

FOCUS
Ireland

**Family
homelessness
end of year
review 2017**

Wayne Stanley and Mike Allen

Challenging homelessness. Changing lives.

focusireland.ie

Family Homelessness

End of Year Review 2017

Wayne Stanley and Mike Allen, Focus Ireland Advocacy Team.

March 2018

1. Introduction

There was a continued deterioration in the homeless situation across the country, with record numbers of adults, families and children experiencing homelessness. By the end of the year there were 1,439 (20%) more people homeless than there had been at the start of the year.

Despite this overall deterioration, it is important to recognise the positive developments during the year. For instance, the total number of households which escaped homelessness through prevention or supported exits was greater than ever before and the quality of emergency accommodation provided to many families substantially increased with the introduction of Family Hubs.

This Review takes data from our own services along with published official data to present a picture of the complex changes behind the headline figures and to draw out some of the issues which require deeper consideration.

The main conclusions include:

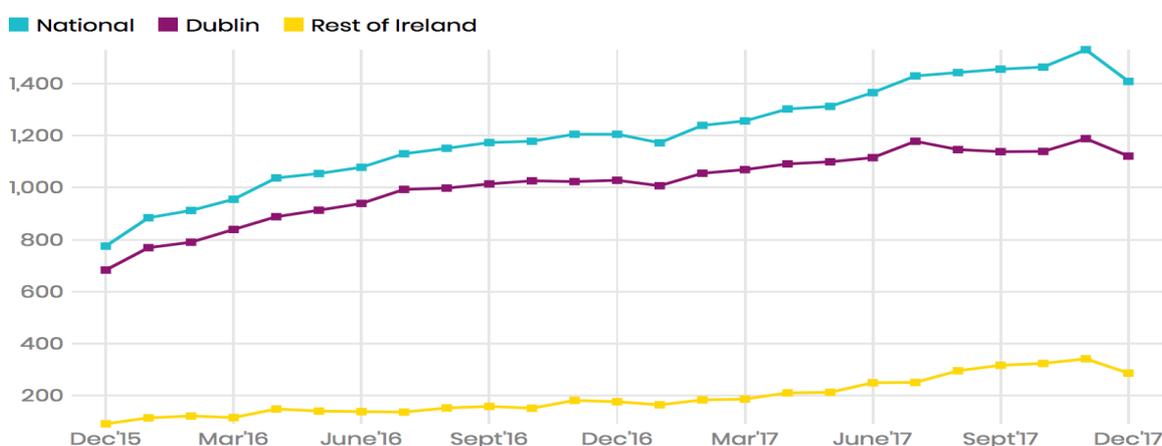
- The pattern of family homelessness continued to be different in Dublin to the rest of the country; with 2017 showing a severe deterioration outside of Dublin but a slowing down of the increase in Dublin.
- The rate of growth in family homelessness slowed significantly in Dublin during the second half of 2017, but this progress is precarious because the number of families becoming newly homeless continued to run at historically high rates.
- Homeless HAP made a significant contribution to ensuring that the rise in homelessness was curtailed to some degree with 33% of all move on from homelessness services and 88% of all rapid response prevention accommodation was secured using this housing subsidy. The shortage of available private rented accommodation poses serious questions as to whether the slowdown in family homelessness in Dublin can be sustained.
- The number of families becoming newly homeless is continuing to rise and continues to be driven by landlords evicting tenants to sell their property. Without structural changes to reduce this inflow into homelessness, it will be hard to make further progress in reducing total homelessness.
- The significant increase in family homelessness outside of Dublin during the year (62%) is a grave cause of concern, some of the measures successfully deployed in Dublin (e.g. HHAP, accommodation finders, case management) should be rolled out in other areas, and data collection needs to be upgraded to better understand causes.

- There is strong evidence that the increase in Rent Supplement/Homeless Assistance thresholds (RS/HAP) in June 2016 initially reduced the number of families becoming homeless, but the impact of this has now been eroded by increased rents.
- The growing number of families which have been homeless for extended periods of time is deeply concerning. These are likely to be the most vulnerable families, and require greater levels of support rather than punitive measures.

2. Changes in the number of families experiencing homelessness.

There were 203 more families experiencing homelessness in December 2017 than one year earlier (an increase of 17%). In the second half of the year, the rate of increase in family homelessness started to slow, but only in Dublin. This was seen by some commentators as the first indication of ‘turning the corner’ on homelessness, but deeper analysis suggests underlying pressures which raise grave risks that the trend of rising homelessness may return.

Figure 1: The number of families experiencing homelessness



Source: Department of Housing Planning and Local Government



While the underlying trend in family homelessness remains upwards, the rate at which it is rising slowed during the year. The 17% national increase in 2017 (203 families) compares favourably with the 55% increase the year before (430 families)¹.

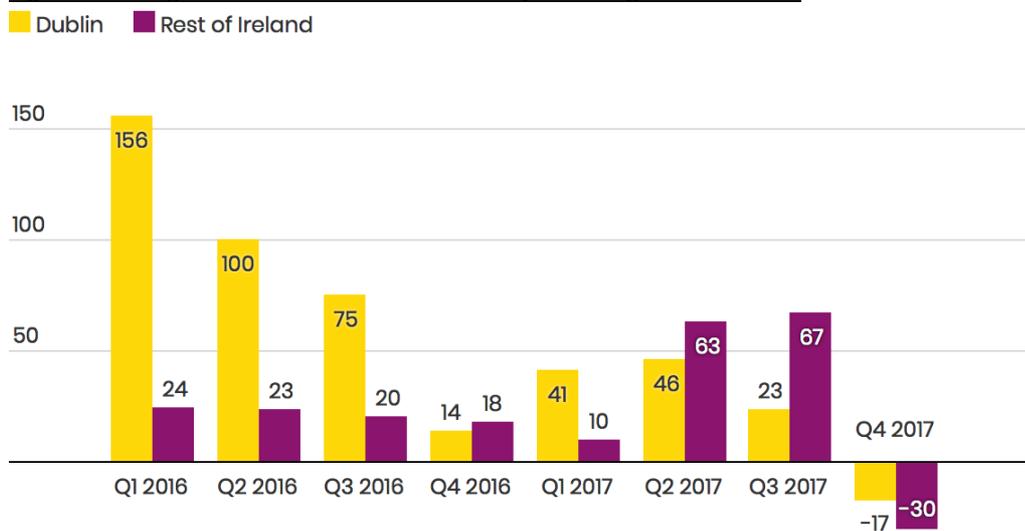
This reduced rate of increase is, however, driven by the pattern in Dublin. In Dublin, the rate of increase in 2017 was only 9%, compared to 50% in 2016. This is part of a longer term trend in which Dublin family homelessness has been increasing more slowly, the complex reasons behind this decline are explored below. Figure 2 shows that the monthly increase in homelessness in Dublin has been on a downward trend since the start of 2016. The second half of 2017 showed a small (0.5%) decline.

The majority of families that are homeless are in Dublin, so the Dublin pattern dominates the national picture. The pattern outside of Dublin is very different. Despite a striking sudden fall in the month of December 2017, there was a 62% increase in non-Dublin family homelessness over the

¹ From 775 families in December 2015 to 1205 in December 2016.

full year, albeit from a much lower base. Figure 2, despite the sudden fall in December 2017, suggests a continued upward pattern outside Dublin. For the first year ever, the numerical increase outside Dublin was higher (110 families) than in Dublin (93 families).

Figure 2: Changes in the number of families experiencing homelessness



Source: Department of Housing Planning and Local Government



There are three aspects of this pattern that deserve more detailed attention:

- Specific issues relating to the interpretation of the December figures
- The reasons behind the different pattern in Dublin and non-Dublin homelessness
- The pattern of flows into and out of homelessness

3. The problem of the November/December/January homeless figure.

This complex annual pattern of rises and falls over these three months raises the question of whether a year-on-year, December-to-December comparison might not fully reflect the overall annual pattern.

Since figures were first published in 2014, the data for November, December and January have shown a complex pattern which is distinct from the pattern during the rest of the year. At the end of 2015, December showed a 5% decrease in family homelessness, which was followed by the highest ever increase in January 2016. In December 2016, the number of families was unchanged from November, but the number actually fell in January 2017, before returning to its previous pattern of increase. Similarly the 8% decline in December 2017 was followed by a substantial increase in January 2018.

The table below illustrates the pattern over these three months – where a decline in homelessness occurs during this period each year, but the fall may happen in either December or January. In any case, such a fall has always been followed by a larger increase in the subsequent month.

Table 1: End of year trends 2015-2017

	Date	No. Families	Diff %	Date	No. Families	Diff %	Date	No. Families	Diff %
National	Nov'15	813	-	Dec'16	1205	-	Nov'17	1530	-
	Dec'15	775	-5%	Jan'17	1172	-3%	Dec'17	1408	-8%
	Jan'16	884	14%	Feb'17	1239	6%	Jan'18	1571	12
Dublin	Nov'15	705	-	Dec'16	1028	-	Nov'17	1188	-
	Dec'15	683	-3%	Jan'17	1007	-2%	Dec'17	1121	-6%
	Jan'16	769	13%	Feb'17	1055	5%	Jan'18	1191	6
Outside Dublin	Nov'15	108	-	Dec'16	177	-	Nov'17	342	-
	Dec'15	92	-15%	Jan'17	165	-7%	Dec'17	287	-16%
	Jan'16	115	25%	Feb'17	184	12%	Jan'18	380	32

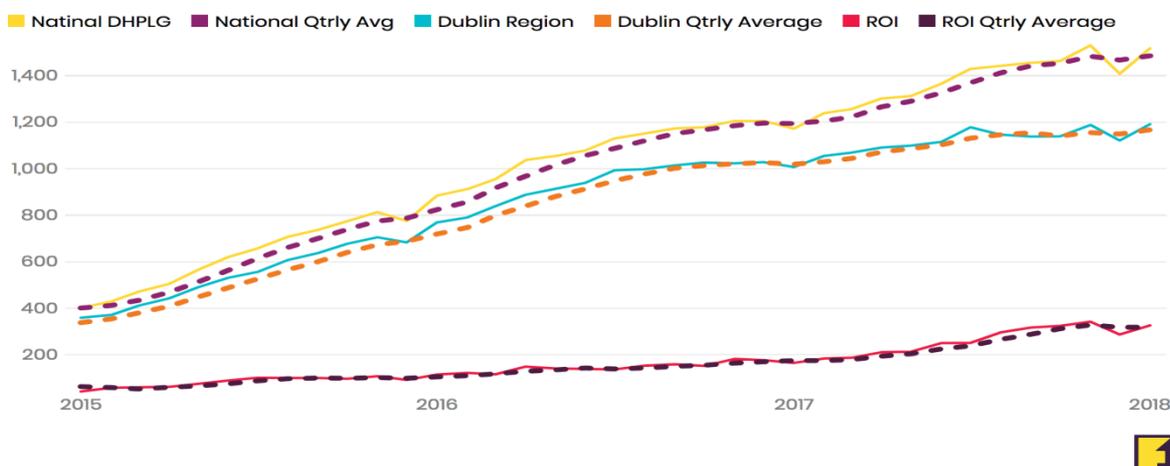
There are a number of factors behind this pattern. The number of families that are in homeless accommodation is, of course, depends on the balance between the families becoming homeless and the families exiting. There is a recurring annual pattern of lower inflows into homelessness in the month of December. Experience from the front-line suggest this may arise because landlords are less likely to evict during this period and extended family and friend networks have more capacity to provide support for short periods. In addition, a number of families leave homeless accommodation for short periods to stay with extended family or friends over Christmas. However these situations are not sustainable in the longer term and the families either enter homelessness or return to it after Christmas, resulting in the typical January spike.

The variation in the month in which this phenomenon appears in the statistics may relate to when the 'reference week', the week in which the number of families is collected, used to compile the figures fall in the run-up to Christmas.

For these reasons, the use of the December or January figures alone to assess trends should be approached with a degree of caution.

One means of reducing this end-of-year volatility in the data is to plot a rolling-three-month average. The averages displayed (shown in the broken line in figure 3 below) visually represent the overall trends of growth and avoid potentially misleading analysis based on predictable fluctuations.

Figure 3: Number of homeless families and rolling-3-month average



Increase in homelessness outside of Dublin

As noted above, homelessness is increasing at a slower rate in Dublin, while the rate of increase is continuing to rise in the rest of Ireland. The increase in families experiencing homelessness in Q3 of 2017 for the Rest of Ireland was equal to the total Rest of Ireland increase in Q1, Q2 and Q3 in 2016.

Even allowing for the significant decrease in December 2017, in the year from December 2016 to December 2017 the number of families experiencing homelessness in these 8 regions combined rose by 62%, albeit from a low base figure. (Table 2)

There are a number of potential explanations for this sudden and alarming increase in family homelessness outside Dublin, some of them relating to the way the figures are compiled.

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government data used for this analysis records the people who are accommodated in facilities paid for under Section 10 of the Housing Act, and therefore reported on the PASS database system. In the early stages of the family homelessness crisis a number of non-Dublin local authorities supported homeless families in facilities funded through other schemes (e.g. services funded by Tusla or the HSE). As provision has improved, families which were already 'homeless' have moved to new facilities (Family Hubs) which are funded by Section 10, and therefore they now appear in the 'official' homeless figures for the first time. A similar pattern may apply to families which had been 'hidden homeless' in unsuitable accommodation due to the shortage of funded emergency accommodation.

Table 2: Comparing No. of families experiencing homelessness by region Dec 2016 & Dec 2017

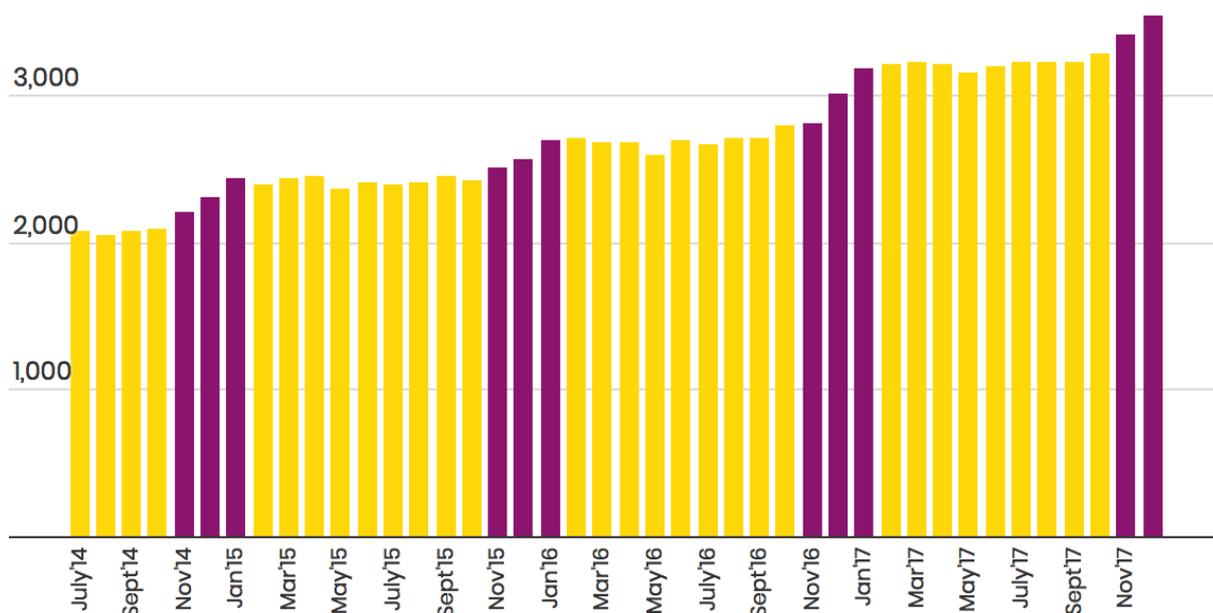
REGION	DEC'16	DEC'17	CHANGE	% CHANGE
MID-EAST	28	38	10	36%
MIDLANDS	13	19	6	46%
MID-WEST	39	64	25	64%
NORTH-EAST	18	32	14	78%
NORTH-WEST	1	2	1	100%
SOUTH-EAST	19	36	17	89%
SOUTH-WEST	38	57	19	50%
WEST	21	39	18	86%
TOTAL	177	287	110	62%



As an example the largest regional growth in family homelessness was in the Mid-West region where two family hubs have opened over the course of 2017. This would be similar to the well-recognised phenomenon in the Dublin region, where single persons homelessness rises in the DHPLG data as additional ‘cold weather’ beds allow people to move from sleeping rough (which is counted only every 6 months) into the section 10 funded ‘cold weather’ beds.

We know less about the circumstances of families outside the Dublin region as the issue has not seen the same level of investigation. Focus Ireland is able to obtain a comprehensive overview of some of the developments in family homelessness in Dublin because of our role as the Family Homeless Action Team, as designated by the DRHE. Neither Focus Ireland nor any other NGO has the same overview outside Dublin, and the non-Dublin regional authorities have not published the administrative data on inflows into homelessness or the reasons given for family homelessness.

Figure 4: No. of adults without dependents experiencing homelessness nationally (Nov-Jan highlighted)



Source: [Department of Housing Planning and Local Government](#)



However, it is likely that the pattern of delayed presentation to formal homeless services, which is evident in the Dublin region, is replicated outside Dublin. To this extent the rapid increase in non-Dublin homelessness may reflect the official figures ‘catching up’ with the reality, in which case we could expect the rise to slow down once the pent-up pressure is captured.

One the other hand, information on rising rents and availability of rental accommodation suggests that the factors that drove the increase in family homelessness in Dublin in 2015/16 (rising rents and evictions) are only now becoming apparent in other towns and cities. To the extent that this is the case, the official figures reflect an emerging reality, in which case we would expect to see a continued escalation of homelessness in an increasing number of towns and cities.

Publication of administrative data and research on this issue is urgently needed so that appropriate responses can be put in place.

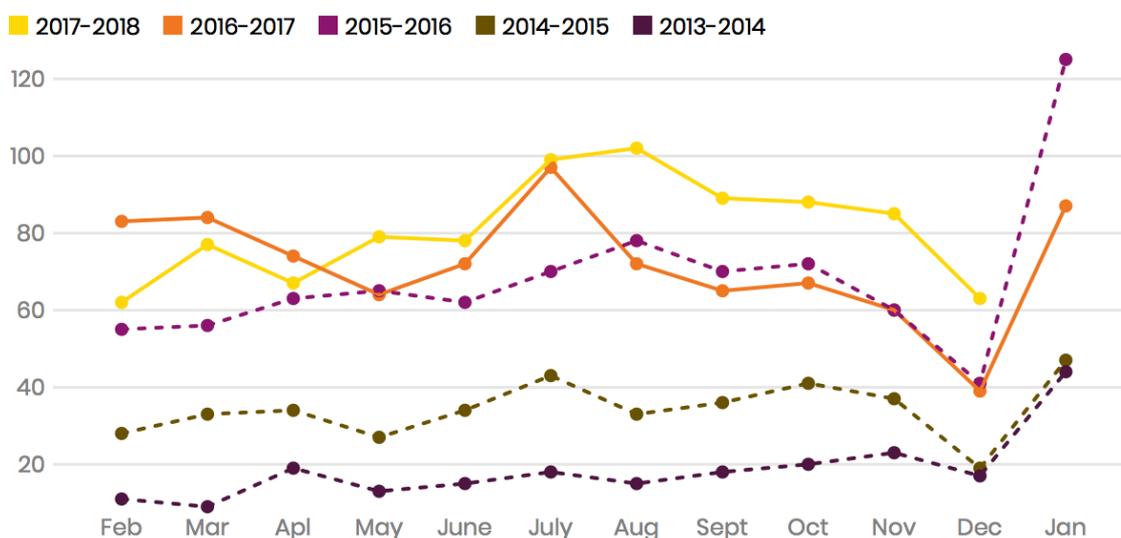
4. Entrances and exits from homelessness continuing to rise

2017 was an extraordinarily busy year for Focus Ireland services working with families experiencing homelessness as it undoubtedly was for all those on the front line. While the total number of families experiencing homelessness saw an increase of 203 (17%) in the Dublin region, a total of 976 families became newly homeless over this period, while a further 94 returned to homelessness².

With only one exception, from 2013 until August 2016, the number of families becoming homeless in each month was higher than the corresponding month in the previous year. From August 2016 until April 2017, this pattern was reversed, with the recent inflow being lower than the inflow for the corresponding month a year previously. From May 2017 the older pattern reasserted itself, and every month since has shown an increase on the previous year's inflow figure.

While it is not possible to conclusively name the reason for this the trend began in August 2016 following the increasing of rent supplement and Housing assistance payment (HAP) rates to bring them in line with market rents. The reversal of that trend seems to be occurring as rental inflation and decreasing supply has moved beyond the range of this increase.

Figure 5: The pattern & number of people becoming newly homeless in Dublin Region 2013-2017



NB: The 12 month cycle in this graph runs from February to January ie Feb 07 to Jan 08 to better illustrate the recurring patterns

Source: Focus Ireland

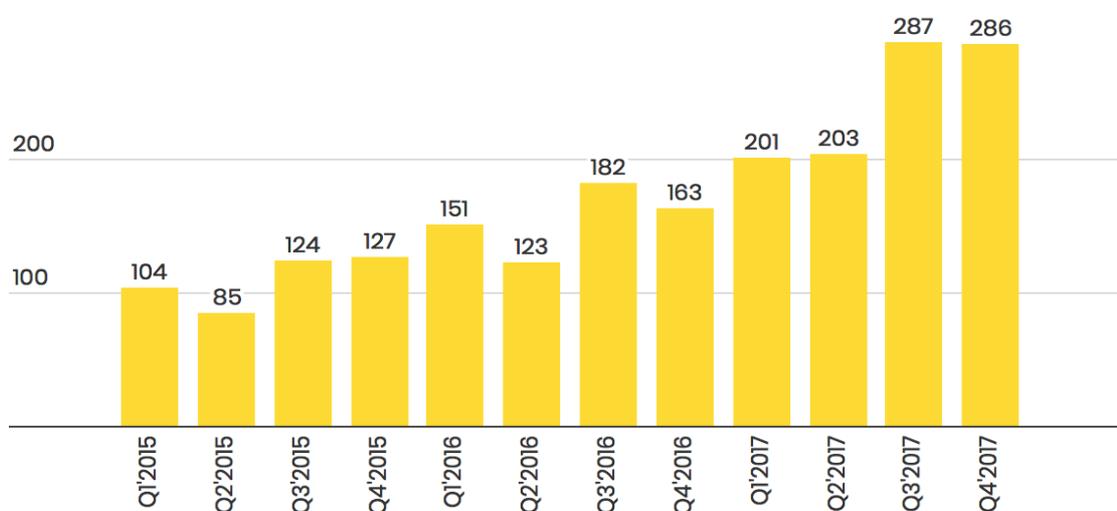


² To be counted as 'returning to homelessness' a family have been homeless in the last two years, have exited emergency accommodation for a period of weeks and returned to homelessness. The period out of homelessness may either be with wider family or in a new home. Focus Ireland is currently undertaking research on this phenomenon, and preliminary finding suggest that most 'returning' families exited to private rented accommodation but became homeless again due to the landlord selling up or moving in family members.

If the initial slowing down in the rate of increase in family homelessness relied heavily on a lower rate of inflow, the continued slow-down over the rest of 2017 relied on a rapid increase in exits – sufficient to cancel out the rising rate of inflow.

While accurate information on the number of families leaving homelessness is not available we are able to provide an estimated number for the Dublin region by subtracting the number of families entering homelessness in a given month from the change in the total number of families experience homelessness that month. The numbers are not directly comparable as one is the hard number of families that have entered homelessness and the total number of families is taken over a week. This derived number is set out as a quarterly figure in Figure 6 below³ and illustrates the expanding efforts of stakeholders to secure move-on accommodation.

Figure 6: Derived number of families exiting homelessness quarterly



These move-on numbers are derived by subtracting the change in the total number of families in a given qtr from the total number of families that entered homeless services in that month.



When we compare the total number of families exiting homelessness with Focus Ireland administrative data, we can see that, as the organisations designated as the Family Homeless Action Team by DRHE, Focus Ireland is responsible for supporting a large proportion of these families out of homelessness (see Table 3 below). We will continue to work closely with all other stakeholders to maintain and exceed these levels of successful move-on.

³ These derived exits are also not directly comparable with the exits data on the DRHE Quarterly Report, which shows 917 'move-ons to tenancies' for Q4 2107, compared to 286 here. The Quarterly report figure also includes families that received 'preventative Homeless HAP' and so were rehoused without ever entering homeless services. The QR figure also includes households with no children, though these seem to make up a very small number of move-ons.

Table 3: Quarterly derived exits and Focus Ireland supported exits

2017	Derived Exits	Focus Ireland Supported Exits	%
Q1	201	82	41%
Q2	203	120	59%
Q3	287	106	37%
Q4	286	119	42%
Total	977	427	44%



However, it is hard to see that a flattening off in the total number of homeless families in Dublin can be sustained on the basis of ever rising inflows being balanced by increased success in supporting exits. Families exit from homelessness either into social housing (either local authority or approved housing body accommodation) and private rented accommodation provided through the Homeless HAP. A review of Focus Ireland move-on found that almost 1 in 3 families supported to exit homelessness was supported using the private rental market with HHAP support, while the remaining 66% relied on some form of social housing. This is in line with the data provided to Dublin City Council SPC by the Dublin region homeless Executive⁴ which shows 37% of household move on from homeless accommodation was through Homeless HAP. It is notable that the DRHE Quarterly Report for Q4 2017, shows 60% of all households leaving homelessness moving to HAP tenancies⁵ but this figure also include tenancies arising from rapid re-housing preventative measures were HHAP accounts for 88% of cases.

All three of these forms of accommodation have proved increasingly difficult to secure and indications are that it will be difficult to ensure that the level of supply that was secured in 2017 can be maintained let alone significantly exceeded.

Government policy continues to be highly committed to the HAP scheme but recent reports from property website daft.ie has shown a private rental market with escalating rents and reducing availability⁶. Despite increased investment in the 'accommodation finders' service, operated by the DRHE with the support the NGOs, there is only a finite amount of private rented housing which can be accessed.

⁴ Gleeson E. (2018) *Homeless Update 2017: Report to Dublin City Council Housing SPC February 8th 2018*. Dublin Region Homeless Executive. Dublin. Available at: <https://www.dublincity.ie/councilmeetings/documents/s15972/4d.Housing%20Update%20Reports%20-%20Homeless%20Update.pdf> (Accessed 5th April 2018)

⁵ DRHE (2018) *Performance Report 2017 relating to the Protocol Governing Delegation of Section 10 Funding for Homeless Services to Dublin City Council Quarter 4 2017 and Year End 2017*. Dublin. DRHE. Available at: http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/performance_report_q4_2017_-_dublin.pdf (Accessed 5th April 2018)

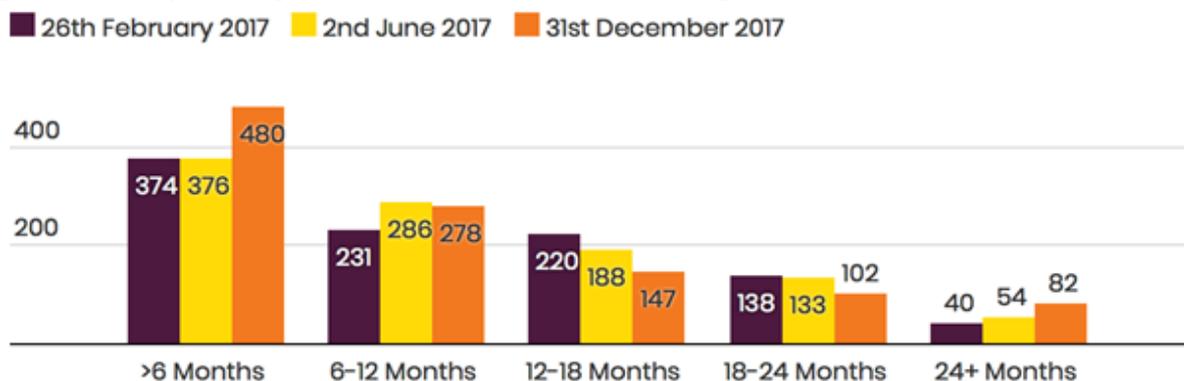
⁶ Lyons R. (2018) *The Daft.ie Rental Price Report An analysis of recent trends in the Irish rental market 2017 Q4*. Dublin: Daft.ie Available at: <https://www.daft.ie/report/2017-Q4-rental-price-daft-report.pdf> {Accessed: 5th April 2018}

The number of social housing units likely to be available for allocation in 2018 is expected to decline, while proposed changes in the ‘Scheme of Lettings’ currently being considered by Dublin City Council would effectively close off an exit into social housing for most families.

5. Who is getting left behind?

Despite the higher than ever exit rate from homelessness, the number of families homeless for more than two years continues to rise (figure 7).

Figure 7: Time experiencing homelessness for families in Dublin Region



This graph tracks the changes in the duration of homelessness of families experiencing homelessness on given dates. Sourced from Questions submitted by Dublin City Councillor and Quarter 4 report from the Dublin Region Homeless Executive

Source: Dublin Region Homeless Executive



A Focus Ireland review⁷ of the pattern of families moving out of or remaining in emergency accommodation, indicated that families that the most insecure pattern of housing prior to becoming homeless are the ones which are most likely to remain in homelessness in the longer term. This suggests that families which have higher levels of social challenges and are most vulnerable are the ones who are finding it hardest to exit homelessness. This is not a surprising finding, but requires some reflection as to what is the best policy response. The current proposal from Dublin City Council to close off the option of social housing for these families does not appear to be in their best interest and is likely to have long-term consequences for them and their children.

6. The impact of homeless prevention and rapid re-housing

In the context of the increasing pressure on move-on options the efforts being made to stem the flow of families into homelessness are critical. There have been significant initiatives that have been put in place. The Tenancy protection services provide through Threshold and efforts by DRHE to utilise HAP for those presenting at risk of homelessness have had significant success in preventing families from entering homelessness.

⁷ Sheridan, S. (Forthcoming) *Families Exiting Homelessness: Analysis of March 2016 Telephone Survey Cohort*

However it remains the case that many families are not aware of the supports that are available to them. In 2016 Focus Ireland ran a pilot prevention programme in Dublin 15, in which, with Department of Social Protection support, 2,500 families on Rent Supplement were proactively targeted with information and support. Preliminary analysis of this indicates that homelessness may have been averted in a significant number of cases.⁸ We are currently working with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to run a second project like this targeting those who are possibly more at risk of experiencing homelessness due to the current housing crisis.

However the largest single push factor into homelessness remains families being evicted into homelessness from the private rental sector where landlords are selling up. In such instances, the pre-qualification for Homeless HAP scheme operated by the Dublin local authorities is of extreme importance. Under this scheme, families which can show that they have been issued with a valid Notice of Termination are approved for HHAP without having to first enter homeless services, and in three of the Dublin local authorities are also given priority for social housing. While the reporting of this programme makes it hard to get a clear idea of numbers, it appears that total number of 817 families benefited from this scheme in 2017, a minimum of 650 (80%) of them getting new private rented tenancies using HHAP. The scale of numbers availing of HHAP in this scheme (in fact higher than the number availing HHAP to exit homelessness) gives a further indication of the extent to which current trends are reliant on continued availability of private rented supply – and the fragility of this.

There is also a small number of families who have never been in the housing market and cannot get access to it presenting to local authorities as they are experiencing homelessness. This cohort has appeared in the last two insight surveys.

While it was only a small number, 1 family in the last available survey in June 2017⁹ and 5 families in the previous survey March 2017¹⁰. It is a noted change in the presenting demographic of family homelessness and it is important that we work to understand the needs and best preventative responses to meet the needs of these families.

7. Conclusion

The slowing down in the rate of growth in family homelessness during 2017 reflects a massive commitment of effort and resources by a wide range of voluntary sector and state sector

⁸ Focus Ireland (2017) Results of a pilot project to prevent family homelessness in Dublin 15. Dublin: Focus Ireland. Available at: <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/D15-Homeless-Prevention-Campaign-Report-Final-2017.pdf> (Accessed 5th April 2018)

⁹ Hoey D, Sheridan S. (2017) Insights into Family Homelessness No. 11. Survey of Families that became homeless in June 2017. Dublin: Focus Ireland Available at: <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Insights-into-Family-Homelessness-No-11-Families-who-presented-as-Homeless-during-June-2017-FINAL.pdf> (Accessed 5th April 2018)

¹⁰ Sheridan S. (2017) Insights into Family Homelessness No. 10. Survey of Families that became homeless in March 2017. Dublin: Focus Ireland Available at: <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Sheridan-2017-Insights-into-Family-Homelessness-No-10-Families-who-Presented-as-Homeless-during-March-2017.pdf> (Accessed 5th April 2018)

organisations, and a lot of commitment from the families themselves. To achieve this outcome in the context rising inflows into homelessness in the second half of 2017 is even more remarkable.

While there are positive signs that there will be an increased supply of new social housing in the medium term, it is certain that housing and homeless policy will have to operate in the context of severely inadequate supply for the next number of years. In this context, it is doubtful whether this level of effort on the front-line is sustainable without greater attention to structural issues at a policy level.

In particular the number of buy-to-let mortgages that are in arrears remains very high with 13,099 of these more than 720 days in arrears¹¹. Without changes in the rights of tenants in such circumstances, it is hard to see how a further increased flow into homelessness can be avoided. Similarly the failure to increase the level of Rent Supplement/HAP levels to match, at the very least, the 4% rent increases allowed to landlords appears to ignore the positive impact the previous increase in levels in April 2016.

The proposals from Dublin City Council to effectively close off the exit route of social housing for homeless families, in parallel with the reduced number of private sector rentals on the market would have the inevitable impact of pushing up the numbers of families that are homeless, with the well known social and economic costs.

The growth in the number of families in excess of 24 months in homelessness in the Dublin should be one of the key indicators of concern. There must be an imperative on the state to ensure that housing options and any necessary supports are put in place to facilitate them to move to independent living. In addition given the growth in family homelessness in the rest of Ireland there is a growing need for a greater publication of data about the causal factors and duration of family homelessness beyond the Dublin region, and a roll out of policies which have been successful in Dublin (such as Homeless HAP, and pre-qualification for HHAP) to other major towns and cities.

¹¹ Central Bank (2018) Credit and Banking Statistics: Mortgage Arrears. Central Bank, Dublin. Available at: <https://www.centralbank.ie/statistics/data-and-analysis/credit-and-banking-statistics/mortgage-arrears> (Accessed 5th April 2018)

Focus Ireland
Head Office
9-12 High Street
Christchurch
Dublin 8

Tel 01 881 5900
LoCall 1850 204 205
Fax 01 881 5950
Email info@focusireland.ie
focusireland.ie

Registered charity
CHY 7220

Challenging homelessness. Changing lives.
focusireland.ie

FOCUS
Ireland