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**Research Briefing No. 1**

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

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**Challenging  
homelessness.  
Changing lives.**

**FOCUS**  
Ireland

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## Research Briefing No. 1

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

## June 2019

This report is part of a wider body of research and policy analysis produced by Focus Ireland entitled *Insights into Family Homelessness Series*.

For full access to all publications see [www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/research/](http://www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/research/)

**Since 2014, the number of families experiencing homelessness in Ireland has grown rapidly. In May 2019, there were 1,700 families with 3,749 children living in emergency accommodation across Ireland.<sup>1</sup> While there is published monthly statistics on the numbers of those in emergency accommodation, less is known in what are the key drivers of this unprecedented increase in family homelessness.**

Therefore, in 2016, Focus Ireland embarked on a research initiative to determine the key drivers and dynamics of family homelessness in Dublin. The research team began to collect regular data on why families lost their last stable home in an effort to determine the root cause of homelessness in Dublin. It also captured families' housing histories, demographic profiles, and help seeking patterns of families living in emergency accommodation. This exercise was repeated on a quarterly basis to determine whether patterns changed or continued over time, culminating in eight separate reports as well as two summary reports which brought together 2016 and 2017 data.<sup>2</sup>

## What did we do?

The current report follows the same research design and methodology as the aforementioned studies but with *a larger sample of families* who are currently engaging with the Focus Ireland Family Homeless Action Team (HAT).<sup>3</sup> We administered surveys via telephone to a total of 237 families who were on the Focus Ireland Family HAT caseload. A strict research ethical protocol and procedure was adhered to which prioritised the needs of families at all times, and only consenting participants were invited to take part. This report was funded by Bord Gais Energy who also funds a range of Focus Ireland family homelessness prevention services.

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1 Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (2019) Homelessness Report May 2019.

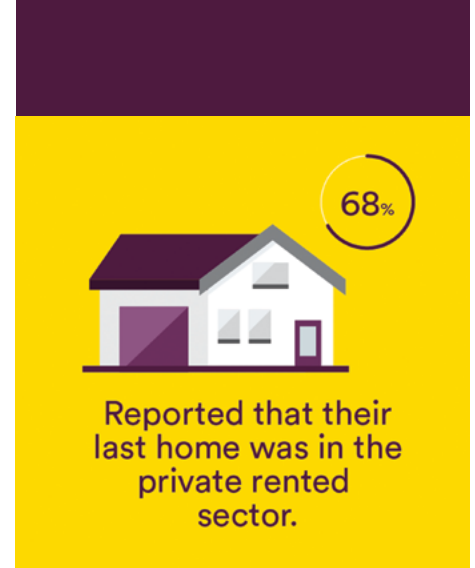
2 Gambi, et al. (2018) *Causes of Family Homelessness in Dublin Region during 2016 and 2017*. Dublin: Focus Ireland. Available: <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Gambi-Sheridan-and-Hoey-2018-Insights-into-Family-Homelessness-No-16-Causes-of-family-homelessness-in-the-Dublin-region-during-2016-and-2017-Final-2.pdf>

3 Focus Ireland Family HAT team provides case management to almost 500 families in Dublin. The service is funded by Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) with additional funding for child support from Tusla, the HSE, and the organisation's own fundraising.

## What did we find out?

### Most families had their last stable home in the private rental sector

68% of families (n=161) reported that their last stable home was in the private rental sector. While 22% (52%) had their last stable home with family or with a family member. All other types of accommodation accounted for the remaining 10% of families. Additionally, 60% of all respondents (n=142) were categorised as having *very stable housing histories*, i.e. they reported lengthy, stable tenancies and never reported homelessness or hidden homelessness in the past (i.e. sofa-surfing or living in overcrowded conditions).



### Property removal from market was a leading cause for leaving stable housing

36% (n=86) of respondents cited the property being removed from the market as their primary reason for leaving their last stable accommodation (most commonly due to the landlord selling); 22% (n=51) cited problems with private sector accommodation (predominantly affordability); while 30% (n=70) cited family circumstances (including domestic violence, and relationship breakdown).

### Just over half of respondents sought advice or information before presenting as homeless

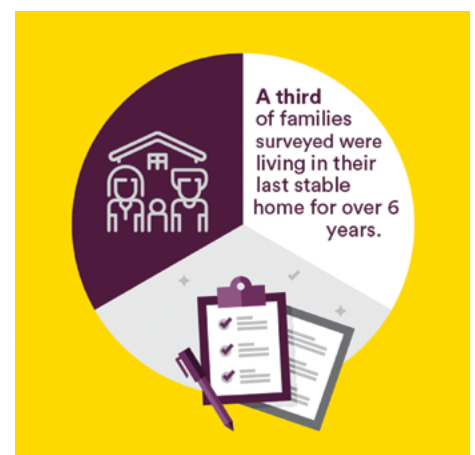
55% (n=130) of respondents sought assistance before presenting as homeless, primarily to their local authority, or services run by Focus Ireland or Threshold.

### The majority of respondents had applied to over 20 properties through HAP

Families were actively trying to exit homeless emergency accommodation. Respondents reported extreme difficulty finding properties under the HAP Scheme. 77% (n=183) of respondents had been actively looking for properties under Housing Assistance Payment Scheme. Of these, 61% (n=111) of those surveyed had applied to over 20 properties.

### Lone mothers and those born outside of Ireland were over-represented

Single mothers continue to face disproportionate risk to homelessness. 58% (n=137) of the survey respondents were lone-parents, of which 95% were female-headed. Furthermore, 56% of the respondents were originally from a country outside Ireland, of which 41% (n=97) were from outside the EU and 15% (n=35) were from EU country. Importantly, researchers found that 80% of the 'migrant' cohort reported *notably stable housing histories*. In this way, these migrant households (who are also disproportionately represented in the wider renter population) appear to be becoming homeless due to problems directly related to the private rented sector, such as landlords selling.



## Call to Action

This study yields a number of important implications for policy and service delivery:

- 1** The findings clearly demonstrate the urgent need for more effective measures to *prevent family homelessness*. Central to this is acknowledging that the key drivers of this worsening problem is rooted in the private rented sector with specific issues related to availability and affordability. The data also points to a need for expansion of homelessness prevention services or greater promotion of existing services to help families to avoid homelessness in the first place.
- 2** Local authorities must set *ambitious targets for building new social and public housing* – and must deliver on those targets. HAP must not be primary ‘social housing solution’ to the problem. This is clearly evidenced in the futile efforts among many families who try to exit homelessness through this channel.
- 3** Above all, this research emphasises the urgent need for the Government to publish a *dedicated Family Homelessness Strategy* to adequately address the needs of families facing a crisis in their housing. Within this, the importance of case managers to support families is integral to effectively support families.



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## Further Information

Full report is available here: <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>

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Focus Ireland would like to sincerely thank Bord Gáis Energy for funding this research. Our partnership with BGE focuses on two specific areas within Focus Ireland’s range of services: providing support to families who are homeless and preventing family homelessness. Our partnership also allows us to pursue research in this area.



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