

Focus Ireland **Budget 2021**

Recommendations
to Government

Challenging
homelessness.
Changing lives.

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Focus Ireland Budget 2021

Recommendations to Government

Focus Ireland have already submitted our full budget proposals to all relevant Government Ministers in recent months. This more concise document outlines the key actions which we are calling for the Government to include in Budget 2021. You can review our full Budget Submission at <https://www.focusireland.ie/>

Introduction

Covid-19 has turned life as we know it upside down. Budget 2021 must reckon with the cost of the damage to our economy, while ensuring that we do not inflict further harm on our society, particularly for the many who had already been left behind by the economic recovery. In repairing the damage done, there are significant opportunities to effect meaningful structural changes and address some of the hitherto seemingly insurmountable obstacles to a fair, inclusive society. Above all, we must avoid the risk of some sections of society disproportionately bearing the brunt of the economic fall-out.

Families and individuals who are homeless are still living with the ongoing legacy from the previous property crash. Years of austerity and cutbacks have made recovery much harder for this group. Data from the ESRI shows that the burden of Covid-19-related unemployment has fallen disproportionately on young people, with the pandemic causing an immediate unemployment rate of 51% in real terms.¹ The recovery from Covid-19 must bear in mind the unequal distribution of the burden and the risk of an unequal recovery. The recovery must not follow previous paths, but strike a new course towards a fairer economy for all.

Covid-19 will impact on the delivery of new housing as a result of construction delays caused by the recent lockdown. The emergency measures to halt evictions during the pandemic did bring about a temporary reprieve in the numbers of people entering emergency accommodation. However, there is a real risk of a rise in homelessness since the moratorium on evictions ended at the start of August. Careful attention must be paid to how we address and prevent this risk, including through financial interventions which prioritise a person's ability to remain in their job and which act quickly to prevent entry into emergency accommodation, as a priority goal of our policy response.

The sudden and unprecedented shutting down of the economy due to Covid-19 created an event of mass unemployment which will have broad consequences for State support systems. Research from the ESRI shows that the majority of those working in the sectors most affected by Covid-19 unemployment are renters.² This places a clear onus on the State to prepare for the risks people will face in maintaining their tenancies while out of work over the short to medium term. If done properly, we can prevent people entering homelessness.

1 https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/special_committee_on_covid-19_response/2020-06-16/4/

2 Coffey et al (2020) "The Effect of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Consumption and Indirect Tax in Ireland. Available at: <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/BP202103.pdf>

More broadly, there is an opportunity now for counter-cyclical investment in our housing stock. The private market must be facilitated to act but the State must also build new social housing to urgently address the shortage of supply. Goodbody are estimating a 20% fall in housing completions, with just 16,500 expected in 2020.³

The Government, facing the challenges of a post-pandemic economy where Covid-19 remains a key constraint, can redefine how we approach homeless policy. The first step must be to set a goal of reducing and ultimately ending homelessness. This means tackling the underlying causes of homelessness and ensuring that the solution is sustainable, long-term homes to achieve and maintain a 'functional zero' level of homelessness.

In order to rebuild our economy and get people back to work, we will need homes which people can afford to rent or purchase. The most vulnerable in our society must be protected from both the health and economic consequences of Covid-19 to the greatest possible extent. A key priority in reopening our economy and society must be preventing people from becoming homeless or facilitating a quick exit out of homelessness.

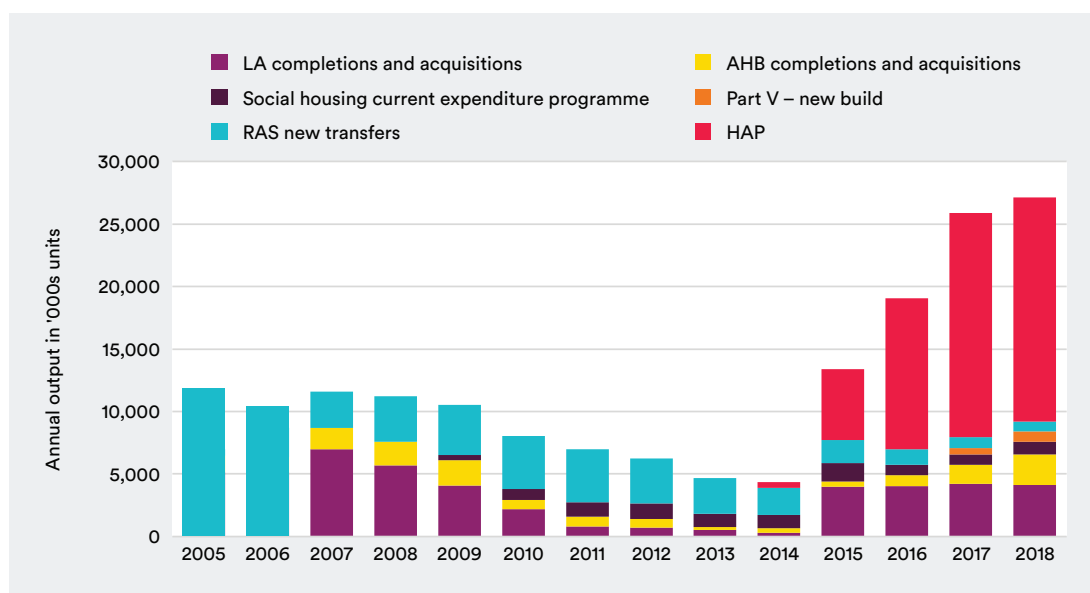
Homes are the bedrock of our society and vital for public health: ending homelessness must be our goal.

³ <https://www.goodbody.ie/insights/your-family/2020/08/06/housebuilding-rebounds-after-lockdown-freeze>

Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage

We welcome the Programme for Government commitment to “invest in housing as a social and economic imperative, focused on low- and middle-income earners and developing sustainable mixed-tenure communities” – but social housing output remains far lower than needed – as is shown by the fact that 65% of exits from homelessness into the private rental sector via HAP in 2019.⁴

Figure 1 · Social Housing Output 2005–2019⁵



It seems clear at this juncture that the targets of delivering over 11,000 new social homes in 2020, and a further 12,000 units in 2021, is unlikely to be achieved given the impact of Covid-19. The Programme for Government commits to 50,000 extra social homes over five years with “the majority of which is to be built by local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies and State agencies”. However, this commitment remains below the 30–35,000 per annum that the ESRI has estimated will be required to meet the need. Nonetheless, achieving this level of output will require a clear plan, with clearly defined targets.

⁴ Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government Quarterly Report for Q4 2019

⁵ Malone, Patrick (2020) *Housing: Social Housing Outputs and Stock*. PublicPolicy.ie. Available at: <http://publicpolicy.ie/papers/housing-social-housing-outputs-and-stock-2/>

A year-on-year shortfall in housing supply inevitably leads to increased pressure, most keenly felt in the private rental market. Prior to the pandemic, Ireland had seven years of rents rising faster than general inflation – and indeed faster than the legal maximum of 4% for Rent Pressure Zones. The consequence, as Focus Ireland research has shown, has been unprecedented increases in homelessness – 68% of homeless families in one Focus Ireland research study had their last home in the private rented sector.⁶

Our ongoing reliance on subsidising the private rented sector as the primary exit out of homelessness is not a lasting solution to the current homeless crisis. As a primary driver of homelessness, the private rental market cannot be the solution, particularly for those with long-term and complex needs. Not only is it an unsatisfactory response to homelessness, it is an expensive one.

The efficient and sustainable solution to homelessness is increasing the supply of affordable, quality, social housing.

Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)

Most households exiting homelessness move to the private rented sector, usually with the support of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).⁷ If HAP is to be effective in making the private rented sector affordable to low income households, rent caps must bear a realistic relationship to market rents, otherwise rents will become even more unaffordable for HAP tenants.

Tenants who have to ‘top up’ the rent they pay to close the gap face a growing affordability problem, pushing them below the Supplementary Welfare Allowance minimum income level and giving rise to arrears and the risk of homelessness. The scale of this problem is likely to increase as the labour market impact of Covid-19 makes such top-ups unsustainable for households. Data from the Residential Tenancy Board (RTB) rent index shows that average rents have increased by 19% since HAP maximum rents were last revised in July 2016. The majority of exits from homelessness are to the private rented sector; however, this sector is also the source of most entries to homelessness. For HAP tenancies to provide a sustainable exit from homelessness, rent limits must reflect market rents.

Housing Assistance Payment

- › Rebase HAP maximum rent limits to reflect market rents, and review annually.

⁶ Long et al (2019) *Family Homelessness in Dublin: Causes, Housing Histories, and Finding a Home*. Available at: <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Long-et-al-2019-Insights-Vol-2-No-1-Family-Homelessness-in-Dublin-%E2%80%93-Full-Report.pdf>

⁷ In Dublin, Homeless HAP (HHAP) allows a potential 50% ‘uplift’ above the maximum rent limit. In other cities, homeless families may be able to access up to a 20% ‘uplift’ on the normal maximum rent level.

Ending Family Homelessness – Housing First for Families

No child should live in ‘emergency’ accommodation for years. It has a damaging impact on children at all stages, impacting their development, health, education, and leaving them more likely to experience homelessness as adults. Last year, two Joint Oireachtas Committees highlighted the damaging impact of homelessness on children and called for urgent measures to reduce family homelessness.⁸

Yet a strategy to end family homelessness is notably absent from the Programme for Government; in this context, Focus Ireland welcomes Minister O’Brien’s statement that child and family homelessness is the “most important and urgent” of his delivery programme.⁹ Ireland has already had success in implementing Housing First for adults who have high levels of need. Focus Ireland proposes a structured ‘Housing First for Families’ pilot to address the needs of the growing number of families who have been homeless for more than 24 months, many of whom have complex needs which present particular barriers to securing a home, and need intensive support to address these issues and sustain their housing. Focus Ireland estimates the cost of providing these supports at €1.2m for 30 families.

However, there are also many families who are homeless but do not have complex needs – although prolonged living in emergency accommodation may yet create such needs. A two-pronged approach is needed, comprising a Housing First response for families with complex needs, and a programme of rapid rehousing for low-needs families, including prioritisation of families who are homeless for social housing allocations. This will allow these families to rebuild their lives and recover from homelessness, without the need for an extensive and ongoing programme of supports.

Tackle family homelessness

- › Allocate €1.2m to develop, implement and evaluate a pilot ‘Housing First for Families’ response for 30 families who have been homeless for more than two years.
- › Introduce a Rapid Rehousing programme for families so that no family spends more than six months in emergency accommodation.

8 Committee on Children and Youth Affairs (November 2019) *The impact of Homelessness on Children*. Available at: https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_children_and_youth_affairs/reports/2019/2019-11-14_report-on-the-impact-of-homelessness-on-children_en.pdf
Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government (November 2019) *Family and Child Homelessness*. Available at: https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_housing_planning_and_local_government/reports/2019/2019-11-14_report-on-family-and-child-homelessness_en.pdf

9 Interview by Sarah McInerney, RTE Radio 1, 2nd July 2020. Available at: <https://www.rte.ie/radio/radioplayer/html5/#/radio1/21797001>

Proactive and collaborative homelessness prevention

Establishing a **Homelessness Prevention Unit** within the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage would enable the delivery of a coherent prevention strategy, co-ordinating actions across government – liaison with the health service, children's services and social protection are all important in this regard – and working with the Homeless Inter-Agency Group to effectively prevent homelessness.

Building on the learning of previous successful prevention initiatives, the Homeless Prevention Unit can carry forward the effective collaboration through well-coordinated structures which have served the sector so well during Covid-19.

Homeless Prevention Unit

- › Establish and resource a Homelessness Prevention Unit in the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage, linked to the Homeless Inter Agency Group, with an initial fund of €500,000 to support effective prevention actions.

Housing Supply

Maintaining capital investment in housing is more important than ever as we face into the economic shocks of Covid-19, as well as the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union. Our social housing output remains lower than needed, with 65% of exits from homelessness still dependent on entry into the private rental sector via HAP in 2019.¹⁰

In Budget 2020, Minister Donohoe allocated capital funding of over €1.1 billion to support the delivery of over 11,000 new social homes in 2020, with a further 12,000 units to be delivered in 2021. This is still below the 30–35,000 that the ESRI has estimated will be needed to meet the annual need. The Programme for Government 2020 commits to 50,000 social homes over five years, to be delivered by a combination of local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies, and the Land Development Agency. Achieving this level of output in a sustainable manner, bearing in mind Covid-19 safety requirements on construction sites, will require a clear agreed plan, removing administrative obstacles where possible, and meeting clearly defined targets. The new Programme for Government does not commit to a specific overall target for the building of new homes. The Programme for Government does commit to using the Land Development Agency to boost the use of public land for social and affordable homes. This work must begin immediately to prevent a backslide in the number of homes being built over the coming term of Government. Given the scale of our housing crisis, consideration should be given to measures which would safeguard and prioritise **residential** construction to keep supply underway — similar to other essential supply lines — while the pandemic continues indefinitely.

¹⁰ Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government Quarterly Report for Q4 2019

Increasing the 10% provision of social housing is necessary to avoid an arrangement whereby only a small percentage of social housing is built on land that is publicly owned while we separately rely, through Part V, on social housing being built on land owned by private investors.

Social and Affordable homes

- › An increased budget allocation to the LDA should be made to ensure that it has the resources to ensure that a minimum of 15% social, 15% cost rental and 30% 'affordable for sale' be provided on all LDA land.

Buy-to-Let Properties in Arrears

There remains a large number of buy-to-let landlords who are in long-term arrears on their loans and who are essentially being taken out of the market as a result of decisions which took place several years ago. As of March 2020, there were 13,476 buy-to-let mortgages in arrears for over 90 days – accounting for 13.3% of all buy-to-let mortgages. The detailed statistics for repossessions and rent receivers give no clear insight onto the fate of the tenants, but with 5,180 properties currently with rent receivers, it is clear that a significant proportion of the 'withdrawal' of landlords can be explained by the policies related to the treatment of buy-to-let arrears.

Where the tenant in these buy-to-let properties are in receipt of HAP or Rent Supplement, the state is already essentially servicing the loan and the arrears problem relates to historical circumstances. In the current crisis for such tenants to be evicted, frequently into homelessness, and the property sold on the open market represents poor value for the exchequer. Where banks are taking repossession proceedings against properties where the tenant is in receipt of HAP/RS, the option of transferring the property to state ownership should be explored.

Buy-to-Let properties in arrears

- › Establish a fund to take into ownership buy-to-let units which are being repossessed due to landlord arrears and the tenant is already in receipt of HAP/RS and is at risk of homelessness.

Department of Children, Disability, Equality and Integration

Supporting children who are homeless with their families

There is a solid body of evidence that child support workers play a crucial role in mitigating the adverse impacts of homelessness on children. The integration of dedicated child support workers within a multi-disciplinary team was successfully piloted as part of the Government's Social Impact Bond initiative from 2013; the value of this work was recognised and additional posts were resourced through Tusla in Budget 2017, adding to the three workers who continued to be funded by HSE (Social Inclusion).

Child Support Workers

- › Allocate funding for four additional Child Support Workers in Tusla, to support to over 100 vulnerable children per year.

Focus Ireland services (in partnership with DRHE) are the largest provider of specialist support for family and children. Some children need this support to cope with the trauma of homelessness, either as a result of challenges they were facing before becoming homeless, or as a result of being homeless, or both. Not only do our child support workers help to address some of the detrimental impacts of homelessness, by extension, they help to reduce the pressure and stress on parents. This enables parents to engage much more fully both with supporting their children through a traumatic experience, as well as on the process of exiting homelessness. But there are not enough Child Support Workers in place, and there are a significant number of children with assessed needs who are unable to access childcare supports. Each Child Support Worker has a case load of about 20 children. Four additional workers, at an estimated cost of €280,000, could support over 100 vulnerable children per year. The best approach to the deployment of these workers should be considered in a review of family homeless services, as recommended above and by the Ombudsman for Children in *No Place Like Home*.

Family mediation for children and young people at risk of homelessness

A major longitudinal study into youth homelessness in Ireland¹¹ found that family dysfunction and conflict are significant drivers of youth homelessness: *“several decades of research have produced strong consensus on the role of the family environment – including experiences of conflict, abuse and/or violence in the family home – in pushing young people out of home”*.

However, in many instances (i.e. where there is no abuse or neglect) skilled family mediation can resolve the issues that caused the break, support reconciliation, and prevent or end homelessness. The research recommended the establishment of a family mediation service to prevent and address such cases of youth homelessness.

In 2016 Focus Ireland secured private funding to pilot a Family Mediation service, helping young people to return to their family home and supporting improved family relationships. The service has been so effective that Tusla has funded two Family Mediator posts within Focus Ireland’s Dublin services (and also directly employed the Mediator involved in the successful pilot). The effectiveness of this service can mean that a child often does not have to be taken into care, resulting in a considerable financial saving to the State and avoiding the long run consequences of experiencing homelessness at a young age. The social and financial benefits of this service are so clear that it should be rolled out to other vulnerable young people outside of Dublin as soon as possible.

Family Mediation

- › Resource three additional Family Mediators for Cork, Limerick and Waterford, at an estimated annual cost of €190,000.

¹¹ Mayock et al (2014) *Young People, Homelessness and Housing Exclusion*. Dublin: Focus Ireland.
<https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Mayock-Parker-and-Murphy-2014-Young-People-Homelessness-and-Housing-Exclusion-FULL-BOOK.pdf> at p182

Domestic violence

Focus Ireland research found that domestic or family violence was the declared cause of homelessness for 6% of families in emergency accommodation and may be a factor in a larger number of undeclared cases.¹² Women's Aid reports that on more than half the occasions in which they tried to find a refuge place for a woman and children escaping violence in 2019, all refuge spaces were full. A large number of women and children fleeing domestic violence are living in emergency homeless accommodation, where neither the physical accommodation or staff support are appropriate to their needs. Domestic violence has increased significantly during Covid-19 containment measures, with Gardaí reporting an 25% increase in domestic violence calls compared to the same time last year.¹³

This epidemic is visited on a system which was already deeply inadequate to the level of need. Ireland committed to developing a plan to expand the number of refuge places and to ensure geographical coverage — this is urgently needed. A plan to expand provision to the levels required by the Istanbul Convention, and ensuring geographic coverage, should be published at the earliest opportunity, and adequately funded.

A core element of this plan needs to be the delivery of a much more integrated response to homelessness and domestic violence – currently, women in refuges may not be receiving the same accommodation supports as they would in homeless services, while women living in homeless services may not be receiving adequate care and support in addressing the domestic violence they have experienced. It is critical that every person experiencing violence and abuse in their home knows that they will be able to find safe accommodation.

Domestic violence

- › Resource a planned expansion of domestic violence refuge spaces in line with Istanbul Convention requirements.
- › Resource a domestic violence homelessness taskforce to include cross-departmental decision-making capacity with the Departments of Housing and of Children.

Support vulnerable young people

The Programme for Government has committed to developing a Youth Homelessness Strategy, a welcome statement of the new Government's commitment to prioritising youth homelessness. Young people aged 18–24 who are homeless rarely have access to youth-specific emergency accommodation or supports, leaving them with little option but to rely on mainstream adult services, an option described as “one of the most significant contributors to ongoing or prolonged homelessness among young people”.

12 Long et al (2019) 'Family Homelessness in Dublin: Causes, Housing Histories, and Finding a Home'. *Insights into Family Homelessness*. Series 2019 | Vol.2 No.1. <https://www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/research/>

13 Oireachtas Library and Research Service (2020) *Domestic violence and Covid-19 in Ireland*. Available at: https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/libraryResearch/2020/2020-06-09_l-rs-note-domestic-violence-and-covid-19-in-ireland_en.pdf

Research on youth homelessness illustrates the extreme vulnerability of young people in mainstream adult homeless services, noting that *“problem behaviours, including substance use and criminal activity, invariably intensified subsequent to young people’s first contact with the homeless service system and, in particular, following their entry to adult systems of intervention”*. In contrast, those who had accessed supported temporary accommodation for young people reported more positive experiences, as they had access to support, typically re-engaged with education or training, and began to form trusting relationships with staff, particularly key workers.

Given the risks faced by young people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, it is critically important that they can access prevention and support services designed to meet their needs in their local communities. Children & Young People’s Services Committees are an appropriate structure through which to coordinate such support, but it is important that services are adequately resourced to be able to meet these needs.

Vulnerable young people

- › Resource Tusla to provide key workers for vulnerable young adults who are homeless and ensure that they can access the range of youth oriented and community based services they need, through Children and Young People’s Services Committees.

Support young people leaving state care

It is well established from national and international research that care experienced young people are at an increased risk of homelessness on reaching adulthood. Planning and resourcing aftercare can play a critical role in helping vulnerable young people avoid homelessness and establish independent lives. In this context, the government has made a welcome commitment to ensuring that every young person leaving state care who needs an aftercare worker should be allocated one.

However, in order to reach this laudable goal, the caseload of aftercare workers in some areas has been increased to a level where it is not possible to provide meaningful aftercare support, particularly to those young people with complex needs who are most vulnerable to homelessness. Focus Ireland aims to maintain a caseload of 15–20 young people per aftercare worker, in line with international best practice. However, funding constraints have forced us to operate a case load of 22–25.

In the case of aftercare services run directly by Tusla a caseload of up to 50 young people per aftercare worker is not uncommon. This is a false economy. Vulnerable young people leaving care need meaningful aftercare support to realise a sustainable and independent life. In the absence of such support, the risks of a life of social exclusion, with associated costs, are high.

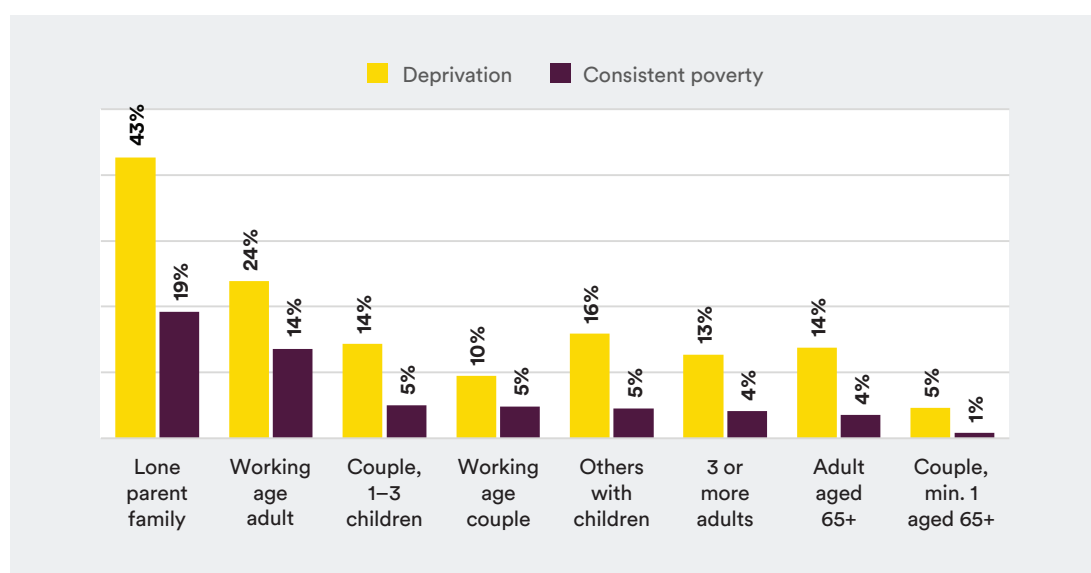
Aftercare workers

- › Resource Tusla to provide an aftercare worker for every 20 young people who need one in 2021, and one to every 18 by 2022.

Department of Social Protection

Income poverty leaves households more vulnerable to homelessness, for example, while lone parent families account for just 23% of families in Ireland, they comprise 57% of homeless families. In that context, a commitment to “protect core weekly social welfare rates” will not address the poverty and increased risk of homelessness faced by single adult households of working age: weekly social welfare payments are not sufficient to provide these households with a minimally adequate income, and they face the highest risk of poverty – whether the combined measure of consistent poverty, or in relation to deprivation.

Figure 2 · Poverty by household type, 2018



Significant increased costs in the private rented sector, which have not been reflected in the subsidies intended to make such rents affordable, “led to dramatic rises in the overall cost of a minimum essential standard of living for households unable to access social housing and a differential rent” (p.9). While good progress was made in transferring households with a long-term rent support need from Rent Supplement to the Housing Assistance Payment, it is likely that a significant number of households in the private rented sector who will face a short to medium term need for assistance with their housing costs. Rent Supplement will therefore play a key role in preventing an increase in homelessness as the economy recovers from the impact of the pandemic.

Rent Supplement

Recent ESRI analysis shows that renters are over-represented in the economic sectors most impacted by Covid-19 – for example, over 35% of those working in the accommodation and food sector were renting, and over a quarter of retail workers.¹⁴ These sectors, which are characterised by low-paid and precarious work, have a high share of young, migrant and women workers (including lone parents),¹⁵ and are also the sectors where recovery is likely to be slowest. These precarious workers face a high risk of homelessness as emergency measures are lifted; it is critical that policy anticipates and prevents this risk.

While the increase in Rent Supplement applications during the crisis has not been in line with receipt of PUP, the moratorium on evictions (and rent increases) as well as a general lack of awareness of the scheme are likely to be explanatory factors. Housing precarity is likely to rise in the sector as these measures are brought to an end.

To address the increased risk of homelessness, amendments to the Rent Supplement scheme introduced in response to Covid-19 have the potential to mitigate some of this risk. In particular, Focus Ireland recommends that in the short- to medium-term:

Short to Medium Term measures:

- › Tenants who have been renting for less than six months should remain eligible for Rent Supplement;
- › Tenants who do return to work may face reduced earnings; those who work more than 30 hours a week *and* who have reduced earnings should be eligible for Rent Supplement;
- › Immediate access for people fleeing domestic violence should be maintained permanently.

Rent Supplement

- › Retain eligibility for tenants who have been renting for less than six months.
- › Extend eligibility to employees working longer than 30 hours and whose earnings have been reduced.
- › Retain immediate access to rent support to people fleeing domestic violence on a permanent basis.
- › Align maximum rent limits with market rents, and review annually.

¹⁴ Roantree et al (2019) *Housing Assistance Payment: Potential impacts on financial incentives to work*. Working Paper no. 610

¹⁵ <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Issues-for-Covid-19-era-rent-supplement-in-context-of-a-High-Road-Back-to-Work-strategy.pdf>

Extend the Pandemic Income Supports for parents

The economy is re-opening in stages and people are being called back to work where possible. As the numbers in receipt of the PUP have declined, the largest declines have been among the 25–54 age group: the age group which are most likely to be parents.

But childcare is lagging behind. There are over 560,000 households which include children and where all the adults go out to work. Many of these parents will find it impossible to return to work because the childcare they need is not fully open. These parents are at risk of losing their jobs, and the income which has supported them to date. By 7th July, over 255,000 people in this age group were still reliant on the PUP.

We know that job losses put families at greater risk of homelessness. It is critical that the government acts to ensure that the employers of parents who are unable to access childcare remain flexible and keep those jobs open for their return, and in the meantime ensures that their entitlement to Pandemic Unemployment Payment (and the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme) is extended until they can access the childcare that will allow them return to work.

Pandemic Income Supports for parents

- › Extend eligibility for the Pandemic Unemployment Payment and/or the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme to parents unable to access the childcare they need to return to employment.
- › Issue guidelines requiring employers to remain flexible in relation to employees' care obligations, so that parents have a job to return to.

Focus Ireland is also calling for:

People of working age

- › Increase the personal rate of social welfare payments for people of working age from €203 to €210 per week.

Young people who are homeless

- › Include emergency homeless accommodation as a 'state housing support' to provide young people who have an agreed plan to exit homelessness with a full rate social welfare payment.

One parent families and homelessness

Lone parent families are disproportionately represented among families who are homeless: while lone parent families comprise 23% of all families in Ireland, the 670 lone parent families who were homeless in May represent 55% of all families in emergency homeless accommodation. Despite reforms to social protection arrangements for lone parent families, the rate of in-work poverty among lone parents has doubled in the five years since 2012,¹⁶ so that lone parents are five times more likely than other households to experience in-work poverty.

Focus Ireland welcomes the increase in the earned income disregard for lone parents to €165 in Budget 2020. In the absence of a significant and targeted increase in investment in the National Childcare Scheme to address the reduction in childcare subsidies for low-income parents, a significant increase in the earned income disregard is needed to prevent a further rise in poverty for this at-risk group; Focus Ireland recommends that the disregard be increased by €35 to €200.

One Parent Family Payment

- › In light of the reduction in childcare subsidies for low-income parents under the NCS, increase the earned income disregard for lone parents by €35 to €200.

¹⁶ SVP (2019) *Working, Parenting and Struggling? An analysis of the employment and living conditions of one parent families in Ireland*. <https://www.svp.ie/getattachment/6cd5834e-a8cf-48bf-b14c-82227aa5bc61/Working,-Parenting-and-Struggling-Full-Report.aspx>

Department of Health

Invest in health-related Homeless Services

The Programme for Government includes a number of welcome commitments to develop in-reach supports, step-down accommodation and inclusion-health services for people who are homeless. The health sector has been to the forefront during the Covid-19 pandemic, yet there are a number of legacy issues which continue to hinder the effectiveness of these services.

While there has been an increase in the HSE Social Inclusion funding for homeless services in recent years, this is almost entirely going into new services. While these services are very welcome, this does not address the now chronic underfunding of the pre-existing core services. There is an urgent need to increase the core funding levels from HSE social inclusion to homeless services in the 2021 budget, in order to properly implement the commitments made in the Programme for Government.

Clarity on funding lines for front-line homeless services is needed to ensure that adequate resources are available to fund local services. This is currently the subject of confusion as some local authorities are attempting to return to 2008 agreement that key workers should be funded by HSE (Social Inclusion). The HSE does not have the resources to deliver this, as all the budgetary increases in homeless expenditure in recent years has been channelled through the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and, so, to local government. Voluntary sector providers and local services are being left to negotiate the further of vital services in this departmental turf war and services are at considerable risk. This question is first and foremost one for national budgetary policy and it is unreasonable to put the services of the most vulnerable at risk due to a lack of clarity at national budgetary level.

Social Inclusion Funding

- › Increase HSE Social Inclusion funding for homeless related services by 8% in 2021.
- › Agree at Cabinet level which aspects of homeless services are to be funded by the HSE (Social Inclusion) and which by the DHPLG Section 10 funding, and provide adequate funding accordingly.

You can review our full Budget Submission at <https://www.focusireland.ie/>



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