned) accommodation to provide social housing. HAP for homeless households – or Homeless HAP – has been operational in the four Dublin local authorities since February 2015. It is an enhanced version of the main HAP payment in which the local authority will pay up to three months' rent in advance and has discretion up to 50% above the rent cap. It is administered by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE).

2 Methodology



The study adopted a quantitative methodology using a telephone survey method. This enabled the team to collect data with a greater number of families as well as minimise the impact on families who were in crisis situations (see Appendix A to view the Telephone Survey Instrument). The survey design closely followed previous rounds of Focus Ireland telephone survey initiatives with families, but a number of additional items on families' efforts to exit homelessness were included to shed more light on this area. The research design, however, differed in that the current study surveyed families who were on the Focus Ireland Family HAT caseload in 2018 and entered homelessness at different points in time, as opposed to previous data collection conducted on a quarterly basis with families presenting as newly homeless.

2.1 Survey Design

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).²³

The survey targeted data on:

- current type of accommodation
- length of time in emergency accommodation (EA)
- tenancy type and duration of stay in last four accommodations²⁴ (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: not including address to protect anonymity);
- information on help-seeking prior to homelessness;
- experiences of looking for accommodation, specifically, with regards to HAP;
- demographic profile.²⁵

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

24 The questions pertaining to the last four accommodations sought to capture change and transition in the respondents' living situations and (partially) identify the dynamics of their housing history.

25 Demographic information includes: age; gender; relationship status; employment status; country of origin of the respondent; and number of children living with respondents. Respondents were also asked questions about: their ethnic and cultural background; the age of children living with them; if they received a weekly social welfare payment (if unemployed); if originally from outside of Ireland – the year they arrived in Ireland and if they had a history of living in direct provision accommodation (and if so, for how long).

Most questions in the survey were closed-ended. However, a small number of the questions sought to elicit any specific details which were relevant to each case, such as respondents' experiences of looking for HAP accommodation.

A pilot phase was integrated into this study to test for response rate and survey design (in particular with regards to the newly-added questions). This led to minor revisions to the survey on questions relating to exits via HAP.

2.2 Ethical Protocol

Focus Ireland's Data Protection and Customer Confidentiality policies, as well as the organisation's Ethical Guidelines for Conducting Research,²⁶ were always adhered to in the completion of this study.

While informed consent was one of the most important considerations of the ethical protocol adopted, the way in which this was collected varied between the pilot phase and the roll-out of the study. To support the pilot phase of the study, a member of the Family HAT team conducting initial service assessments with families collected consents to participate in a follow-up telephone survey. The Family HAT member clarified at this point that participation in studies is entirely voluntary and their service support would not be impacted in any way if they declined to participate. Subsequent to this pilot phase, consent was collected by all Case Managers and telephone numbers were communicated with the research team.

When the researcher later made contact with the consenting participant via telephone, the aims and objectives of the study were reiterated, and it was emphasised that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the survey at any stage and without repercussion. The researcher also emphasised again at this point that participation or non-participation would not impact on any supports or services they were accessing at Focus Ireland.

High standards in relation to confidentiality were maintained at all times. The researcher replaced names with survey identifier reference numbers and any identifiable details were removed across all hard copies of surveys. The researcher conducted calls in a private meeting room in Focus Ireland Head Office to both maintain confidentiality when conducting surveys and also to ensure secure data storage practices were adhered to with hard-copy surveys stored in a secure cabinet. Confidentiality policy and the limits of confidentiality (i.e. if a respondent disclosed that there was a risk of harm to them or someone they knew) were also clarified. If the participant did not answer the call, the researcher re-attempted contact at another time or on another day, and where possible left a voicemail or sent an SMS text message describing the reason for the call. The researcher did not exceed three attempts to make contact with the family.

Surveys mostly took 5–10 minutes to administer. 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. In these instances, surveys took longer to complete,

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

depending on the level of detail offered by participants. Several calls lasted 15–20 minutes, or longer, as some respondents voluntarily elaborated on their answers and described their trajectories into homelessness in more detail.²⁷ The researcher recorded notes in these instances (and excluded identifiable information).

In cases where a family requested information or advice in relation to their homelessness or housing situation, the researcher directed the family to the relevant Focus Ireland Advice and Information Service or staff member (for example, in cases where the family had already been assigned a Focus Ireland Case Manager).

2.3 Study Sample, Administrative Procedures, and Limitations

In total, the research team received contact details from 359 households who consented to being contacted in order to participate in survey. Of these, surveys were completed with a total of 237 families who experienced homelessness in the Dublin region in 2018. These families entered into homelessness at different points (which will be detailed in Section 3) and represent a sample of the families supported by the Family HAT during 2018. They represent approximately 53% of the total number of families who were on our current caseload ($\approx n=450$). In December 2018, when the case load sheet was shared with the research team, 1,252 families were experiencing homelessness across the Dublin Region.²⁸ Therefore, this study does not aim to be representative of all families, but nonetheless offers a considerable and timely contribution to the evidence base.

Fieldwork took place across two phases, both of which took place during January and February 2019. The first represented a pilot phase. During this phase, 55 surveys were completed with families. A key objective of the pilot phase was to test new questions added to the survey. Consents and telephone numbers were supplied to the research team by a Family HAT Duty and Assessment Worker. Following from this, contact details for an additional 290 families from the current caseload were sent to the research team. These families had explicitly and voluntarily ‘opted in’ to participate in a research study – a protocol that has now been integrated into normal service practice.²⁹

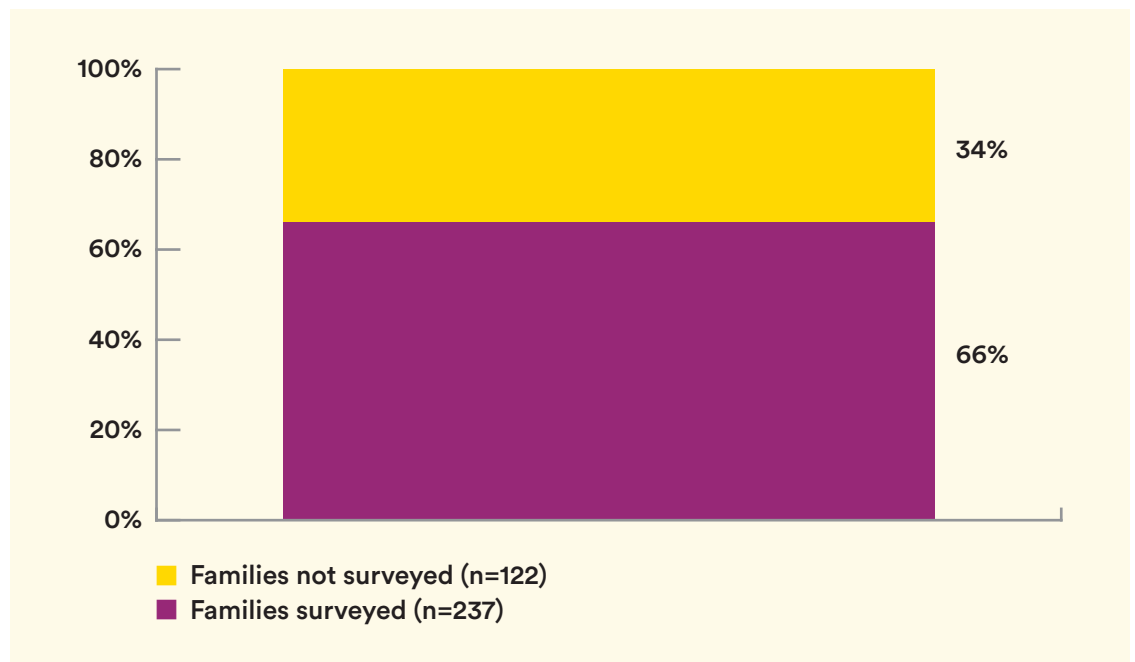
In terms of the overall response rate, 237 of the 359 participants completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 66% (see Figure 1). The results from this study relate to the sample of 237 families who completed the survey and do not claim to relate (i.e. are not representative or generalisable) to all the families who experienced homelessness in 2018 in the Dublin Region, or even all those who experienced homelessness in December 2018 in the Dublin Region. Notwithstanding these considerations, it is perhaps worth noting that families who work with Focus Ireland would not necessarily be any different from families working with other organisations (unless there are practices in allocation procedures which are not documented).

27 No leading questions were used in these discussions to ensure methodological rigour.

28 Data source: DHPLG, Homelessness Data.

29 All practices in collecting consent, storage of data, etc., involved consultation with and approval of Focus Ireland’s Data Protection Officer.

Figure 1: Survey Participation of Families in the Sampling Frame [Response Rate], by Frequencies and Percentages (n=359)



Overall, 122 (34%) of the 237 did not complete the survey. The non-completion of surveys was primarily due to the following factors:

- The telephone number did not appear to be in service;
- The participants did not answer their phone and, so, calls were stopped after three attempts;
- Language barriers to the point that consent was unclear;
- In a small number of cases (4%), families declined to participate in the study at the point of the telephone call.

It is possible that there was a sample bias as participants who are willing to participate in a telephone survey may have a different profile or experience than those who were uncontactable or declined to participate. For example, a more vulnerable cohort may be reluctant or unable to participate, or language issues may affect participation and completion, etc. However, in light of the consistency in findings with previous research conducted by Focus Ireland (across eight different points in time during 2016 and 2017) and the way in which the demographic profile closely tallies with wider homeless statistics (such as lone parenthood rates), it is believed that this bias is not significant.

2.4 Data Entry and Analysis

A basic coding scheme was developed prior to the pilot surveys. After the pilot and prior to conducting the next phase of data collection, the coding scheme was revised, and saw some additions / removals and reconfigurations of codes, based on researchers reviewing the responses to the pilot surveys and on running a preliminary data analysis.

Data was firstly entered into a Microsoft Excel sheet. The data was cleaned and some verifications in responses were also carried out via checking the survey response with participants' case notes in order to clarify a response given or accurately input a response, as, for example, sometimes participants provided vague estimates of the amount of time spent living in emergency accommodation or had stated that they were unsure about the tenure type of a tenancy they had move to. After all the data entry of the survey was complete, a final check of the data for any mistakes that may have occurred in inputting was completed.

The Microsoft Excel sheet with the data was then imported into a dataset file in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) Version 24. IBM SPSS was then used to analyse the data, with descriptive statistics, e.g. frequencies and percentages. Tables and graphs were designed in Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word.

Thematic analysis was conducted on the various open-ended responses, through a process which was both systematic but also iterative: early analysis greatly enhanced the refining of coding categories and also helped to polish the research instrument for the second stage of data collection. The coding categories were revisited after data collection had been completed.

2.5 Study Limitations and Further Research

This study represents a sample of the total number of families who are being case managed by Focus Ireland. It does not claim to be representative of all families experiencing homelessness but rather offers an insight into a sizeable sample who consented to being contacted. It is not known whether consent to participate raises a sample bias but the similar demographic profile around lone parent status and age, which closely mirrors wider statistics published by the DHPLG, offers an indication of reliability in the findings. The consistency of data which emerges across each wave of data collection conducted by Focus Ireland since 2016 highlights this further. Focus Ireland will use the findings from this study to inform the service delivery of family services, and the results and outstanding questions which are raised in the findings of this report will also help to direct the research programme in 2019 and beyond.

3 Sample Profile

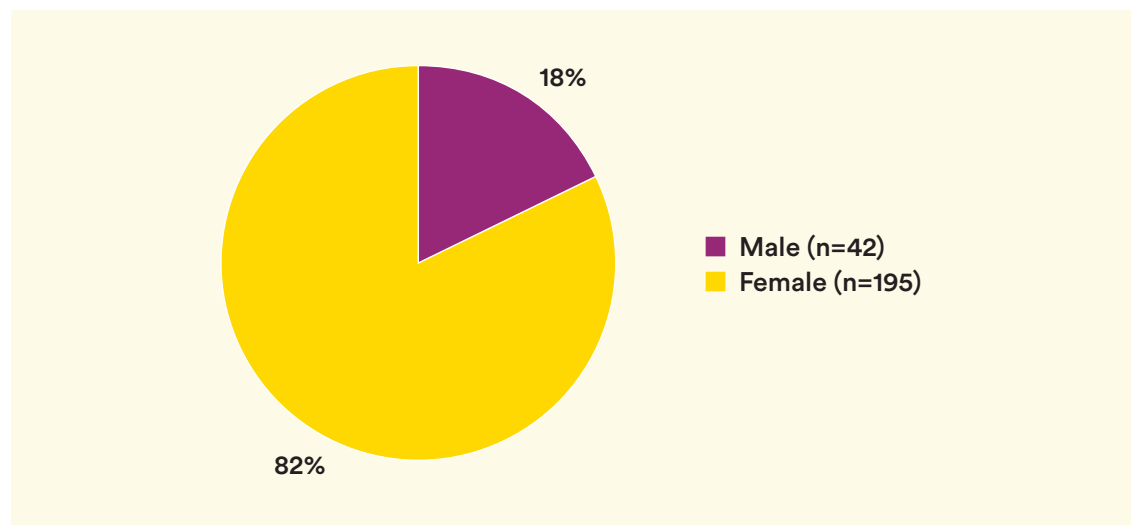


The following section provides a brief description of the sample (N=237) by gender, age, country of origin and ethnicity, family type, employment status, type of accommodation at the time of the survey and emergency accommodation usage. The ages of the children living with survey participants are also outlined. Some comparisons are made with previous statistics to provide a more nuanced analysis.

3.1 Gender

Of all the survey participants, a higher proportion of the sample identified as female (82%) than male (18%), as seen in Figure 2. This over-representation of women is revisited in Section 3.4.1 and in the Conclusion section, which highlights the disproportionate number of female-headed households in family homelessness.

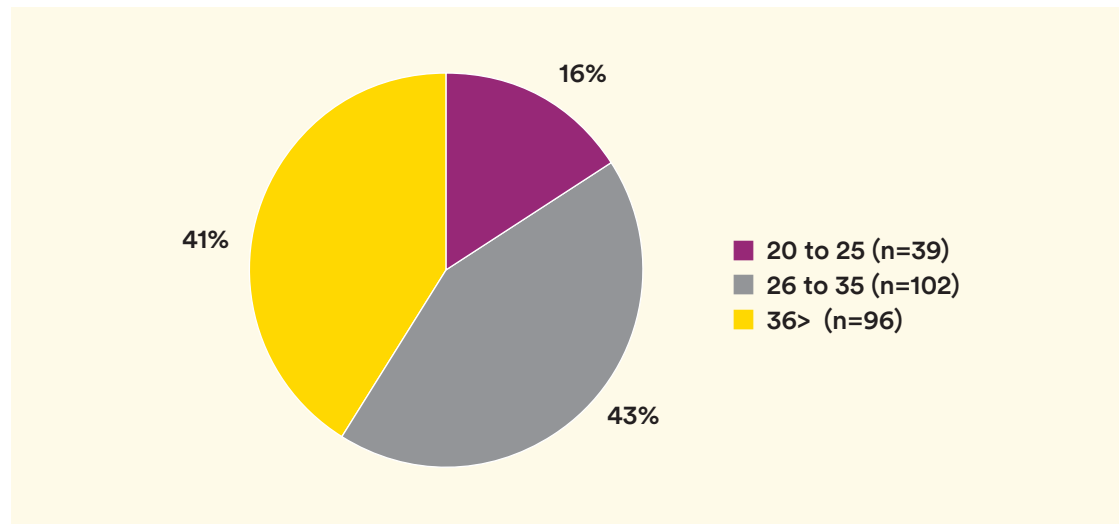
Figure 2: Sample Breakdown for Gender, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)



3.2 Age

The ages of respondents ranged from 20 to 66 years. The average age of survey participants was 35 years (median=33). Figure 3 shows the age of survey participants in three categories and Figure 4 shows a more detailed breakdown of participants' ages in six categories.

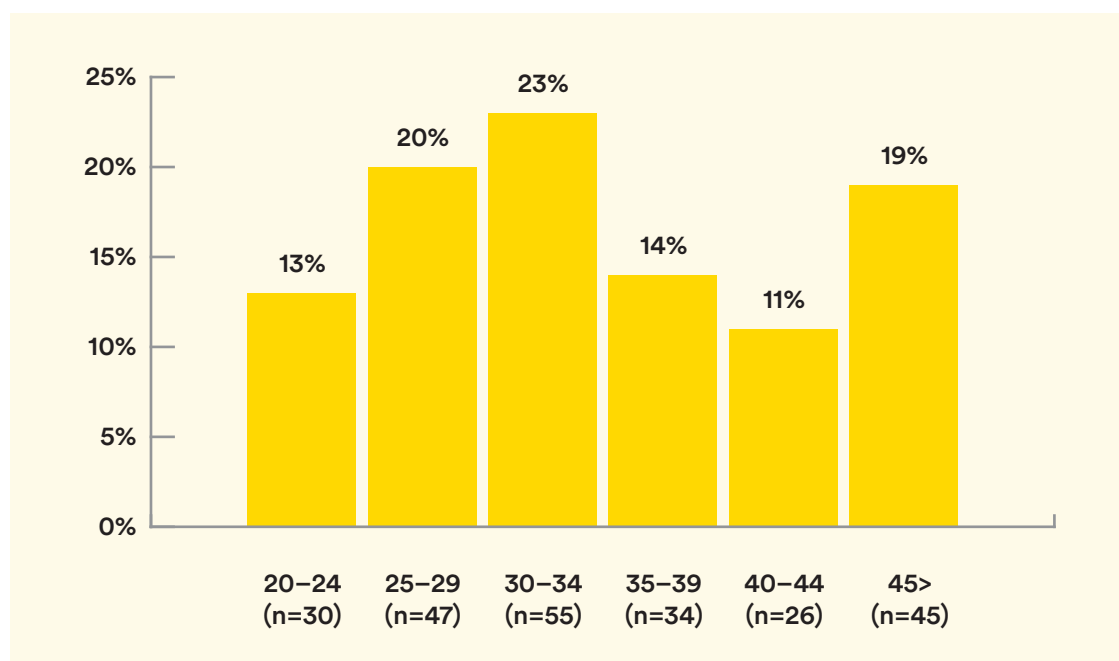
Figure 3: Sample Breakdown for Age (in years), by Three Categories, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)



There were 102 participants aged 26–35 years, which represents 43% of the sample. While, as Figure 3 highlights, 41% (n=96) of the survey participants were aged 36 years or older and 16% (n=39) of survey participants were aged 20–25 years, no respondents were under 20 years of age.

Examining the age breakdown of survey participants more closely, as shown in Figure 4, the age group that contained the highest frequency and proportion of participants was the age range 30–34 years (55 participants, which represents 23% of the sample). Following from this, 47 or 20% of the sample were between 25 and 29 years. Thirteen per cent of the respondents were in the ‘young parent’ cohort, or between the ages of 20 and 24 years (n=30).

Figure 4: Sample Breakdown for Age (in years), by Six Categories, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)



3.3 Country of Origin and Ethnicity

In relation to the country of origin of the survey respondents, 44% (n=105) were originally from Ireland and 56% (n=132) were originally from a country other than Ireland. These figures do not relate to the current citizenship or residency status of respondents, as many of those who are originally from another country are Irish citizens. However, as also captured in previous Focus Ireland reports, country of origin can be a more useful variable in capturing migrant background than citizenship.

Among survey participants, there were 97 households (41% of survey respondents) where a respondent was originally from a non-European Union (EU) country (non-EU origin) and 35 households (15% of survey respondents) where a parent was originally from an EU country (EU origin); see Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Breakdown for Country of Origin, by Categories, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)

Country of Origin by Category	No. of Survey Participants (N)	Percentage of Total (%)
Ireland	105	44%
Non-EU	97	41%
EU	35	15%
Total	237	100%

Of the 132 adults originally from outside of Ireland, 35 stated that they had resided in Direct Provision (DP) accommodation in Ireland and all were of non-EU origin; see Table 2. Meaning, 15% of the sample had previously resided in Direct Provision (DP) accommodation. While one family's last stable home before entering emergency accommodation was in Direct Provision, in the majority of cases, families lived in stable tenancies since exiting the DP system.

Table 2: Breakdown of Respondents of EU and Non-EU Origin for If They had Resided in DP Accommodation, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=132)

Country Region of Origin by Category	Yes		No		▲ Missing		Total	
	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
EU	–	–	27	77%	8	23%	35	100%
Non-EU	35	36%	56	58%	6	6%	97	100%
Total	35	27%	83	63%	14	11%	132	■ 100%

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

▲ Data relating to this question was not captured at time of survey.

In examining the ethnic and cultural background of respondents, 16 persons (7%) identified as Irish Travellers. The results show an over-representation of members of the Travelling Community in relation to the general population given that the 2016 Census reported that in relation to the general population, Irish Travellers represented 0.7%; therefore, a higher proportion of Irish Travellers were present in the sample (7%) compared to the general population.³⁰

3.4 Family Type

3.4.1 Relationship Status

There were 98 respondents who stated that they were in a couple, meaning that two-parent families represented 41% of the families; see Table 3. However, over half of the families surveyed (58%, n=137) were one-parent families. This percentage closely aligns with the number of one-parent families in the most recent homelessness statistics figures published in February 2019 (i.e. 58.8%).³¹

³⁰ Data source: Central Statistics Office (CSO). Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/>

³¹ Data source: DHPLG, Homelessness Data.

Table 3: Sample Breakdown for Relationship Status, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)

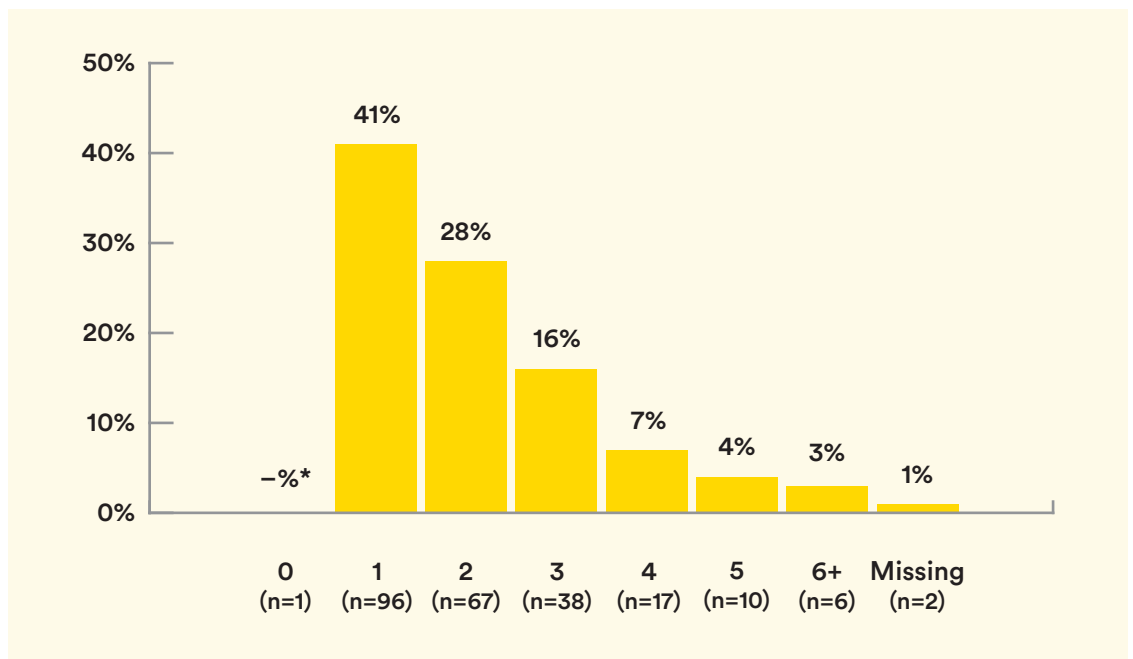
Relationship Status	No. of Survey Participants (n)	Percentage of Total (%)
Single	137	58%
Couple	98	41%
Missing	2	1%
Total	237	100%

Of the 137 one-parent households, the majority (95%, n=130) were female-headed, while, 5% (n=7) were male-headed.

3.4.2 Number of Children

The majority (69%) of families had either one child or two children living with them, with the largest proportion (41%, n=96) of respondents having one child (Figure 5). A further 28% had two children; 16% had three children; while 14% had four or more children. Data was missing on the number of children living with two respondents. One respondent currently did not have a child(ren) living with them, as the parent and child(ren) were currently living separately while the parent was residing in EA.

Figure 5: Number of Children Living with Respondents, by Categories, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)

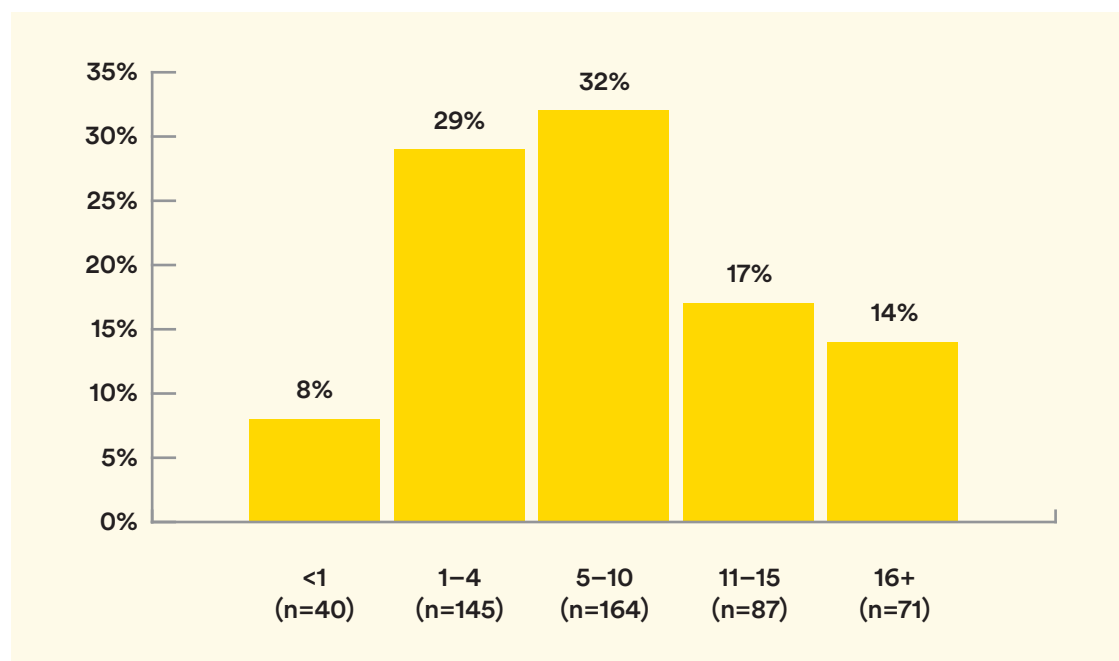


* <1%

3.4.3 Age of Children

Determining the age of the children was considered important in this project, as it offers a sense of whether these children are at a preschool, primary or post-primary age. Information about a total of 507 children was gathered, see Figure 6.

Figure 6: Age (in years) of Children Living with Respondents, by Categories, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=231)



A key finding in this regard was that 37% (n=185) of these 507 children were aged 4 or under. Just under one-third of the children (32%) were aged 5–10 years. Children aged 11–15 years accounted for 17% (n=87), while 14% (n=71) were aged 16 or older (14%, n=71). In total, 69% (n=349) of the children in these households were aged between 0 and 10 years.

3.5 Employment Status

As outlined in Table 4, the majority of respondents identified as unemployed (69%, n=163), and 92% (n=150) of these were in receipt of a weekly social welfare payment (see Appendix B, Figure B1). Thirty-five (15%) out of 237 respondents were in part-time employment, 21 (9%) were students, 13 (5%) were in full-time employment and 2 (1%) were classified as having another type of employment status.

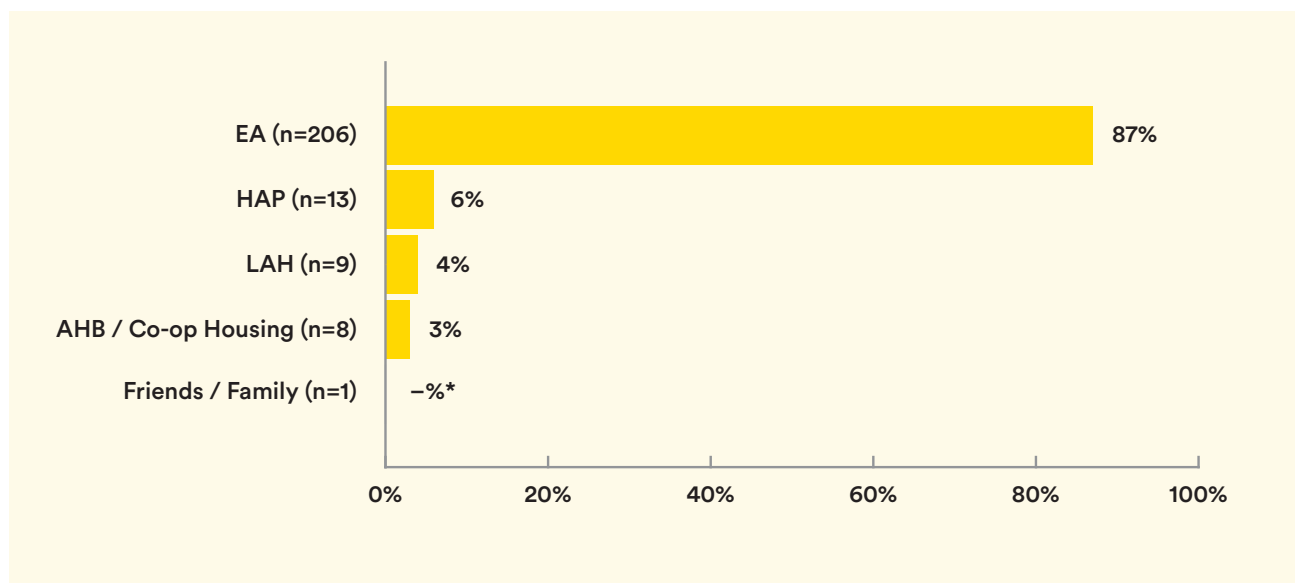
Table 4: Sample Breakdown for Employment Status, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)

Employment Status	No. of Survey Participants (n)	Percentage of Total (%)
Unemployed	163	69%
Part-time employment	35	15%
Student	21	9%
Full-time employment	13	5%
Other	2	1%
Missing	3	1%
Total	237	100%

3.6 Current Accommodation

Of the 237 respondents, the vast majority were living in Emergency Accommodation (EA) (87%, n=206) (see Figure 7 below and Table B1 in Appendix B). A number of families had already exited EA by the time the survey was conducted via telephone. In these cases, 13 (6%) were living in the private rented sector with HAP, 9 (4%) were living in Local Authority Housing (LAH), while 8 (3%) were living in Approved Housing Body (AHB) or Co-operative (Co-op) Housing accommodation. One respondent had left emergency accommodation and was living with friends / family.

Figure 7: Respondents' Current Type of Accommodation, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)



* <1%

3.7 Emergency Accommodation (EA) Usage

The approximate length of time during which participants were living in EA varied considerably. The average duration was 17 months (median=16 months). However, it was particularly striking that almost half of the surveyed families (47%, n=112) had resided in EA for between 12 and 23 months, as highlighted in Table 5. While 20% (n=47) had resided in EA for 7–11 months, 16% (n=38) for 24–35 months, and 13% (n=30) for 1–6 months.

Smaller proportions of the sample had resided in EA for less than a month (n=1), for 36–47 months (3%, n=7), and for 48 months (1%, n=2) or longer.

Therefore, 33% (n=78) of respondents were living or lived in EA for less than 12 months, of which 60% (n=47) had been living (or lived) in EA for 7–11 months, with 67% (n=159) for 12 months or longer.

Table 5: Approximate Length of Time (in months) Respondents Had Resided in Emergency Accommodation – Inclusive of Month Survey Conducted – Categorised, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)

Length of Time in Emergency Accommodation (EA)		No. of Survey Participants (n)	Percentage of Total (%)
Under 12 months (33%, n=78)	<1 month	1	•–%
	1–6 months	30	13%
	7–11 months	47	20%
12–23 months		112	47%
24–35 months		38	16%
36–47 months		7	3%
48+ months		2	1%
Total		237	100%

• <1%

4 Housing Histories and Causes of Homelessness

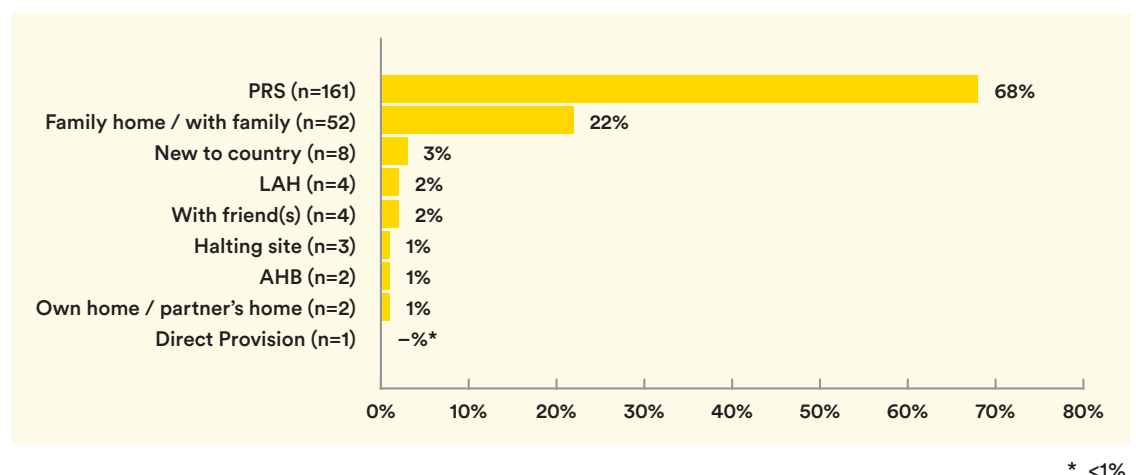
One of the most insightful items in this research exercise was to analyse data on respondents' previous four living situations in terms of tenure, duration in each accommodation, and main reasons for leaving each of these accommodations. It also captured whether the respondents were in receipt of Rent Supplement (RS) or the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). This information was collected in order to capture the broad nature of their housing history (with a particular focus on length of time in each tenancy and reasons for leaving) but also established the root causes of their homelessness. For example, there were numerous examples of families who, upon losing their private sector home, went to temporarily live with friends or family prior to presenting to their local authority.

4.1 Last Stable Home and Last Living Situation

4.1.1 Tenure Type of Last 'Stable'³² Home

For over two-thirds (68%, n=161) of those surveyed their last stable home was in the Private Rented Sector (PRS); see Figure 8.

Figure 8: Tenure Type of Respondents' Last Stable Home, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)



³² 'Stable' is a term which can be interpreted in different ways by respondents but nonetheless offered an approximate measure of 'ontological security' among families. Ontological security is defined in homeless and housing literature as a feeling of constancy, daily routines, privacy, and having a secure base for identity construction. See: Padgett, D., 2007. 'There's No Place Like (a) Home: Ontological Security Among Persons with Serious Mental Health Illness in the United States, *Social Science and Medicine*, 64, 7, 1925–1936.

For the second highest proportion of those surveyed (22%, n=52) their last stable home was in the family home or with a family member. Additionally, 8 (3%) respondents were new to the country or had returned to Ireland after a period abroad; their last stable home was, therefore, not in Ireland. For 4 (2%) respondents their last stable home was with friends and for another 4 (2%) respondents their last stable home was in Local Authority Housing. There were 3 (1%) participants for which their last stable home was in a Halting Site. There were 2 respondents (1%) whose last stable home was in Approved Housing Body (AHB) accommodation and 2 for whom their last stable home was in their own or their partner's home. There was one respondent who went directly from Direct Provision accommodation into emergency accommodation as they could not find affordable accommodation.

Of the 161 participants whose last stable home was in the Private Rented Sector, 112 (70%) were in receipt of Rent Supplement (RS) in their last stable home and 8 (5%) were in receipt of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). The remaining 41 respondents (25%) were meeting rental payments through their own income or were supported by a partner / family member, etc.; in a small number of cases, it was not clear or the respondents appeared unsure whether they were in receipt of RS / HAP (see Table 6).

Table 6: Tenure Type of Respondents' Last Stable Home, with Sub-Categories for PRS Tenure Type, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)

Tenure Type of Last Stable Home		No. of Survey Participants (n)	Percentage of Total (%)	
Private Rental Sector (PRS) (68%, n=161)	PRS + RS	112	47%	68%
	PRS▲	41	17%	
	PRS + HAP	8	3%	
Family home / with family		52	22%	
New to country		8	3%	
Local Authority Housing (LAH)		4	2%	
With friends		4	2%	
Halting Site		3	1%	
Approved Housing Body (AHB)		2	1%	
Own home / partner’s home		2	1%	
Direct Provision		1	●—%	
Total		237	■100%	

● <1%

▲ PRS (Some participants in this category may have been in receipt of HAP / RS)

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

4.1.2 Last Stable Home versus Last Living Situation

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 make one or more informal temporary living arrangements in the period before entering emergency accommodation.

A total of 59% (140 respondents) lived in the private rented sector immediately before entering emergency accommodation (see Table B2 in Appendix B), while 24% (n=56) lived in the family home or with family directly before entering emergency accommodation and 10% (n=24) lived with friends. This indicated a reliance on friends and family before presenting as homeless.³³

4.1.3 Duration of Stay in Last Stable Home

While this item was recorded in previous rounds of data collection, it is reported for the first time in the current study as it offers an insight into the length of time families were living in their last stable home. The findings demonstrate that most respondents reported lengthy durations in their last stable home. As outlined in Table 7 below, 92% (n=217) of respondents lived in their last stable home for 12 months or longer; 58% (n=138) had resided in their last stable home for 1 to 6 years; while a very sizeable 33% (n=79) of participants had resided in their last stable home for over 6 years.

Table 7: Respondents' Duration of Stay (in months) in their Last Stable Home, Categorised, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)

Duration of Stay in Last Stable Home	No. of Survey Participants (n)	Percentage of Total (%)
<7 Months	10	4%
7–11 Months	4	2%
12–35 Months	56	24%
36–59 Months	44	19%
60–72 Months	38	16%
73+ Months	79	33%
Missing	6	3%
Total	237	■ 100%

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

³³ A more in-depth analysis of these housing trajectories is currently being conducted by Letizia Gambi, one of the authors of this report, in her Master's dissertation in Applied Social Research (Trinity College Dublin).

4.1.4 Area of Last Stable Home

In relation to the area of respondents' last stable home, 26 of the participants' last stable homes were in Dublin 7; 23 were in Dublin 15; 17 in Dublin 17; and 16 in Dublin 8. There were 18 respondents whose last stable home was in areas in County Dublin. Other common areas where several participants stated their last stable home was include Dublin 11 (n=14), Dublin 1 (n=12), Dublin 22 (n=10), Dublin 10 (n=9), Dublin 9 (n=8) and Dublin 12 (n=8). This is relevant for the purpose of designing targeted prevention campaigns such as the Focus Ireland Dublin 15 Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot.³⁴

4.2 Reasons for Leaving Last Stable Home

Survey respondents were asked to provide the main reasons for having to leave their last four cited accommodations. While often there may have been multiple or overlapping factors resulting in homelessness, for the purpose of this exercise, only their primary reason for leaving each accommodation was recorded. For a more detailed account of the processes and triggers which interact to result in homelessness, a more in-depth study is required.

Table 8 below provides a frequency analysis on reported 'triggers' to homelessness, i.e. the primary reason a family had to leave their last stable home. It also compares the data to the 2016–2017 data³⁵ (representing an aggregate analysis of eight rounds of telephone survey data collection over this time). There were some small items of variation in categories compared to previous reports, all of which have been highlighted in Table 8.

34 Focus Ireland, 2017. *Results of a Pilot Project to Prevent Family Homelessness in Dublin 15*. Available at: <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/D15-Homeless-Prevention-Campaign-Report-Final-2017.pdf>

35 Gambi, L., Sheridan, S. and Hoey, D., 2018. *Causes of Family Homelessness in the Dublin Region during 2016 and 2017*. Dublin: Focus Ireland.

Table 8: 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		%	
Property Removed from the Market	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%	
	Total	89	▲ 30%	86		36%	
Private Rented Sector (PRS) Related Issues	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%				
	Total	78	26%	51		▲ 22%	
Family Circumstances	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	●–%				
	Total	89	▲ 30%	70		30%	
Other	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	●–%				
	Total	32	▲ 11%	30		▲ 13%	
Missing		9	3%				
Total		297	100%	237		■ 100%	

● <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.

The primary reasons cited for a family losing their last stable home can be grouped as follows:

- Thirty-six per cent (n=86) of families became homeless due their rental property being removed from the market (most commonly due to a landlord selling);
- Twenty-two per cent (n=51) of reasons related to Private Rented Sector (PRS) issues (most commonly due to problems of affordability);
- Thirty per cent (n=70) of reasons related to family circumstances (including reasons such as family fall out, domestic violence, and relationship breakdown);
- Thirteen per cent (n=30) of the respondents reported reasons due to other circumstances.

Fifty-eight per cent of all families surveyed became homeless as a direct consequence of issues in their private rented home. The most commonly reported reason for families losing their home was due to landlords selling (26%).

4.2.1 Reported Reasons for Leaving Last Stable Home, 2016–2017 v 2018

It is worth noting the consistency in findings that emerge when comparing the 2018 data with 2016–2017³⁶ rounds of data collection using the same research instrument. These stabilities can be characterised as follows:

- Consistently, families are becoming homeless due to factors in the private rented sector – accounting for 56% (n=167 of n=297) in the 2016–2017 data and 58% (n=137 of n=237) in the 2018 data.
 - More recent data indicates that a slightly higher number became homeless due to property being removed from the market when comparing 2018 to 2016–2017 (36% in 2018 to 30%, respectively).
 - Conversely, PRS-related issues accounted for 22% in 2018 and a slightly higher 26% in 2016–2017.
- The most common reason cited across both sets of data was ‘landlord selling’ (26% in 2018; 22% in 2016–2017).
- Family circumstances were cited in 30% of cases as being a primary cause in both 2018 and 2016–2017 data sets.
- There was a small fluctuation in the proportion of respondents citing ‘other circumstances’ across 2016–2017 (11%) and 2018 (13%).

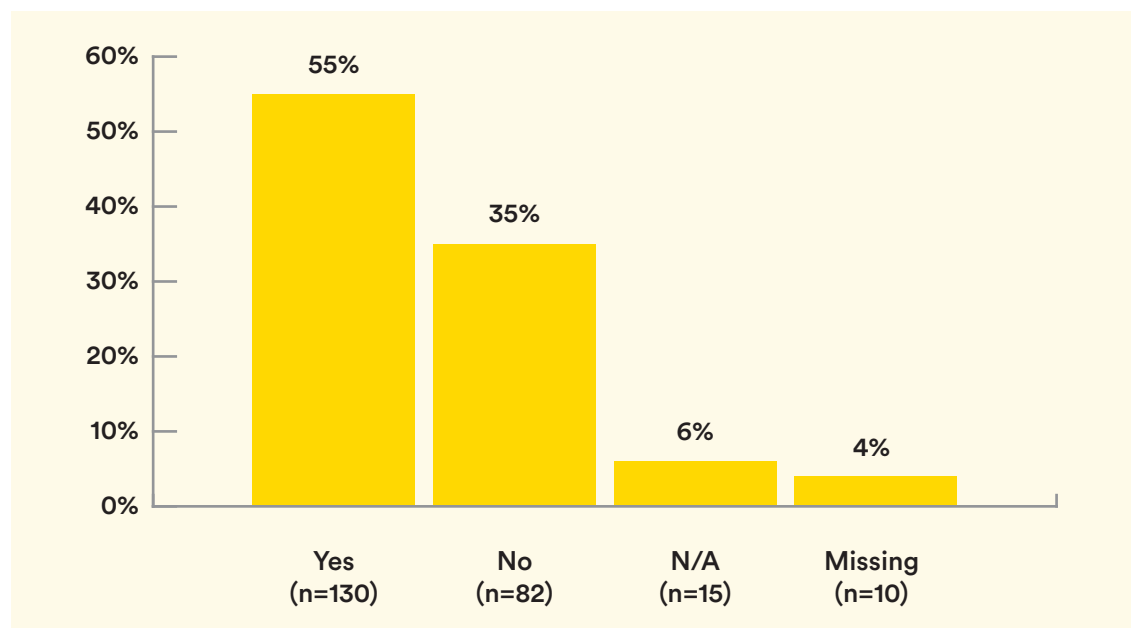
³⁶ Gambi, Sheridan and Hoey, 2018.

5 Help-Seeking Before Becoming Homeless

This section examines whether respondents sought out support or advice from a service (statutory or NGO) or individual prior to presenting to their local authority as homeless.

Just over half of respondents (55%, n=130) contacted a person, organisation or service before they lost or had to leave their home; see Figure 9. By contrast, 35% (n=82) stated that they did not contact any person, organisation or service, prior to presenting as homeless, in a crisis situation. The item was non-applicable (N/A) for 15 (6%) respondents due to them being new to Ireland and / or having left their home due to moving country or returning to Ireland, and 10 (4%) cases had missing data.

Figure 9: If Respondents Contacted a Person, Organisation or Service before Losing Their Home, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)



Participants who were less likely to seek out support or advice prior to presenting as homeless were more likely to be originally from Ireland and between the ages of 20 and 25 years of age (see Table B3 in Appendix B). Sixty-two per cent (24 of 39 respondents aged 20-25 years) of young parents did not seek help as opposed to 25% (24 of 96 respondents) of those aged 36 and over. Likewise, 40% (42 of 105 respondents) of parents originally from Ireland did not seek support or advice, as opposed to 26% (25 of 97 respondents) of parents of non-EU origin. Respondents of EU origin were more similar to respondents originally from Ireland in help-seeking prior to homelessness, with 43% (15 of 35 respondents) having not sought help or advice.

Of the 130 participants who did contact a person or service for advice or support prior to losing or having to leave their home, the following were most cited regarding where they first contacted:

- 53 (41%) first contacted their local authority;
- 21 (16%) first contacted Focus Ireland;
- 18 (14%) first contacted Threshold.

Respondents also contacted Citizens Information (4%, n=5), the Rental Tenancies Board (RTB), social workers, refuges, Crosscare, Simon Community, family / friends, a local representatives and 'other' persons, organisations and services. Ten (8%) respondents were unsure who they first contacted.

6 Housing Trajectories and Routes into Homelessness

In examining respondents' responses regarding their accommodation history and assessing their demographic details, five categories were created which reflected participants' housing trajectories (and routes into homelessness). The research team discussed each case to determine which category was thought to best represent the individual's housing trajectory and route into homelessness; see Table B4 in Appendix B.

The results were:

- Sixty per cent (n=142) of respondents were categorised as having had a **Stable Housing History**.
- The second highest proportion of respondents (16%, n=39) were classified as having had a **Precarious Housing History**.
- There were 19 (8%) participants thought to have had a **Highly Unstable or 'Chaotic' Housing History**.
- Eleven per cent (n=26) of respondents were identified under the category **New Family Formation** category.
- The **Vulnerable Migrant Pathways** category, which reflects the housing trajectory and route into homelessness for 11 (5%) respondents, was broken down into two sub-categories, to provide a deeper understanding:
 - 3% (n=6) of the sample were categorised as **Vulnerable Migrant Pathway**;
 - 2% (n=5) were classified as **Vulnerable Migrant Pathway – Direct Entry Into Homelessness**.

This chapter discusses these housing trajectories in more detail and the typical 'triggers' to homelessness which were reported by participants in the categories.

6.1 Stable Housing History (60%, n=142)

These respondents had lengthy and stable tenancies, with many having had numerous stable tenancies within the Private Rented Sector (PRS).

- Some participants relied on informal arrangements before presenting as homeless.
- Ninety-five per cent (135 of 142) of respondents' last stable home was in the PRS.
- Most of this group had been supported, in their last stable homes, by rent supplement (67%, n=95), and 5 (4%) had been supported by HAP.
- The duration of stay in participants' last stable home highlights the stability in their housing history:
 - Thirty-four (24%) of the 142 families had been in their last stable home for 12 to 35 months.
 - One hundred and three (73%) of the 142 families had stayed in their last stable home for 36 months or more.
 - A sizable proportion of the 142 families (28%, n=40) had resided in their last stable home for more than 6 years.

Specific Triggers to Homelessness for Group 1:

- The main reasons for having to leave their last stable home for the majority (54%, n=76) of the 142 families was due to reasons linked to property being removed from the market, and 29% (n=41) of the 142 families mentioned main reasons for having to leave their last stable home that were PRS-related.
 - Fifty-five (39%) of the 142 families cited the landlord selling the property as the main reason for having to leave their last stable home.
 - In addition, 13 (9%) of the 142 participants cited overcrowding (in PRS), 10 (7%) cited bank repossession from landlord, 7 (5%) cited the landlord moving back into the property, and 6 (4%) cited the landlord renovating as the main reason for having to leave their last stable home.
 - For 8 (6%) of the 142 respondents, the main reason for having to leave their last stable home was domestic violence.

Characteristics of Group 1:

- Seventy-seven (54%) of the 142 families were one-parent families and 63 (44%) were two-parent families.
- All 142 respondents were 25 or older, and the age ranges with the highest proportions were 30–34 years and 45 years and older, both of which represented 37 (26%) respondents, so 74 (52%) respondents combined.
- Over two-thirds (68%, n=96) of the 142 families were from a migrant background; 76 (54%) were originally from a non-EU country and 20 (14%) were originally from an EU country.

- Thirty-two per cent (n=46) of the 142 participants were originally from Ireland.
- Eighty-eight (62%) of the 142 respondents said that they contacted a person, organisation or service before they lost / had to leave their home.
 - Of the 88 families who said they contacted a person, organisation or service before they lost / had to leave their home, 32 (36%) said they first contacted their local authority, 17 (19%) said they first contacted Threshold, and 12 (14%) said they first contacted Focus Ireland. Nine (10%) respondents were unsure of where or whom they first contacted.

6.2 Precarious Housing History (16%, n=39)

These participants had broadly stable housing histories but had some degree of housing instability or precariousness in the past, with a higher number having resided in the family home / with family in their last stable home than those with a stable housing history.

- Nineteen (49%) of 39 respondents' last stable home was in the Private Rented Sector and 14 (36%) respondents' last stable home was either in the family home or with family.
- Participants had experienced substandard or insecure tenancies in PRS.
- They had a greater reliance on informal arrangements for longer periods.
- Thirteen (33%) had resided in their last stable home for 12 to 35 months and 22 (56%) had resided in their last stable home for 36 months or longer.

Specific Triggers to Homelessness for Group 2:

- Nearly half of the 39 families (49%, n=19) noted that the main reason for having to leave their last stable home was due to family circumstances. Seven families (18%) stated that they had to leave their last stable home due to reasons linked to property being removed from the market and seven (18%) additional families had to leave their last stable home due to PRS-related issues.
 - Six of the 39 respondents (15%) cited reasons linked to family fall out (including in-laws) as the main reason for having to leave their last stable home; 5 families (13%) cited relationship breakdown with a partner as the main reason for having to leave their last stable home; and 4 (10%) mentioned that the main reason was overcrowding in the family home or in living with family.
 - Ten per cent (n=4) of the 39 families noted the landlord selling the property as the main reason for having to leave their last stable home.
 - Three of the 39 families (8%) described the main reason for having to leave their last stable home as being in relation to the landlord moving back in, and an additional 3 families (8%) stated the main reason as being due to rent increasing.
 - Three of the 39 respondents (8%) noted that the core reason for having to leave their last stable home was due to moving in / out of a country.

Characteristics of Group 2:

- Twenty-eight (72%) of the 39 families were one-parent families.
- The majority (64%, n= 25) of the 39 families were aged between 25 and 34 years; 28% (n=11) were aged 35 and over; and 8% (n=3) were between 20 and 24 years of age.
- Twenty-three (59%) of the 39 families were originally from Ireland.
- Sixteen (41%) families were from a migrant background. Of these 16 families, 12 participants were originally from a non-EU country and 4 were originally from an EU country.
- Twenty-two (56%) of the 39 respondents said that they contacted a person, organisation or service before they lost / had to leave their home.
 - Of these 22 participants, 10 (45%) first contacted their local authority, 5 (23%) first contacted Focus Ireland, 2 (9%) first contacted Citizens Information, and 2 (9%) contacted a person, organisation or service categorised as 'other'.

6.3 Highly Unstable Housing History (8%, n=19)

A smaller cohort had a history of transience in housing and was classified as having a highly unstable or 'chaotic' housing history.

- Some participants had little or no experience of living in independent tenancies and/or had experienced extensive periods of hidden homelessness (sometimes lasting for years).
- A substantial proportion of respondents' had their last stable home either in the family home or were living with family members (47%, n=9); 3 of the 19 participants' (16%) last stable home was living with friends; and 3 (16%) respondents' last stable home was in the PRS.
- A few participants had experienced homelessness in the past.
- A lower proportion of the families classified under the highly unstable (42%, n=8) housing trajectory, compared to those classified as having a stable (73%) or precarious (56%) housing trajectory, were found to have resided in their last stable home for 36 months or longer.
- Six (32%) of the 19 families had resided in their last stable home for 12 to 35 months, while 4 (21%) participants had lived in their last stable home for 11 months or less.

Specific Triggers to Homelessness for Group 3:

- Thirteen (68%) of the 19 families noted reasons related to family circumstances as the cause of having to leave their last stable home, and 4 families (21%) cited other reasons not related to family circumstances. While property being removed from the market (n=1) and PRS-related issues (n=1) accounted for the reason for having to leave a last stable home for one participant each.
 - Five (26%) of the 19 families stated the most prominent reason for having to leave their last stable home was due to family fall out (including in-laws).

- Four (21%) of the 19 families noted overcrowding in the family home or in living with family as the main reason for having to leave their last stable home, and two families said overcrowding outside of the PRS or in the family home / with family was the main reason for needing to leave their last stable home.
- Three (16%) of the 19 families had to leave their last stable home due to domestic violence.

Characteristics of Group 3

- Twelve (63%) of the 19 families were one-parent families.
- Of the 19 respondents, 47% (n=9) were 20–29 years of age, 11% (n=2) were aged 30–34 years, and 42% (n=8) were 35–44 years of age.
- Fourteen (74%) of the 19 participants were originally from Ireland, and 5 (26%) were from a migrant background.
- Eleven (58%) of the 19 respondents said they did not contact any person, organisation or service prior to losing / having to leave their home.
 - Of the 7 (37%) respondents who said they did contact a person, organisation or service before they lost / had to leave their home, four (57%) stated that they first contacted their local authority.

6.4 New Family Formation (11%, n=26)

These participants had mainly lived in the family home / with family and after having a baby or another baby the situation became untenable, causing them to have to leave.

- Twenty-four (92%) of the 26 families' last stable home was in the family home or living with family.
- Many had lived at home / with family for their whole life before entering homeless accommodation.
- The majority of the 26 families (92%, n=24) had resided in their last stable home for over 6 years (73+ months), and 2 (8%) of the families had lived in their last stable home for 12–35 months
- A high proportion of this cohort of participants were 24 years of age or younger.
- This cohort of families was considered to be particularly marginalised from the housing market.³⁷

³⁷ Given the paucity of research and information about this group, Focus Ireland commissioned a more comprehensive study of this particular cohort. 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>

Specific Triggers to Homelessness for Group 4:

- Twenty-three (88%) of the 26 families had to leave their last stable home for reasons related to family circumstances.
 - For 13 of the 26 families (50%), the main reason for having to leave their last stable home was linked to family fall out (including in-laws), and for 10 of the 26 families (38%), the main reason for having to leave their last stable home was because of overcrowding in the family home or in a home living with family.

Characteristics of Group 4:

- Seventeen (65%) of the 26 families were one-parent families.
- All 26 of the participants were aged between 20 and 28; 21 (81%) of the 26 respondents were aged 20–24 and 5 (19%) were aged 25–28.
- Twenty-two (85%) of the 26 respondents were originally from Ireland, with 4 (15%) respondents being from a migrant background.
- Seventeen (65%) of the 26 respondents did not contact any person, organisation or service before losing / having to leave their home.
 - Of the 9 (35%) respondents who did contact a person, organisation or service before losing / having to leave their home, 6 (67%) first contacted their local authority.

6.5 Vulnerable Migrant Pathways (5%, n=11)

This cohort refers to a small sub-sample of the 132 respondents originally from a country outside of Ireland (i.e. 8% of migrant sub-sample) whose housing history did not easily ‘fit’ into the other housing trajectories outlined above. This was mainly because they did not have long-term housing histories in Ireland or were new to the country.

6.5.1 Vulnerable Migrant Pathway (3% of total, n=6)

- A small number of migrants were identified as ‘vulnerable’ migrants. These particular families had the means / contacts / information to access accommodation(s) when they moved to Ireland but then had to leave their accommodation. Most did not have long-term housing histories in Ireland before entering emergency accommodation.
- Half (50%, n=3) of the 6 families’ last stable home was in the private rented sector. A third (33%, n=2) of the 6 families’ last stable home was in the family home or with family, and 1 family’s last stable home was in Direct Provision.
- Two-thirds (n=4) of the 6 participants had resided in their last stable home for less than 7 months.

Specific Triggers to Homelessness:

- Half (50%, n=3) of the respondents had to leave their last stable home due to either the property being removed from the market or PRS-related issues.
- Two (33%) of the 6 families cited family circumstances as the prominent reason for having to leave their last stable home; both participants noted the reason as being related to overcrowding in the family home or while living with family.

Characteristics of Group:

- Half (50%) of the 6 families were one-parent families and half were two-parent families.
- Four of the 6 respondents were originally from a non-EU country and 2 were originally from an EU country.
- Four (67%) of the 6 families contacted a person, organisation or service before losing / having to leave their last stable home.

6.5.2 Direct Entry into Homelessness (2% of total, n=5)

- All 5 families were new to Ireland and so did not have a last stable home in Ireland. Before presenting to homeless services, some had lived temporarily with friends, or a community had supported them for a brief period on arrival in Ireland.

Characteristics of Group:

- All 5 families were two-parent families.
- Eighty per cent (n=4) of respondents were in the age category 26 to 35 years of age.
- Four (80%) respondents were originally from an EU country and one (n=1) of the 5 respondents was originally from a non-EU country.

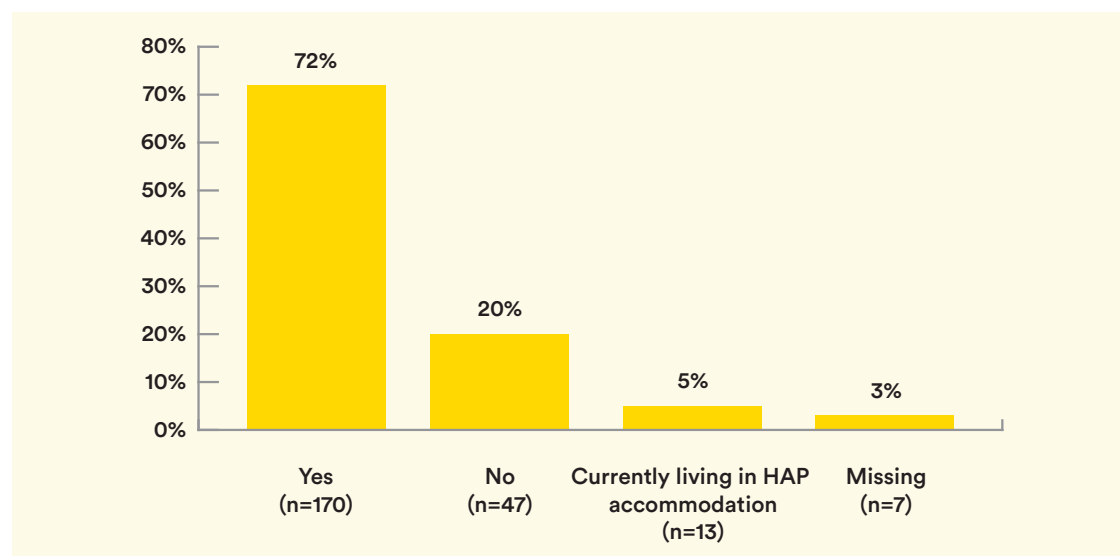
7 Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Accommodation

New questions were added to the survey instrument around Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) / Homeless HAP (though for the purpose of this exercise, no distinction was made between HAP and HHAP³⁸). Respondents were asked about their experience of looking for HAP scheme accommodation, including the number of properties they had applied for under HAP, the number of viewings attended, and an open-ended question on their experience of searching for accommodation. For those who had no experience of looking for accommodation with HAP, an open-ended question was asked on whether there was a reason(s) why they had not looked for accommodation with HAP. For details of how open-ended responses were analysed, see Chapter 2.

7.1 Looked for Accommodation with HAP?

There were 170 (72%) participants who had experience of looking for HAP accommodation and 13 (5%) participants currently living in HAP accommodation; see Figure 10. Therefore, a total of 77% (n=183) respondents had experience of looking for accommodation with HAP. Forty-seven (20%) participants had no experience of looking for HAP accommodation, and data is missing for the remaining 7 (3%) respondents.

Figure 10: Breakdown of Respondents by Experience of Looking for Accommodation with HAP, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)



38 Homeless HAP (HHAP) differs from HAP in how it is delivered, HHAP provides extra discretion to exceed the HAP rent limits for homeless households, as well as providing applicants with access to rental deposits and rent in advance.

7.2 Reasons for Not Looking for Accommodation with HAP (20%, n=47)

Of the 237 respondents, 47 (20%) had no experience of looking for accommodation with HAP. These families were asked open-ended questions to understand why they had not looked for HAP accommodation. Table 9 outlines the categories developed which were thought to best reflect the responses in relation to why participants said they had not looked for HAP accommodation.

Table 9: Reported Reasons, For Respondents with No Experience of Looking for HAP Accommodation, For Why They Hadn't Looked For HAP Accommodation, Frequency and Proportion of Respondents Referring to Each Reason (n=47)

Reasons Why Hadn't Looked for Accommodation with HAP	No. of Survey Participants (n)	Percentage of Cases (%)
Private Rented Sector (PRS) insecurity / negative prior experience	31	66%
Unsuitable for children / family life	20	43%
Name on Local Authority Housing (LAH) list / Waiting as name on LAH list	18	38%
Aware but yet to engage	15	32%
Unsuitable due to illness / disability / health grounds	8	17%
Staff advice	4	9%
Local Authority Accommodation Imminent	3	6%
Unaware of HAP	1	2%
Availed of LAH	1	2%
Do not qualify / meet requirements	1	2%
Total No. Respondents	47	

The issue of the lack of security and stability in the private rented sector (PRS) emerged strongly in the responses as to why respondents had not yet looked for HAP accommodation. A total of 31 (66%) of the 47 respondents stated that the issue of lack of security in the private rented sector and / or negative prior experience(s) in the PRS were key reasons here. Participants also perceived HAP to be not suitable; with 20 (43%) responses suggesting that HAP accommodation was not conducive to raising children / family life, for example due to instability, and 8 (17%) responses suggesting unsuitability due to disability / an illness / health grounds in relation to themselves or a member of the family.

Fifteen (32%) participants were aware of HAP but had not yet engaged with it. Of the 47 respondents, 18 (38%) provided a reason for not looking for HAP accommodation as being due to having their name on a Local Authority Housing (LAH) list. Three (6%) respondents said they had not looked for HAP accommodation as they would be availing of local authority accommodation in the near future, and one respondent had availed of LAH. Four (9%) respondents noted that staff had advised them of some of the barriers in accessing / maintaining HAP accommodation. There was one participant who stated that they were unaware of HAP and one participant who explained that they were not yet eligible for HAP.

7.3 Experiences of Looking for Accommodation with HAP (77%, n=183)

One hundred and seventy participants were categorised as having experience of looking for HAP accommodation, and 13 participants were, at the date of the survey, living in HAP accommodation (n=183).

7.3.1 Number of Properties Applied for with HAP

The 183 participants who had experience of looking for HAP-scheme accommodation were asked about the number of properties they had applied for under HAP; see Table 10. In the pilot study, the survey was designed to capture a maximum of people who had applied for 20 properties or more. However, the responses from participants revealed that several participants had applied to many more than 20 properties and so additional categories were created to capture the high number of properties applied to by some respondents. Therefore, some respondents in the category more than 20 may have applied to a number of properties that at a later point in time were recorded in the survey as more than 50 or more than 100.

Of the 183 participants with experience of looking for HAP accommodation, 61% (n=111) had applied for more than 20 properties with HAP, while 37% (n=67) had applied for 20 properties or less with HAP. There were many participants who had applied for an extensive number of properties with HAP. Thirty respondents stated they had applied for 50 or more properties with HAP, and 44 respondents noted that they had applied for in excess of 100 properties with HAP; see Table 10. Six respondents (3%) noted that they had not applied for any properties with HAP; all of these respondents mentioned that council staff and / or their keyworker were helping them to source a HAP tenancy.

Table 10: Number of Properties Applied for with HAP, For Respondents with Experience of Looking for Accommodation with HAP, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=183)

Number of Properties Applied for with HAP	No. of Survey Participants (n)	Percentage of Total (%)
0	6	3%
1–3	8	4%
4–5	14	8%
6–10	17	9%
10>	22	12%
20> [▲]	37	20%
50>	30	16%
100>	44	24%
Missing	5	3%
Total	183	■ 100%

- ▲ Some respondents in this category may have applied for a greater number of properties as the succeeding categories were added during the pilot study
- Due to rounding, percentages do not add up to 100%

7.3.2 Number of Viewings Attended

After completing the pilot, it was decided to add in an additional question to the survey to capture the number of viewings those who had experience of looking for HAP accommodation had attended. The 46 participants from the pilot study who had experience of looking for accommodation with HAP are excluded from this analysis.

Of the 137 respondents who had experience of looking for HAP accommodation and were asked how many viewings they had attended, 20% (n=27) had attended 6–10 viewings; see Table 11. The second highest proportion (17%, n=23) of respondents had attended between 11 and 20 viewings. More than half (55%, n=76) of the 137 respondents had attended 6 or more viewings. There were 19 (14%) respondents who had attended zero viewings, 22 (16%) who had attended 1–3 viewings, and 18 (13%) who had attended 4–5 viewings.

Table 11: Number of Viewings Attended, For Respondents Surveyed After the Pilot with Experience of Looking for Accommodation with HAP, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=137)

Number of Viewings Attended	No. of Survey Participants (n)	Percentage of Total (%)
0	19	14%
1–3	22	16%
4–5	18	13%
6–10	27	20%
10>	23	17%
20>	12	9%
50>	13	9%
100>	1	1%
Missing	2	1%
Total	137	100%
N / A – Pilot Study	46	
Total	183	

7.3.3 Experiences of Searching for Accommodation with HAP

Of the 183 respondents who reported looking for HAP accommodation, 182 responded to the open-ended question on searching for accommodation with HAP. Respondents' responses were coded and later developed into categories (see Table 12).

Table 12: Reported Experiences of Looking for Accommodation with HAP, For Respondents with Experience of Looking for HAP Accommodation, Frequency and Proportion of Respondents Referring to Each Experience (n=182)

Experiences of Looking for Accommodation with HAP	No. of Survey Participants (n)	Percentage of Cases (%)
No response to applications / never heard back	104	57%
Very stressful / difficult experience	93	51%
Unwilling to take HAP / HAP discrimination or prejudice	88	48%
Long queues / high number of people at viewings	71	39%
Lack of employment / looking for employed people / looking for full-time workers	36	20%
Discrimination / prejudice	31	17%
Discrimination against children	27	15%
Local Authority staff / keyworker sourced or help(ed/ing) to source HAP tenancy	22	12%
Properties unsuitable / inappropriate accommodation for children	21	12%
Lack of references	10	5%
Places too expensive	8	4%
Difficulties in applying / understanding (i.e. language barrier, etc.)	7	4%
Difficult to get to viewings	6	3%
HAP does not cover the cost of rent	5	3%
Landlords ask for / people offer more money	3	2%
Total No. Respondents	182	

Over half (57%, n=104) of the respondents in their discussion of their experience of looking for accommodation with HAP referenced not getting responses to their applications, never hearing back. Severe competition in the market as being a factor in people's experiences in looking for accommodation with HAP was also strongly reflected by the fact that 71 (39%) participants noted the issue of there being long queues / high numbers of people at viewings.

Ninety-three (51%) of the 182 respondents described looking for accommodation with HAP as a very stressful / difficult experience. This category reflected the feeling of many respondents; some respondents noted a loss of hope and that their experience was demoralising / negative / depressing.

Several categories of experiences reported by respondents also highlighted issues of prejudice and discrimination in respondents' search for accommodation with HAP. There were 88 (48%) respondents who cited issues of landlords / agents who were perceived to be unwilling to select HAP tenants. In addition, 31 (17%) respondents reported issues of prejudice in their search for accommodation with HAP, for example, due to skin colour, being a one-parent family, being young, being from the Travelling Community, being homeless, etc. Additionally, there were 27 (15%) respondents who referred to the issue of discrimination against children or large families while looking for accommodation with HAP.

There were 36 respondents (20%) who noted unemployment or a lack of full-time work as problematic when they were looking for rental accommodation; for example, some respondents stated that landlords are looking for employed people, professionals, and full-time workers, etc. Ten (5%) respondents also cited not having references as a barrier or issue when looking for accommodation with HAP.

There were 22 (12%) respondents who said that Local Authority staff or their keyworker were helping / helped them to source accommodation with HAP. Seven (4%) respondents discussed difficulties in applying for HAP accommodation / understanding the process, for example, due to language barriers or country differences in the housing application / search process. Overall, 6 (3%) participants, in explaining their experience of looking for HAP accommodation, referred to difficulties in getting to viewings; for example, due to not driving, due to working.

For 21 (12%) participants who described their experiences of looking for accommodation with HAP, references were made to the properties being unsuitable or inappropriate as accommodation for children.

A number of categories related to the cost of renting, with 8 (4%) individuals citing that places are too expensive, 5 (3%) referencing the fact that the HAP payment does not cover the cost of the rent, and 3 (2%) people mentioning that some landlords ask for / people offer more money for rent.

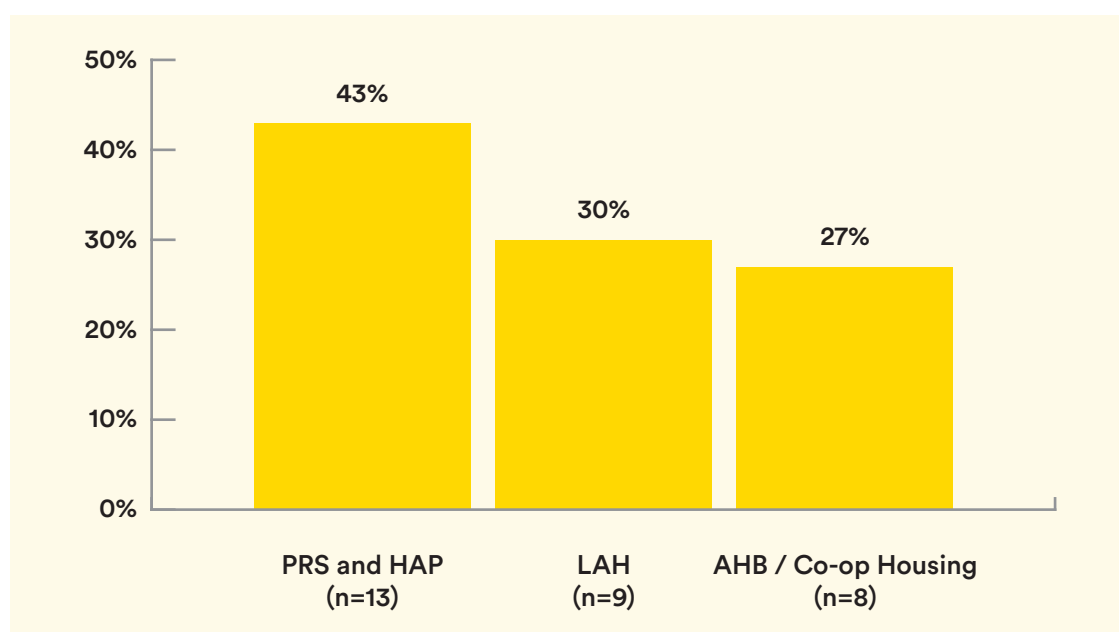
8 Moves to Tenancies

There were 31 families of those surveyed who had departed EA, of which 30 (13%) had moved to tenancies and one who had gone to live with family / friends. This chapter provides details on the tenure type of the tenancies these families moved to and the demographic details of these families. The chapter then looks at the length of time spent in emergency accommodation and the trajectory of respondents by the tenancy type moved to.

8.1 Tenure Type of Tenancies

Of the 30 respondents who had departed to tenancies from EA, 13 (43%) moved into the private rented sector accommodation with HAP, 9 (30%) moved into Local Authority Housing (LAH), and 8 (27%) moved into Approved Housing Body (AHB) or Co-operative (Co-op) Housing; see Figure 11.

Figure 11: Moves to Tenancies by Respondents, by Tenure Type of Tenancy, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=30)



8.2 Demographic Details of Respondents Moved to Tenancies

Examining the demographic details of the 30 respondents who departed EA and moved to tenancies, 14 (47%) respondents were aged 25–34 years, 14 (47%) were aged 35 and older, and 2 (7%) respondents were aged 20–24 years; see Table 13.

Table 13: Demographic Details of Respondents Who Moved to Tenancies, by Categories for Age, Country of Origin by Category, Number of Children Living with Respondents, and Relationship Status (n=30)

Demographic Details of Respondents Who Moved to Tenancies		No. of Survey Participants (n)	Percentage of Total (%)
Age	20–24	2	7%
	25–29	6	20%
	30–34	8	27%
	35–39	3	10%
	40–44	4	13%
	45>	7	23%
	Total	30	100%
Country of origin by category	Ireland	13	43%
	Non-EU	12	40%
	EU	5	17%
	Total	30	100%
Number of children living with respondents	1	15	50%
	2	6	20%
	3	4	13%
	4	4	13%
	Missing	1	3%
	Total	30	■ 100%
Relationship status	Single	19	63%
	Couple	11	37%
	Total	30	100%

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

Regarding the country of origin of respondents who had moved from EA to tenancies, the highest proportion were originally from Ireland (43%, n=13), while 40% (n=12) were originally from a non-EU country and 17% (n=5) were originally from an EU country. Most families who had moved to tenancies were one-parent households (63%, n=19). However, of the respondents who moved to HAP properties, one more family was a two-parent family (54%, n=7) than one-parent family (46%, n=6).

Half (50%, n=15) of the families who had moved to tenancies had one child living with them, 20% (n=6) had two children living with them, and none of the families who moved to tenancies had more than four children living with them. A higher proportion of families who moved to HAP tenancies (85%, n=11) reported having one child or two children than those who departed to LAH (67%, n=6) or AHB / Co-op Housing (50%, n=4). This could be an echo of the findings from the question that sought to understand respondents' experience of seeking accommodation with HAP, where some respondents reflected that some landlords / agents do not want large families.

8.3 Length of Time Spent in EA and Trajectory Type by Tenancy Type of New Accommodation

Of the 30 respondents who had departed EA to tenancies, 57% (n=17) had resided in EA for 0–11 months and 43% (n=13) had resided in EA for 12–35 months. An examination of the length of time spent residing in EA prior to departure by tenancy type shows that 85% (n=11) of those who departed to HAP tenancies (n=13) had spent 0–11 months living in EA and 15% (n=2) had spent 12–35 months in EA. In comparison to those who moved to HAP tenancies, a higher proportion of respondents who departed to LAH or AHB / Co-op housing (n=8) spent 12–35 months (75%, n=6) in EA than 0–11 months (25%, n=2); see Table 14.

Table 14: Trajectory Type and Length of Time Residing in Emergency Accommodation for Respondents Who Moved to Tenancies, by Tenure Type of Tenancy, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=30)

Trajectory Type and Length of Time in Emergency Accommodation (EA) by Tenancy Type				
Tenancy Type	Trajectory	Time EA		Total within Trajectory Type
		0–11 Months	12–35 Months	
		n	n	n (%)
PRS + HAP (43%, n=13)	Stability	6	2	8 (62%)
	Precariousness	2	–	2 (15%)
	New Family Formation	1	–	1 (8%)
	Vulnerable Migrant Pathway	1	–	1 (8%)
	Vulnerable Migrant Pathway – Direct Entry Homelessness	1	–	1 (8%)
	Total – n (%)	11 (85%)	2 (15%)	13 (■100%)
LAH (30%, n=9)	Stability	3	4	7 (78%)
	Precariousness	1	1	2 (22%)
	Total – n (%)	4 (44%)	5 (56%)	9 (100%)
AHB / Co-op Housing (27%, n=8)	Stability	1	3	4 (50%)
	Precariousness	1	–	1 (13%)
	Highly unstable	–	3	3 (38%)
	Total – n (%)	2 (25%)	6 (75%)	8 (■100%)
Total – n (%)		17 (57%)	13 (43%)	30 (100%)

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

Nineteen (63%) of the 30 respondents who moved to tenancies were classified into the stability trajectory; see Table 14. One-sixth (n=5) were classified as having a precarious housing history and 3 (10%) as highly unstable. One family coded under the New Family Formation trajectory had moved to a HAP tenancy and one family from each of the Vulnerable Migrant Pathway trajectories had departed to a HAP tenancy. All three of the respondents who moved to a tenancy and were categorised under the highly unstable trajectory had moved to AHB or Co-op housing.

9 Conclusion



This study marks the latest contribution of Focus Ireland to building evidence in relation to the drivers and dynamics of family homelessness. It seeks not only to inform the organisation's service delivery in preventing homelessness among families but to support families who are currently homeless in exiting homelessness as quickly as possible. The evidence presented in this report also aims to contribute to the debate on family homelessness to inform targeted and effective solutions to one of the most urgent social problems in Ireland today.

The findings are consistent with previous reports published by the 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. This study also sheds light on families' experiences of exiting homelessness through the HAP scheme.

Loss of Home in Private Rented Sector as Key Driver to Family Homelessness

The study shows that dynamics in the private rented sector are a key driver of family homelessness in Dublin, with 68% (n=161) of respondents having had their last stable home in a rental property. The leading trigger to homelessness was property being removed from the market (36%, n=86), with 26% (n=62) of the 237 families specifically citing that they had to leave their home due to the landlord selling the property. A further 22% (n=51) reported other issues, such as affordability, specifically related to the private rented sector.

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).

These key drivers of family homelessness strongly mirror results from the Focus Ireland 2016–2017 report (N=297) on causes of family homelessness. Looking at both the 2016–2017 study and this study – across which data was collected for a total of 534 families – 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), while the proportion of respondents who became homeless for reasons related to family circumstances stood at 30% (2016–2017: n=89; 2018: n=70).

Majority of Families Reported Stable Housing Histories

While a more in-depth analysis could offer greater detail of their housing histories, the data generated here nonetheless gives an overview of their housing trajectories prior to entering homelessness. Over half (60%, n=142) of the participants were categorised as having ‘stable housing histories’, and one-third of the respondents (33%, n=79) had resided in their last stable home for over six years. A smaller proportion of the respondents were categorised as having ‘precarious’ (16%, n=39) or ‘highly unstable’ housing histories (8%, n=19). ‘New Family Formation’ trajectories (11%, n=26) were also identified, typically in these cases a family had to leave the family home or living with family upon having a baby or second baby.

Over-Representation of Lone Mothers and Households Born Outside of Ireland

While risk to homelessness has been shown to be closely related to a scarcity of affordable housing and limited financial resources to compete in the current housing market, there were particular groups who were over-represented in the demographic profile of respondents in this study.

This report showed that 58% of the sample were one-parent households (n=137), of which 95% were female-headed (95%, n=130). This echoes previous research by Focus Ireland on 2016 and 2017 data (N=297),³⁹ which saw an average of 60% of families surveyed being one-parent families, and, similarly, Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) analysis of new families accessing emergency accommodation identified that the majority were one-parent families in 2016 (66%) and 2017 (65%).⁴⁰ Indeed, wider homeless statistics from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government stated that 1,005 families (59%) were one-parent families out of 1,707 families in February 2019.⁴¹ These findings highlight that one-parent families and specifically one-parent families headed by females may face a substantial risk to homelessness, which echoes the view that there is a ‘feminisation of homelessness’ occurring in Ireland.⁴²

Again, similar to previous *Insights into Family Homelessness* reports,⁴³ there was a significant cohort of families with a parent originally from outside of Ireland (though it is important to note that some are Irish citizens). In total, 56% (n=132) were originally either of EU origin or of non-EU origin. While there is a concentration of the ‘non-Irish’ population in the PRS and the ‘non-Irish’ population are more likely to be renters than

39 Gambi, Sheridan and Hoey, 2018.

40 Morrin, H. and O’Donoghue Hynes, B., 2018. *A Report on the 2016 and 2017 Families who Experienced Homelessness in the Dublin Region*. Dublin: DRHE.

41 Data source: DHPLG, Homelessness Data.

42 Mayock, P. and Bretherton, J. (eds.), 2016. *Women’s Homelessness in Europe*. London: Palgrave Macmillan; O’Sullivan, 2016.

43 Respondents of EU origin and non-EU origin (40%) were also over-represented in the 2016–2017 study, see: Gambi, Sheridan and Hoey, 2018.

Irish nationals,⁴⁴ it is nonetheless clear that ‘migrant’ households are over-represented among those experiencing family homelessness.⁴⁵ Many of these households demonstrated notably stable housing histories and lengthy tenancies, with only a small cohort of migrants having had no (or no long-term) history of tenancies in Ireland, these migrants entered homelessness in the context of the recent homeless crisis. A total of 35 respondents (15% of sample) in this study reported that they had lived in Direct Provision accommodation in the past, but many reported stable tenancies since this time.⁴⁶ The over-representation of migrants and also ethnic minorities in emergency accommodation warrants further research.

Barriers in Accessing Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Accommodation

There is currently very little evidence on families’ experience of exiting homelessness and, specifically, in relation to the dynamics of trying to enter into a competitive private rental market. Over three-quarters (77%) (n=183) of respondents had experience of looking for accommodation with HAP, of which 13 had recently secured PRS accommodation with HAP. A total of 111 (61%) of these respondents had applied to more than 20 properties under the HAP scheme. Of the 137 participants with experience of looking for accommodation with HAP who were asked how many viewings they had attended, over half (55%, n=76) had attended six or more viewings.

Families described the difficulties, stress and perceived discriminatory practices against HAP applicants when trying to access and secure rental properties, with over half stating that they received no response from landlords (57%, n=104). Of the 47 (20%) respondents who did not have experience of looking for accommodation with HAP, reasons cited as to why they had not looked for accommodation under HAP included the perceived lack of security in the PRS or negative prior experiences in the PRS (66%, n=31). Respondents also stated that they felt HAP accommodation was unsuitable for their children and family life (43%, n=20), and 18 (38%) families stated that they had not searched for accommodation with HAP as their names was on the local authority housing list.

44 Forty per cent of tenants in private rented households are non-Irish nationals. Data source: CSO; Barrett, A., McGinnity, F. and Quinn, E. (eds.), 2017. *Monitoring Report on Integration 2016*. Dublin: ESRI and Department of Justice and Equality; Grotti, R., Russell, H, Fahey, É and Maître, B., 2018; McGinnity, F., Fahey, É., Quinn, E., Arnold, S., Maître, B. and O’Connell, P.J., 2018. *Monitoring Report on Integration 2018*. Dublin: ESRI and Department of Justice and Equality.

45 The CSO reported, from the 2016 Census, that 17.3% of the general population were born outside of Ireland, see: https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/population/2017/Chapter_5_Diversity.pdf

46 The August 2018 monthly report by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) revealed that RIA residents as a percentage of the population, based on the 2016 Census statistics, stood at 0.05% of the population in Dublin and 0.12% of the total population, suggesting an over-representation of households with a parent who had resided in DP amongst families experiencing homelessness.

More Targeted Prevention Services Needed

Finally, just over half of respondents (55%, n=130) sought information or advice prior to becoming homeless. The most cited first place respondents who sought help (n=130) contacted prior to homelessness was their local authority (41%, n=53), followed by Focus Ireland (16%, n=21) and Threshold (14%, n=18). This is a particularly low proportion of families and indicates that prevention services either need to be expanded or existing tenancy protection services or advice and information services require greater advertising campaigns.

Appendices



Appendix A: Telephone Survey Instrument

Telephone Survey with Families

SCRIPT and OPT-IN

Hi [insert name]! My name is [insert name] and I’m calling from the Focus Ireland research team. How are you?

Sorry to disturb you, but I’m calling all the families in our service to ask some questions about your housing history. The information you provide will help us to better understand and respond to family homelessness, and everything you say to me is **completely confidential**, unless there’s a risk of harm to you or someone you know.

The call will take approximately 5–10 minutes. Is that ok?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Date:	Ref e.g. FHR01:

If No

That’s no problem at all, have a good day.

If Yes

Great! This call is completely voluntary and you are free to end the call whenever you wish or not answer any question you wish. Okay, let’s get started ...

Section I: Accommodations Prior to Homelessness

Q1 What type of accommodation are you **currently** living in?

Homeless		
<input type="checkbox"/> Hotel / Hub / Emergency Accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/> With Friends / Family	<input type="checkbox"/> Moving between places
Exited Homelessness		
<input type="checkbox"/> HAP tenancy	<input type="checkbox"/> RS tenancy	<input type="checkbox"/> LAH
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state)		

Q2 When did you first move to emergency accommodation?

Moved in	Moved out (If applicable)

Q3 Please describe your previous four accommodations **before** you entered emergency accommodation.

(Note: No. 1 relates to accommodation **immediately before** entering emergency accommodation.)

				If you were in PRS	
	Tenure type	Duration of stay	Main reason for leaving	Were you in receipt of rent supplement?	Was this a HAP property?
1				<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
2				<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
3				<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
4				<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

Q4 In what area was your last stable home (before you became homeless)?

Q5 Did you contact anyone or any service before you lost your home?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
------------------------------	-----------------------------

Q5b If Yes, who did you contact first?

Section II: Exits from Homelessness

Q6 Have you experience of looking for accommodation with HAP?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Currently living in HAP	

If respondent **answered Yes** or **currently living in HAP** proceed to next Question (Q7).

If respondent **answered No** skip to **Question 9**.

Q7 How many properties have you applied for with HAP?

1–3	4–5	6–10	More than 10	More than 20	More than 50	More than 100

Q7a How many viewings have you gone to?

1–3	4–5	6–10	More than 10	More than 20	More than 50	More than 100

Q8 Can you **briefly** provide some further details about your experience of looking for accommodation with HAP?

--

Q9 Is there a reason(s) why you haven't looked for accommodation with HAP?

--

Okay, I'd like to finish up the survey now with some general questions about age, nationality, employment, things like that ...

Section III: Demographic Profile

Q10 What age are you?

Q11 Gender

<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Female	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
-------------------------------	---------------------------------	--------------------------------

Q12a What country are you originally from?

<input type="checkbox"/> Irish	<input type="checkbox"/> EU	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-EU
--------------------------------	-----------------------------	---------------------------------

Q12b If from EU or NON-EU, ask 'What year did you arrive in Ireland?'

Q12c If you were born outside Ireland, have you ever resided in Direct Provision accommodation in Ireland?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If Yes, for how long?	

Q13 What is your ethnic or cultural background?

<input type="checkbox"/> Irish	<input type="checkbox"/> Irish Traveller	<input type="checkbox"/> Another White background	<input type="checkbox"/> African
<input type="checkbox"/> Any other Black background	<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/> Any other Asian background	<input type="checkbox"/> Other / Mixed

Q14a What is your current employment status? (If unemployed, ask 14b.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed	<input type="checkbox"/> Student	<input type="checkbox"/> PT Employment	<input type="checkbox"/> FT Employment
-------------------------------------	----------------------------------	----------------------------------------	----------------------------------------

Q14b If unemployed, ask 'Are you in receipt of a weekly social welfare payment?'

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
------------------------------	-----------------------------

Q15 Are you single or in a couple?

<input type="checkbox"/> Single	<input type="checkbox"/> Couple
---------------------------------	---------------------------------

Q16 How many children are living with you?

1	2	3	4	5+

Q17 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+	

Thank you very much for taking the time to take part in this survey.
It is very much appreciated and will help us in delivering our services in the future.

Appendix B: Additional Tables of Results

Figure B1: Breakdown of Respondents who Identified as Unemployed in Receipt of a Social Welfare Payment, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=163)

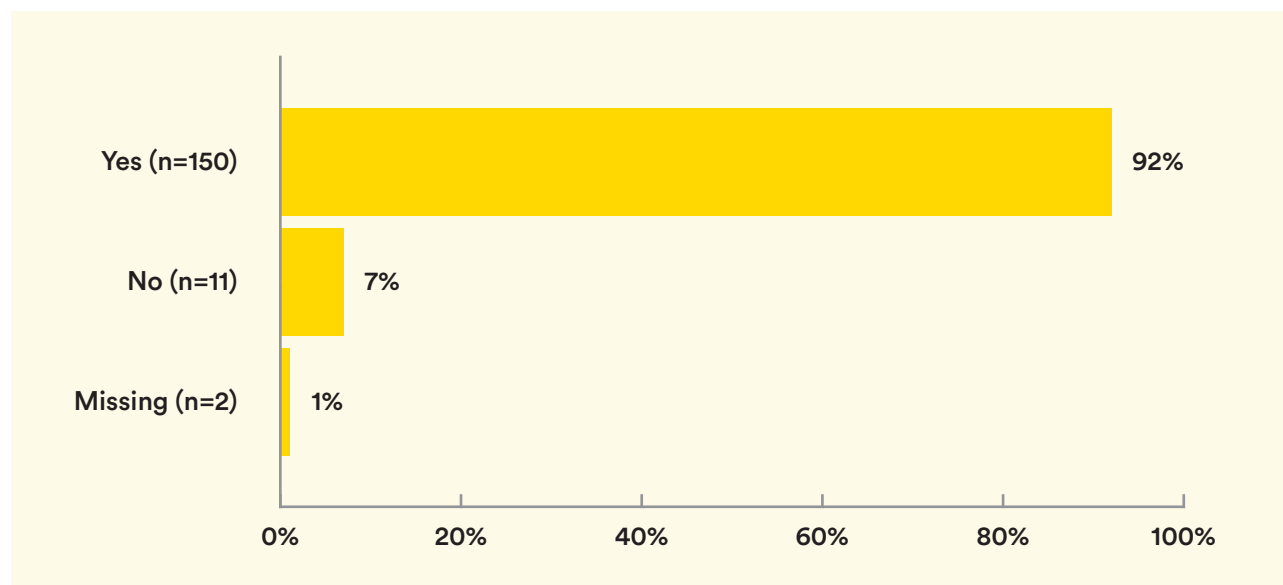


Table B1: Respondents' Current Type of Accommodation, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)

Current Type of Accommodation	No. of Survey Participants (n)	Percentage of Total (%)
Emergency Accommodation (EA)	206	87%
Private Rented Sector + Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)	13	6%
Local Authority Housing (LAH)	9	4%
Approved Housing Body (AHB) / Co-operative Housing (Co-op)	8	3%
Friends / Family	1	• –%
Hidden Homeless	–	–
Private Rental Sector (PRS)	–	–
Rent Supplement (RS)	–	–
Other	–	–
Total	237	100%

• <1%

Table B2: Tenure Type of Respondents' Last Living Situation, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)

Last Living Situation	No. of Survey Participants (n)	Percentage of Total (%)
Private Rented Sector (PRS)	140	59%
Family Home / With Family	56	24%
With Friend(s)	24	10%
Other	6	3%
Halting Site	4	2%
Local Authority Housing (LAH)	3	1%
Own Home / Partners' Home	2	1%
New to Country	2	1%
Total	237	■ 100%

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

Table B3: If Respondents Contacted a Person, Organisation or Service before Losing Their Home, by Country of Origin by Category and by Age Categories (Years), by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)

		Yes		No		N / A		Missing		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Country of Origin by Category	Ireland	59	56%	42	40%	2	2%	2	2%	105	100%
	Non-EU	60	62%	25	26%	8	8%	4	4%	97	100%
	EU	11	31%	15	43%	5	14%	4	11%	35	■ 100%
Age (Years)	20–25	15	38%	24	62%	–	–	–	–	39	100%
	26–35	57	56%	34	33%	7	7%	4	4%	102	100%
	36>	58	60%	24	25%	8	8%	6	6%	96	■ 100%
Total		130	55%	82	35%	15	6%	10	4%	237	100%

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

Table B4: Respondents' Housing Trajectories and Routes into Homelessness, by Frequencies and Percentages (n=237)

Housing Trajectories and Routes into Homelessness		No. of Survey Participants (n)	Percentage of Total (%)
Stability		142	60%
Precariousness		39	16%
New Family Formation		26	11%
Highly unstable (chaotic)		19	8%
Vulnerable Migrant Pathway (5%, n=11)	Vulnerable Migrant Pathway	6	3%
	Vulnerable Migrant Pathway – Direct Entry into Homelessness	5	2%
Total No. of Respondents		237	100%

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