

A stylized, dark purple house icon with a gabled roof, a large arched doorway, and a window with four panes. The house is set against a dark purple background.

Focus on Homelessness

Adult-Only Households

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Challenging homelessness. Changing lives.

FOCUS
Ireland

Introduction

This edition of Focus on Homelessness looks in detail at the trends in homelessness among households composed of either a single adult individual or a couple without accompanying children. These households are often referred to simply as ‘single homeless adults’, but the term ‘adult-only households’ more accurately describes the existence of couples in this category.

The trend of rapid increases in the number of households experiencing homelessness since 2014 slowed in 2020, with different patterns emerging for different forms of household. There have been significant reductions in the number of families (adults with accompanying child dependents) in local authority-managed emergency accommodation on a monthly basis during 2020. However, the number of adult-only households experiencing homelessness has not followed this trend, and has continued to increase.

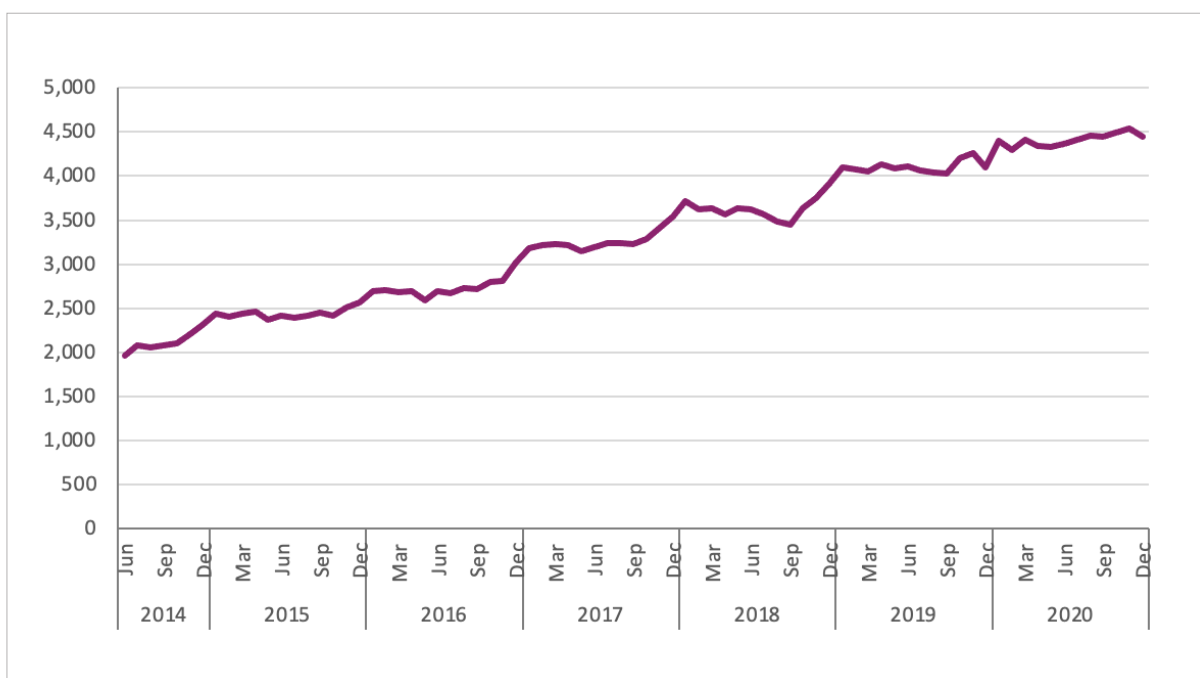
By December 2020, over two-thirds of households in emergency accommodation were adult-only households, composed of either single adult individuals or couples without accompanying children.

The Monthly Reports published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on the number and characteristics of households accessing local authority-managed emergency accommodation do not provide a figure for adult-only households. However, in addition to providing data on the total number of adults in such accommodation, they provide data on the total number of adults with accompanying child dependents. The total number of adults with accompanying child dependents is subtracted from the total number of adults to produce the figure for ‘adult-only households’ in this report: that is the number of unique adults who are either single or part of a couple with no accompanying child dependents.

In terms of the division of adult-only households by gender, two assumptions are made here for the purpose of this calculation based on existing information. Firstly, that all couples with accompanying child dependants are heterosexual couples, and secondly that 93% of single-parent households are female headed. A figure is calculated for both categories each month and then subtracted from the total number of female/male adults to generate the figure used in this report for female/male adult-only households. Thus there is a margin of error associated with the gender breakdown, as in any given month not all couples in emergency accommodation may be heterosexual and the percent of single parents that are female headed may also vary, but this is likely to be minor.

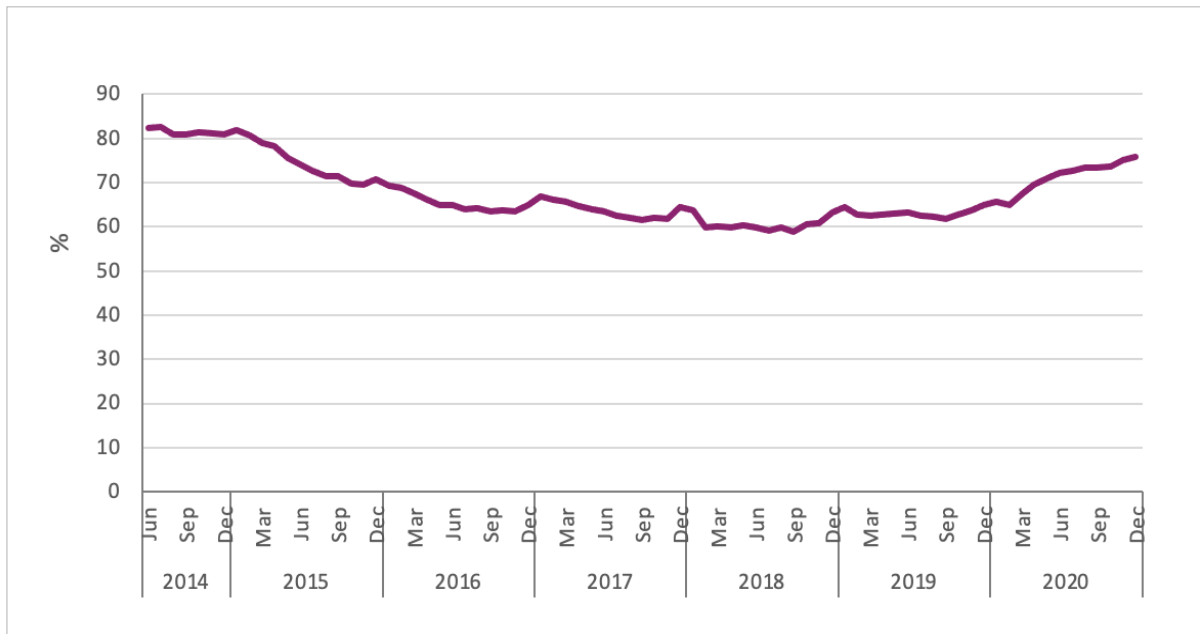
Adult-Only Households

Figure 1: Adult-Only Households in Temporary and Emergency Accommodation, 2014—2020



As shown in Figure 1, as of December 2020 there were 4,447 adult-only households in Local Authority managed emergency accommodation in Ireland. This is a slight decrease on October’s peak of 4,495, the highest number to date. This is an increase of 127% since June 2014, when there were 1,962 adult-only households in emergency accommodation.

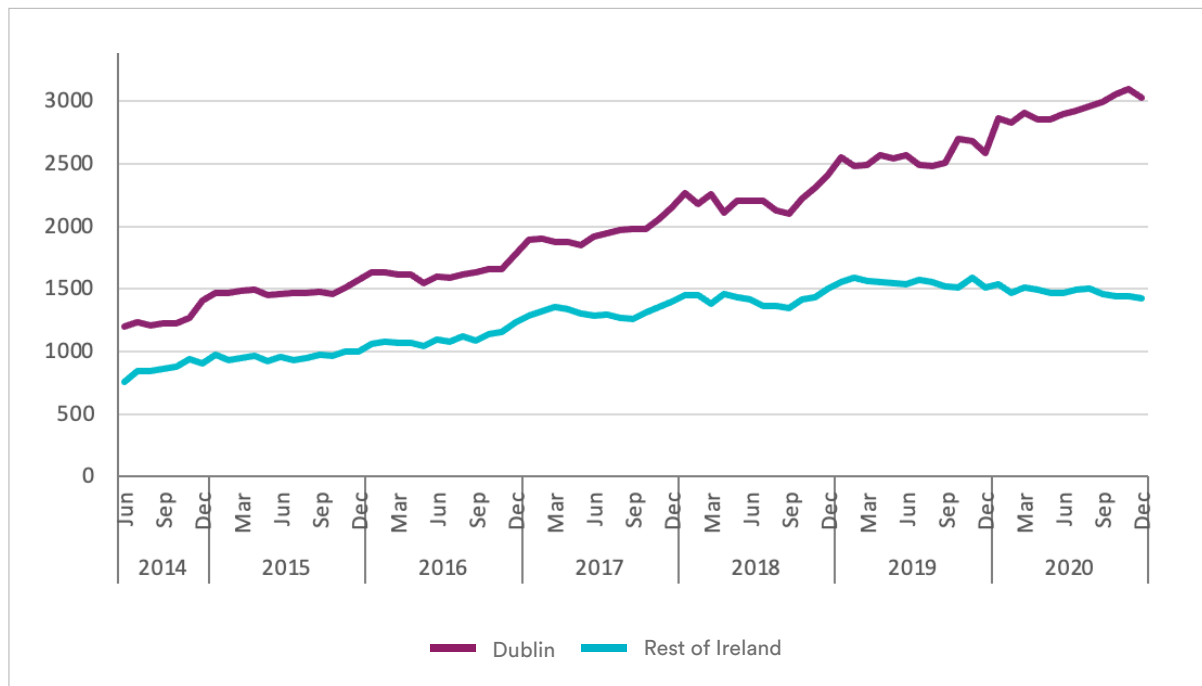
Figure 2: Adult-Only Households in Temporary and Emergency Accommodation as a % of all Adult Homelessness



Given the decline in family homelessness in 2020, adult-only households now make up an increasingly large percentage of all homeless adults, as shown in Figure 2. When the publication of the Monthly Reports commenced in 2014, in excess of 80% of households in emergency accommodation were adult-only. Although the number of such households continued to increase over the period 2015-2019 as shown in Figure 1, the number of households with accompanying child dependents in emergency accommodation increased at a faster rate over the same period, and by September 2018, just under 60% of households in emergency accommodation were adult-only.

During 2018 – 2019, an average of 61% of homeless adults were in adult-only households. By the end of 2020, due to both the ongoing increase in the number of adult-only households and a decline in the number of households with accompanying child dependents, over three-quarters of households in emergency accommodation were adult-only.

Figure 3: Adult-Only Households, Dublin and the Rest of Ireland



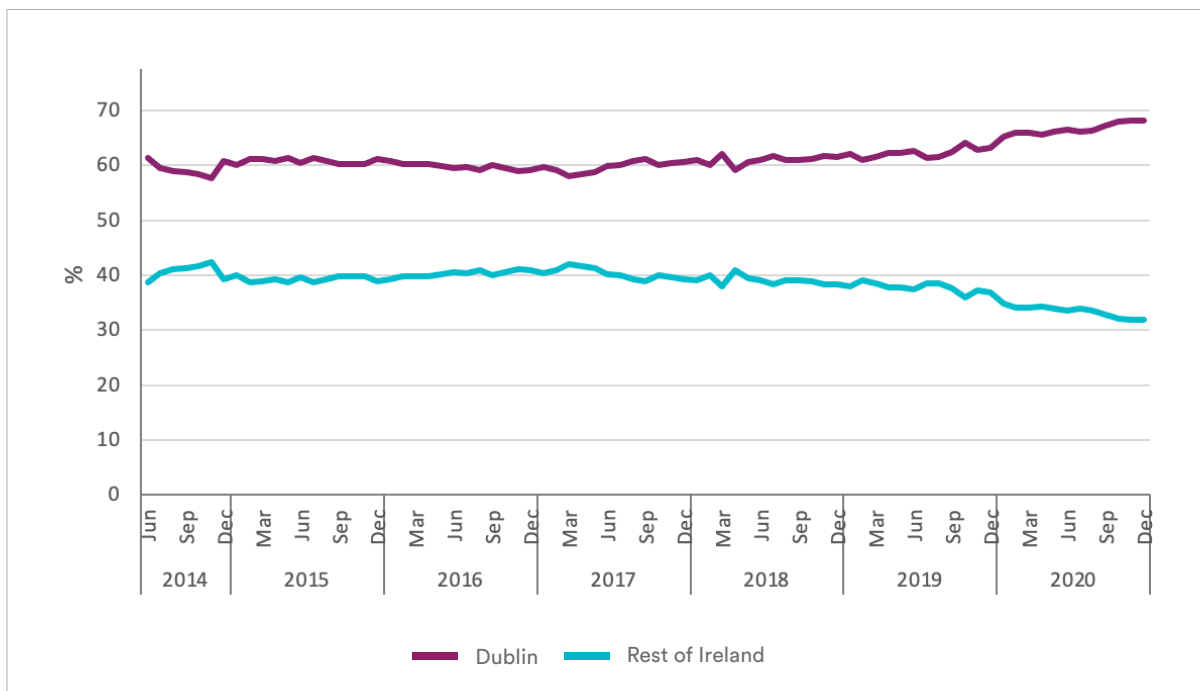
While the number of adult-only households is rising nationally, this rise is exclusively driven by Dublin, as shown in Figure 3. The number of adult-only households increased by 6% during 2020 in Dublin, but fell by 7.5% in the rest of the country.

Outside of Dublin, the number of adult-only households in homelessness has plateaued since the start of 2019, remaining at approximately 1,500 households each month in 2019. The number of adult-only households outside of Dublin is now at its lowest level since October 2018, at 1,420.

However, this overall trend does conceal considerable variation around the rest of the country when further broken down by region. There have been significant declines over the past two years in adult-only households in the South East (Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford) and West (Galway, Mayo and Roscommon), and significant increases over roughly the same period in the South-West (Cork and Kerry) and Mid-East (Kildare, Meath and Wicklow).¹

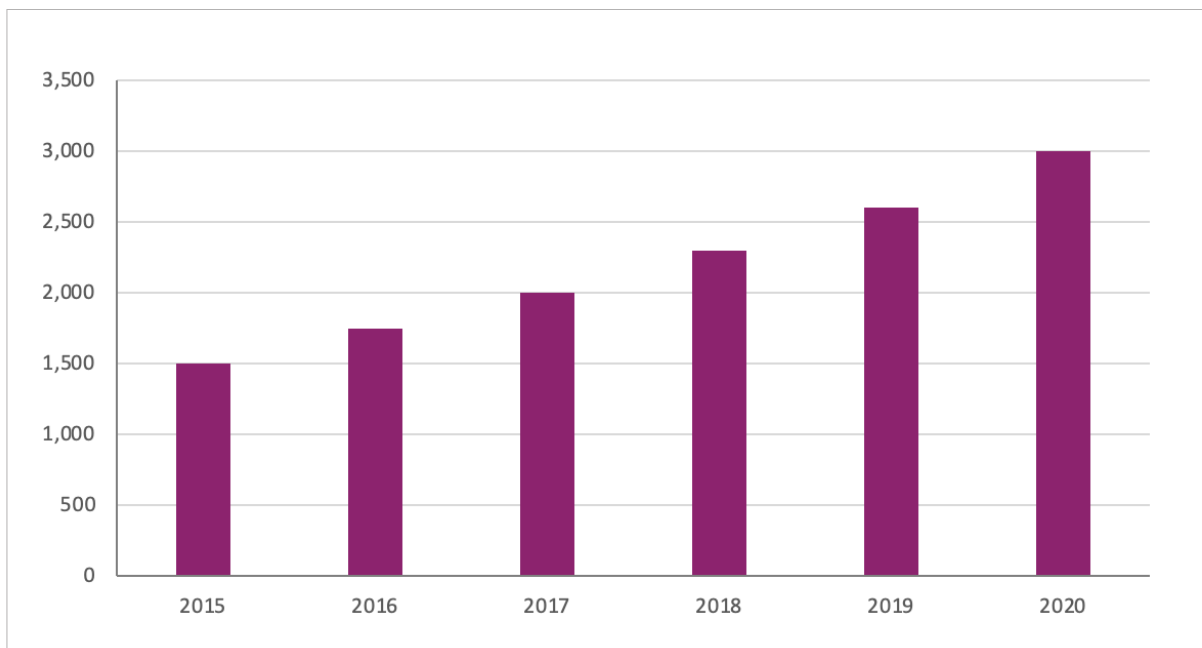
¹A detailed analysis of the regional variations in the use of local authority emergency accommodation is the subject of a forthcoming Focus on Homelessness Report, to be published in Spring 2021.

Figure 4: Adult-Only Households, Percentage Distribution



Dublin now accounts for almost 70% of all adult-only households in local authority managed emergency accommodation, as shown in Figure 4. The percentage distribution of these households remained fairly steady from 2014 to 2018, with a 60-40 split between Dublin and the rest of the country. Figure 4 shows the divergence in the percentage distribution from 2019 as the numbers in Dublin began to increase.

Figure 5: Number of Emergency Accommodation Beds for ‘Singles’ in Dublin, 2015—2020



As shown in Figure 5, the number of beds for ‘singles’ (i.e. adult-only households) in Dublin has doubled in the past five years to 3,000, to provide for the growing number of adult-only households requiring emergency accommodation.

Figure 6: Adult-Only Households by Gender

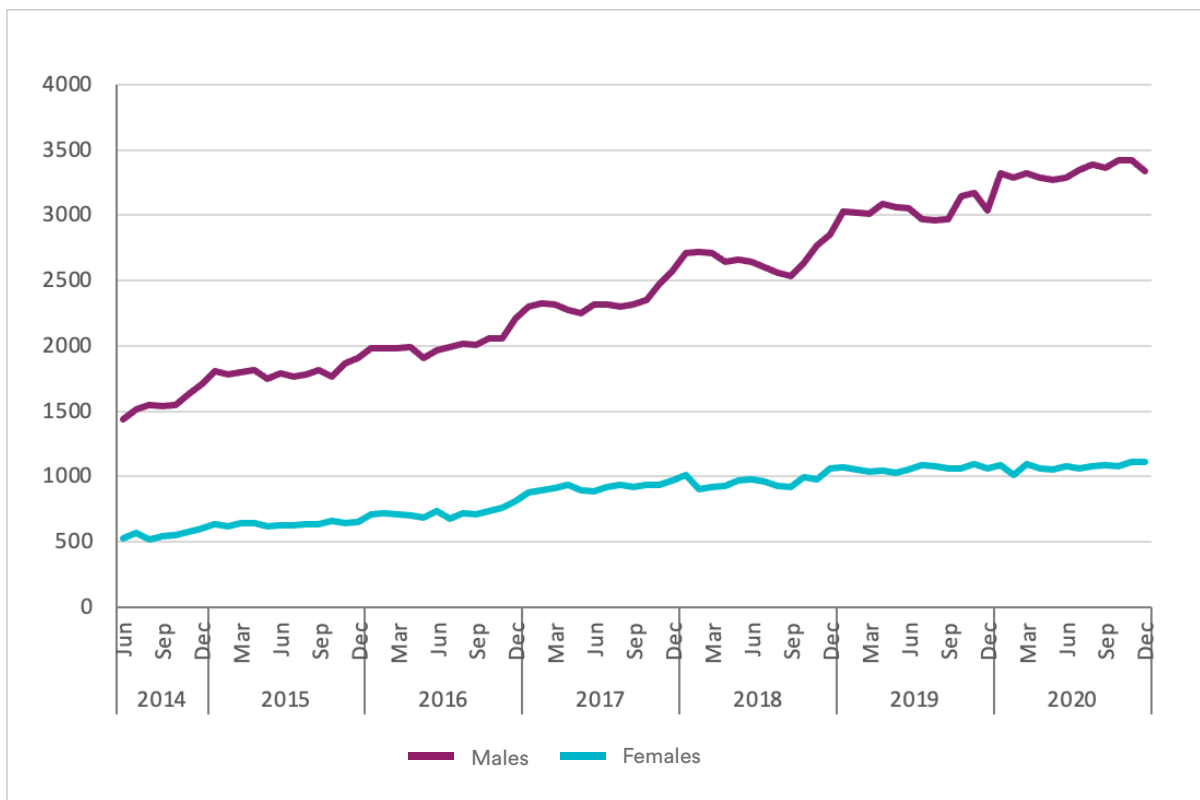
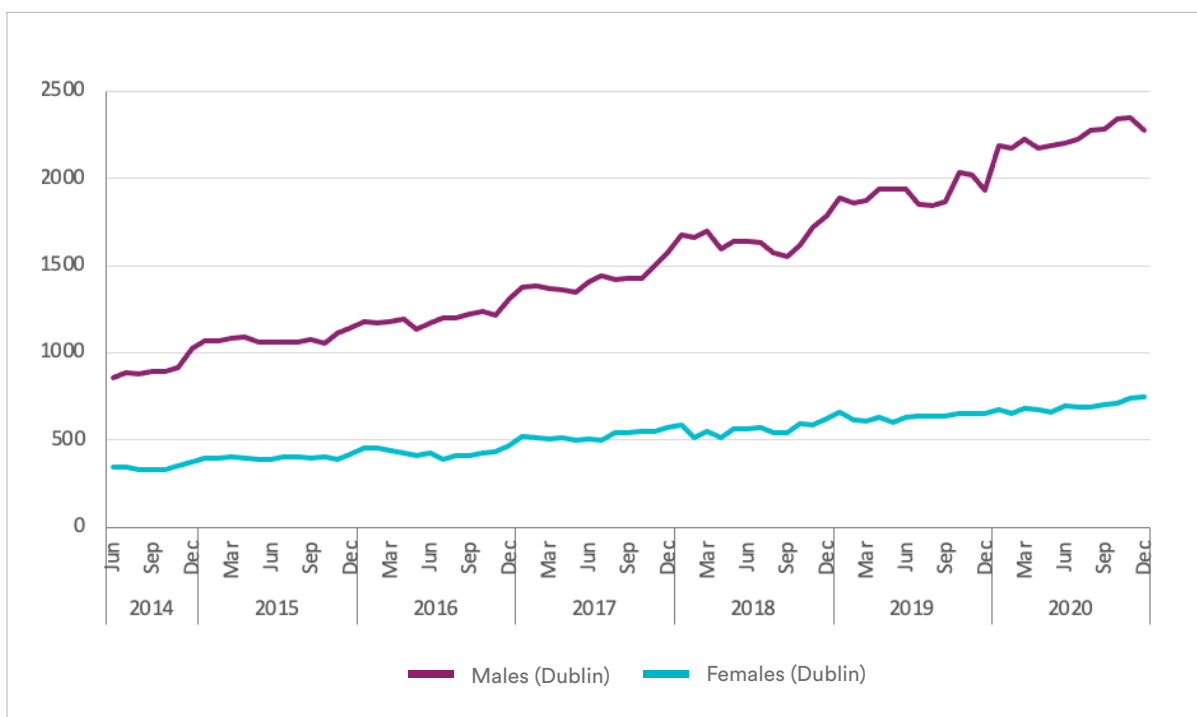


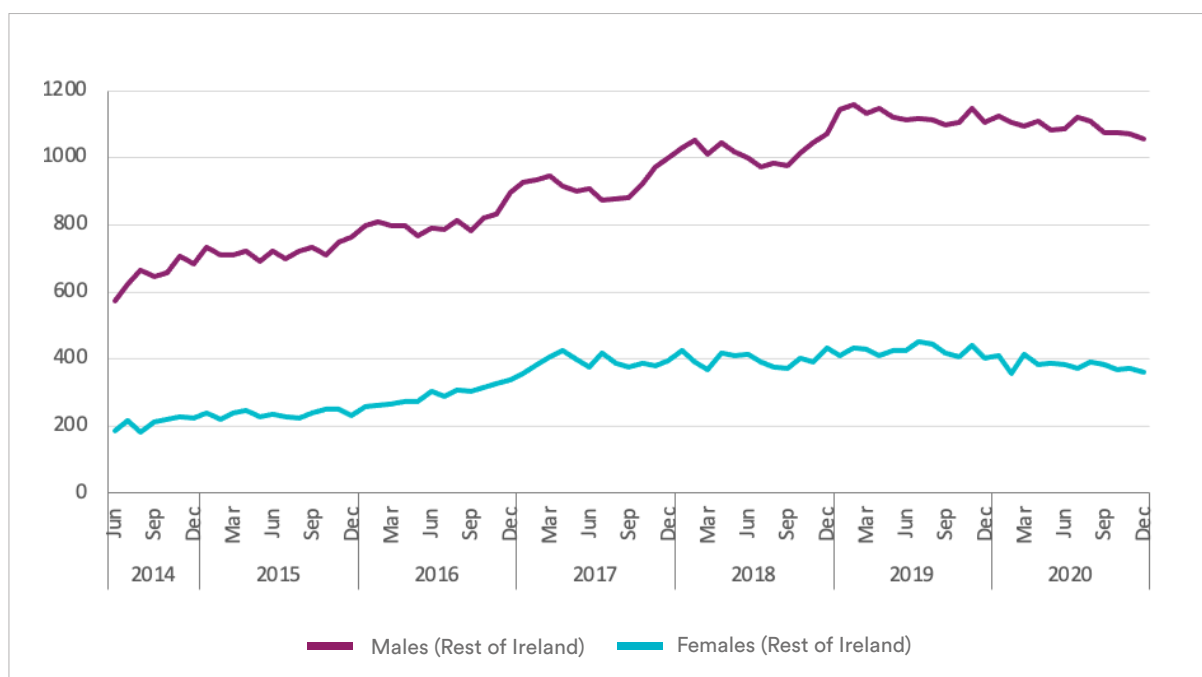
Figure 6 shows that the rise in adult-only households in local authority managed emergency accommodation has been predominantly male, reaching a peak at nearly 3,500 men in October 2020, compared to around 1,000 women. The number of women in adult-only households in Ireland has risen by 110% since June 2014, but this has plateaued in 2019 and 2020. The number of men has increased by 133% since June 2014, continuing to increase throughout 2020. Three-quarters of those in adult-only homeless households are now men.

Figure 7: Adult-Only Households by Gender, Dublin



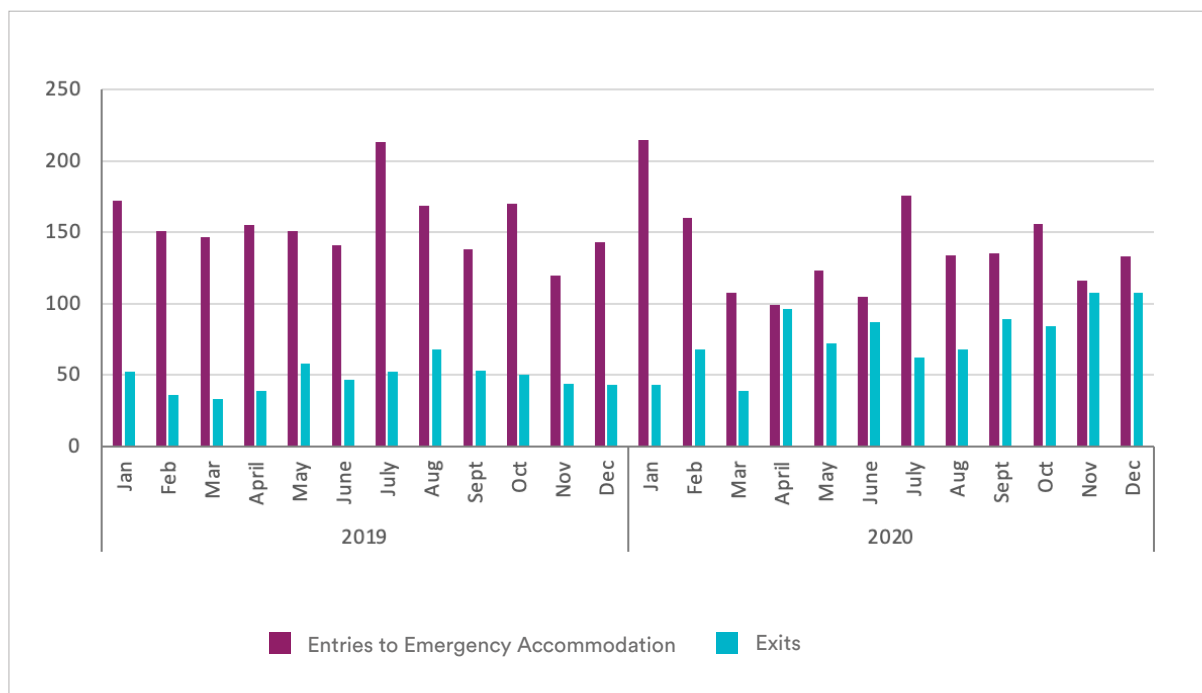
In Dublin, there are over three times as many men in homeless adult-only households as there are women, as shown in Figure 7. In total, there are now over 3,000 adults in adult-only households in Dublin, of which 75% (2,278) are males.

Figure 8: Adult-Only Households by Gender, Rest of Ireland



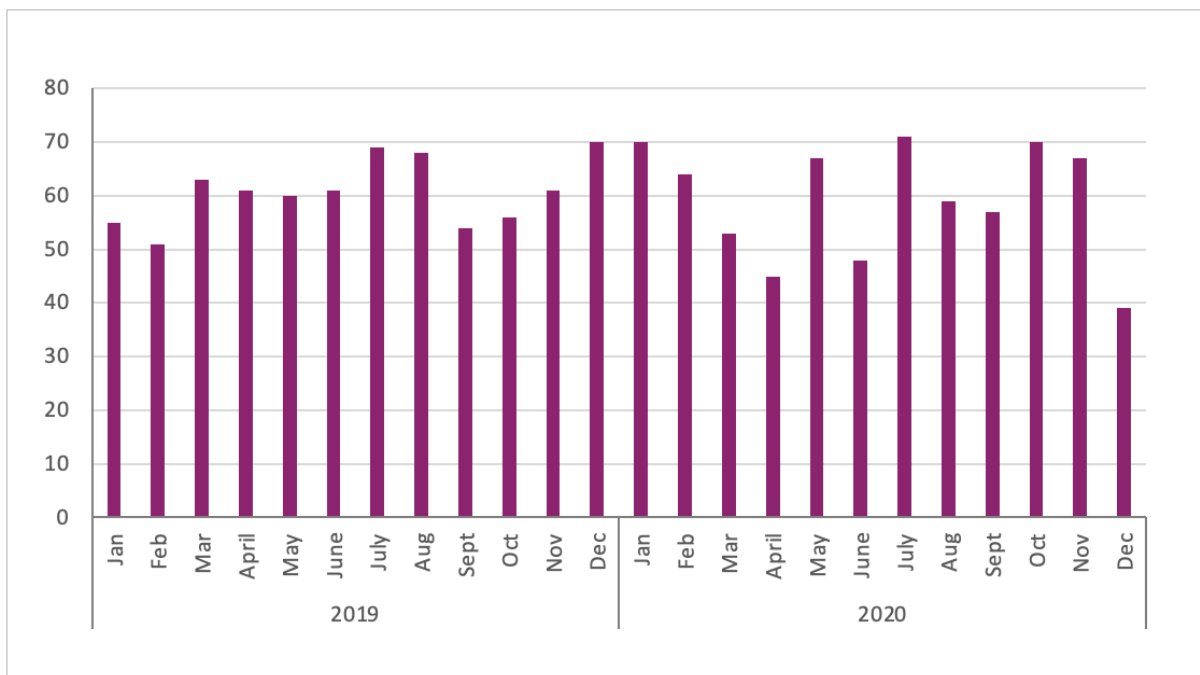
While there are far fewer adult-only households in local authority-managed emergency accommodation outside of Dublin, the ratio of men to women remains similar to that in Dublin. On average, just over a quarter of the approximately 1,500 adults outside of Dublin in adult-only households are women. As noted above however, this overall pattern does conceal some notable regional variations.

Figure 9: Adult-Only Households: Entries to and Exits from Emergency Accommodation in Dublin, 2019—2020



In 2019, 1,870 adult-only households entered emergency accommodation in Dublin (the only region where detailed published data is available), 11% less than the 1,660 entries in 2020. In 2020, there were 924 exits from emergency accommodation for adult-only households, which is 61% higher than the 2019 total of 575.

Figure 10: Adult-Only Preventions in Dublin



The number of adult-only households who presented to Local Authorities but were diverted from entering Emergency Accommodation in Dublin is shown above in Figure 10. Both 2019 and 2020 saw an average of 60 adult-only households prevented from entering emergency accommodation each month through securing private rented accommodation with the assistance of a Homeless Housing Assistance Payment (HHAP).

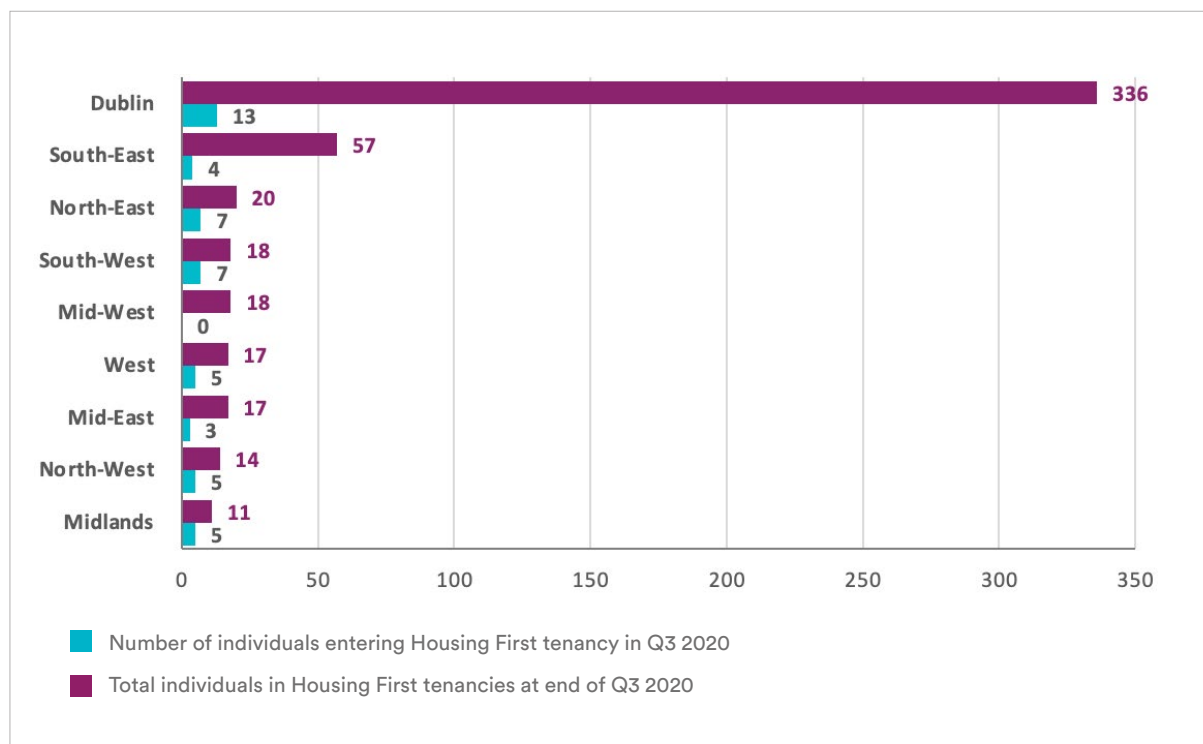
Context

Analysis of the reasons for the continued rise in homelessness among adult-only households, as distinct from the fall in households with children, is beyond the scope of Focus on Homelessness. However, it is useful to publish here information available from other sources which provides some further information on homelessness among adult-only households. These sources include:

- Data on tenancies under the National Housing First Implementation Plan
- Data on committals to prison of persons with ‘no fixed abode’
- Data on admissions to psychiatric institutions and hospitals of persons with ‘no fixed abode’

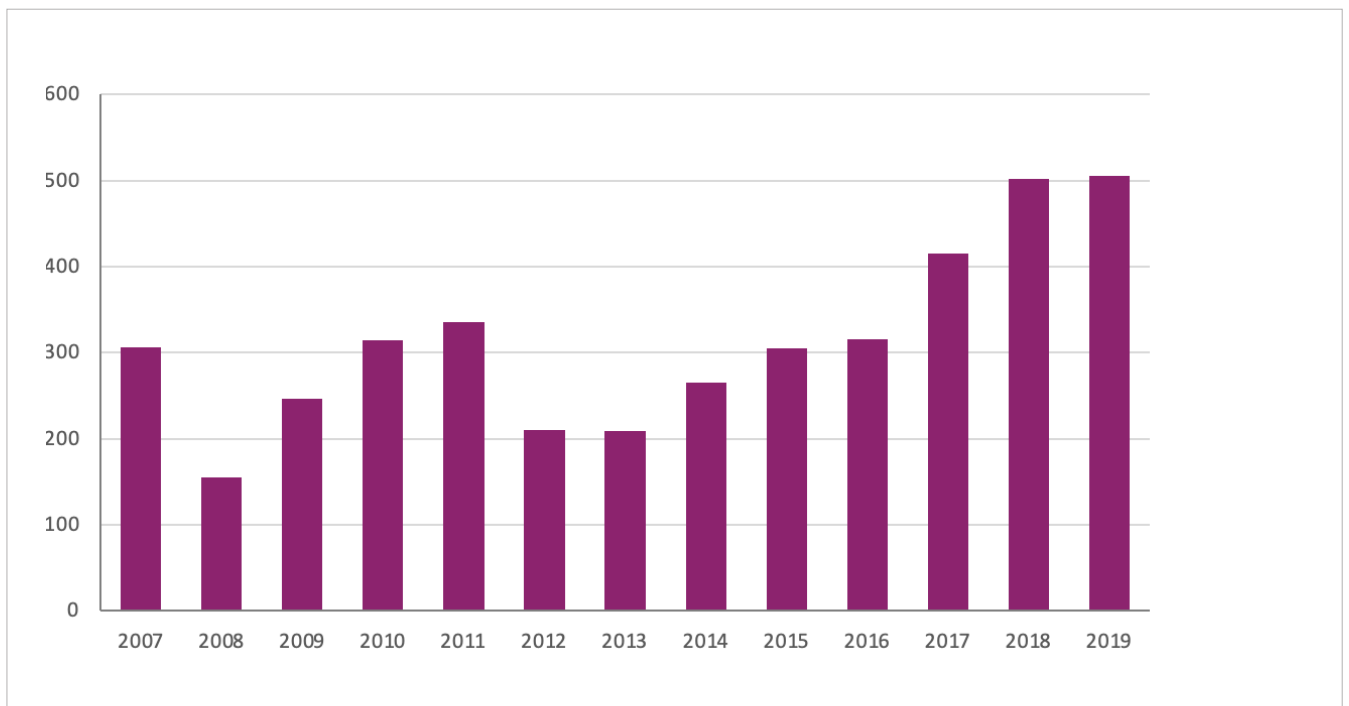
These factors operate in the context of a range of other facts including the continued scarcity of social housing and the cost and scarcity of private rented accommodation.

Figure 11: Housing First Tenancies, Q3 2020



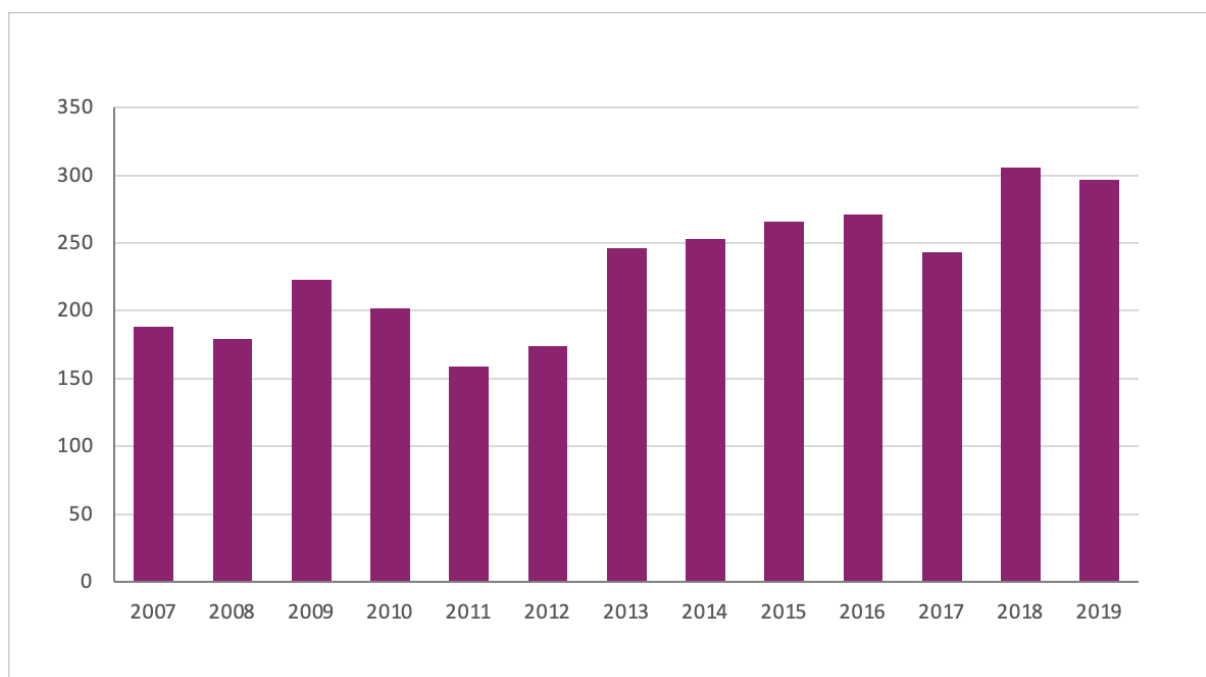
One potential explanation for the increased number of exits from emergency accommodation, particularly in Dublin, may be the roll-out of the Housing First National Implementation Plan covering the period 2018-2021, which aims to provide 663 tenancies nationally and 273 in Dublin. Figure 11 shows the total number of people in Housing First tenancies in Ireland at the end of 2020, with 187 individuals entering new Housing First tenancies during 2020, with Dublin having the largest number of Housing First tenancies (a significant number of these Dublin tenancies predate the national implementation plan).

Figure 12: Number of committals with No Fixed Abode, as Disclosed by the Prisoner



The number of prison committals, where the prisoner declared themselves to be homeless (or of no fixed abode) has increased significantly in recent years, from 265 committals in 2014 (231 males and 34 females) to 505 in 2019 (444 males and 61 females), as shown in Figure 12.

Figure 13: Number of Admissions to Irish Psychiatric Units and Hospitals with No Fixed Abode



Finally, the number of admissions to psychiatric hospitals and units who were homeless has also increased from 253 (170 males and 83 females) in 2014 to 297 in 2019 (211 males and 86 females), shown in Figure 13². This suggests that in addition to those accessing emergency homeless accommodation and rough sleeping, there are a significant number of adults who are cycling in and out of other institutions, a phenomenon referred to as the ‘institutional circuit.’³

² It is important to note that admissions data does not account for repeated admissions of the same person, so one person could account for multiple admissions in the same year.

³ For further details, see Daly, A. Craig, S and O’Sullivan, E. (2018) The Institutional Circuit: Single Homelessness in Ireland, *European Journal of Homelessness* 12(2) pp.79-94.

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