



Focus Ireland Customer Satisfaction Survey 2020/21

Challenging homelessness. Changing lives.

FOCUS
Ireland



Focus Ireland

Customer Satisfaction Survey 2020/21

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October 2021

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Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to the staff of Focus Ireland services who provided the customer consents and contact details on a monthly basis, and the Services Standards team for data clarification. Thanks also to Kayleigh Clements and Veronica Segerstrom, who provided research support at various stages. The Focus Ireland Advocacy team would also like to acknowledge the commitment and professionalism of the team of peer researchers – Paul Haughan, Emma Richardson and Kathleena Twomey – who enabled the organisation to execute this project successfully.

Finally, this project would not have been possible without the contribution and trust of Focus Ireland customers. Their insights and feedback provide understanding into our supports and services and enable us to improve and grow as an organisation.

Abbreviations

| | |
|----------------|----------------------------------|
| A&I | Advice and Information |
| CRM | Customer Relationship Management |
| HAP | Housing Assistance Payment |
| LTA | Long-term Accommodation |
| STA | Short-term Accommodation |
| TSS | Tenancy Sustainment Support |

Foreword

In Focus Ireland, everything we do starts with the customer. Since our foundation over 30 years ago, Focus Ireland has referred to the individuals we support and who use our services as ‘customers’. This language reflects the approach of the organisation’s first service, the Coffee Shop, in Temple Bar. In opening this service, Focus Ireland (then Focus Point) decided to break with the prevailing practice of providing food on a charitable basis for free. Instead, the Coffee Shop presented itself like a mainstream café, offering a choice of quality food. While the charge for the food was nominal, the idea was to treat people who were homeless in the same way as paying *customers* would expect to be treated in any establishment along the street. The Coffee Shop has gone through many changes since then, linking the quality food service with advice and support, but the rights-based model of treating people as ‘customers’, not ‘service users’ or ‘recipients of charity’, has remained. And the language has extended throughout the now over 100 services across the country.

Of course, ‘customer rights’ does not adequately cover the range of social and economic rights which people who are homeless should, along with everyone in society, enjoy. To reflect this Focus Ireland has consistently expanded its engagement with its customers, and its understanding of what constitutes a ‘rights-based approach.’

The new Focus Ireland Strategy ‘Renewing our Vision 2021–25’ represents an important step forward in this process, with ‘Building Tenant and Customer Engagement’ featuring as one of the key themes of the new strategy.

Supporting our customers to participate in meaningful ways will help us create more effective services and policy. Understanding what our customers want and how they experience the services we provide are fundamental to this process. This report is the most recent in a series of surveys of attitudes and experiences of our customers and tenants which helps us gain that understanding.

The report highlights a number of areas in which customers believe we can do better. One area that particularly stands out is the number of customers who do not know how they would make a complaint. There is also helpful feedback relating to housing maintenance and neighbourhood management. The question of providing a high-quality social environment in our properties has also been an important theme for consideration in recent years. A new approach to this has been set out in our innovative Meascan model

of intentional social mix, and we hope that the roll out of that new model, and the lessons we learn from it, will help us respond to our customers' expectations in this area.

There are also many other messages for the report which Focus Ireland staff can justly feel proud and will reaffirm them in their commitment to their work. Customers felt safe in using the service and valued the help and support provided by staff. There were particularly high scores given to the level of respect and professionalism customers experienced from staff members. Achieving high levels of trust is incredibly important to us and the results demonstrate how staff are living the Focus Ireland values in their direct work with customers.

One of the positive surprises from the survey is the engagement and thoughtfulness about Focus Ireland itself, and its new strategy. These thoughts have helped to shape the content and the priorities of the organisation over the coming years and are a very welcome assurance that the desire for engagement set out in that strategy is mutual.

It is also relevant to note that, while much of the feedback was directed at Focus Ireland, there is also a clear message for the Government.

I want to thank the research team in Advocacy, the Services staff across the country who helped draw up the survey participant contact list and my own Services resources office for their work on this report. I particularly want to thank the Peer Researchers who so diligently and sensitively carried out the surveys and considered the findings. Most importantly, I want to thank all the customers who took time to give us their feedback, their experiences, and their thoughts about the future priorities of Focus Ireland.

Finally, I think it is appropriate to give the last word to the advice given to us by one of our customers interviewed for the research.

“Listen to clients about what they need.”

Ciara Carty

Director of Services, Focus Ireland

Introduction

Focus Ireland firmly believes that homelessness can be ended and is not merely a social problem to be managed. Quality research into the causes of homelessness and the practices and policies that are most effective in ending it, as well as the experiences of our customers who avail of Focus Ireland services has always been a key component of our work since its foundation.

Focus Ireland provides around one hundred services, supporting approximately 12,300 customers in 2020, across all the regions in Ireland. Our services include prevention, tenancy sustainment, education, health, advice and information, youth, day services and long-term and short-term accommodation. Another key component to Focus Ireland's work is the provision of affordable homes through Focus Housing Association. During 2019 we directly provided 99 additional homes.¹

This report marks the completion of Phase 3 of our monitoring and evaluation program which explored levels of satisfaction amongst customers across a wide range of services, and most of the regions that we work in. This report follows on from Phases 1 and 2 which examined levels of tenancy sustainment² and levels of satisfaction amongst our long-term housing customers³ respectively.

This evaluation report on customer satisfaction levels relates to Key Performance Indicators from Focus Ireland's 2017–2020 Strategic Plan.⁴ The KPIs of Prevention and Sustained Exits relate to the quality of services that Focus Ireland provides to its customers. We undertook this evaluation to understand their experiences, find out what we were doing well as an organisation, and the areas and services that we needed to improve.

1 Focus Ireland (2020) *Annual Report 2019*. Focus Ireland, Dublin. Available at: <https://reports.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Annual-Report-2019-Main.pdf> (Accessed: 18th May 2021).

2 Focus Ireland (2018) *Are you still okay? Housing tenancy sustainment among Focus Ireland customers*. Focus Ireland, Dublin. Available at: <https://www.focusireland.ie/research/> (Accessed: 5th October 2021).

3 Focus Ireland (2020) *Satisfaction Levels Amongst Customers in Focus Ireland Long-term Housing*. Focus Ireland, Dublin. Internal Report

4 Focus Ireland (2017) *Strategy 2017–2020 Challenging homelessness. Changing lives*. Focus Ireland, Dublin. Available at: <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Focus-Ireland-Restating-our-Vision-2021-2025.pdf> (Accessed 5th October 2021).

The current KPI evaluation project also provided an opportunity for customer engagement with the participation of peer researchers⁵ who have lived experience of homelessness and/or housing insecurity. They provided invaluable support throughout the project, from the designing of the survey questionnaire, carrying out the survey calls, and analysis of the findings through workshops.

This research project was carried out between October 2020–May 2021, and it was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and public health guidelines. With these challenging circumstances in mind, a question was also included on customer’s needs and experiences during the pandemic. This proved insightful into how customers experienced this pandemic and the level and quality of support provided by Focus Ireland during this time. During the time of this evaluation Focus Ireland was also developing its new five-year strategy, ‘Renewing our Vision 2021–2025’, and a question was included in the survey that asked for customer’s input on what, if anything, they would like to see in this strategic plan.

⁵ Peer Researchers are customers of Focus Ireland with lived experience of homelessness or housing insecurity. They are employed on a relief basis to support research projects.

Aims and objectives

Focus Ireland has around 100 services, with approximately 12,300 customers utilising these services in 2020. The aim of this evaluation project was to speak to and survey as many of these customers as possible.

Underpinning this project were Focus Ireland's values, which helped to guide and inform the way in which it was carried out, particularly the values of safety, quality, integration, and empowerment.⁶

The principle aims of this study were to:

- a) Capture customer satisfaction levels across key areas; including access and quality, support and inclusion, and overall satisfaction with support.
- b) Capture and understand the support needs of customers including during Covid-19 and the subsequent public health measures.
- c) Explore feedback from customers on the services that Focus Ireland provides, and what they would like to see in the new Focus Ireland strategy.
- d) Record important demographic information (e.g., age, family size, employment or training status, country of origin, first language, citizenship, support needs history, services history with Focus Ireland).

The following report presents survey data from a total sample of 422 customers who had previously or currently used any kind of Focus Ireland service.

⁶ Focus Ireland Values: Respect, Safety, Quality, Accessibility, Partnership, Integration, Advocacy, Empowerment and Stewardship

Methodology

In this section of the report the research methodology employed for the Customer Satisfaction survey will be discussed. This includes the sample size, breakdown of completed surveys for each region and service, survey design, ethical considerations, data entry and analysis and study limitations.

Sample

For Phase 3 of the KPI evaluation project, the Research and Services teams wanted to attempt to contact as many customers as possible, across all of Focus Ireland services, and in all the regions that we work in. The research was carried out by telephone and there are limitations in who could be included in the survey – ranging from practical issues such as obtaining consents and contact details, and practice issues such as protecting vulnerable customers. 1,053 customers who met all these criteria were identified and **422 surveys** were completed. This was **40%** of the overall number of customers on the contact list (n=1,053).

Between October 2020 to February 2021, the Research team gathered numbers and approvals from Project Leaders across all Focus Ireland services. Numbers and details were collated from our internal CRM and Orion customer databases and sent to Project Leaders to review and approve. At this point Project Leaders consulted with their teams, verified contact details, and removed any customers considered vulnerable and not in a position to participate.

Tables 1 and 2 below provide a breakdown of the number of completed surveys and percentages for both services and regions. The top three highest rates of survey completion for services (Table 1) are LTA, A&I, and TSS. The top three highest rates of survey completion for the regions (Table 2) are Dublin, Waterford, and Limerick.

Table 1: Breakdown of completed surveys by service

| Service | Number of surveys | % |
|-----------------|------------------------|------------|
| LTA | 149 | 36 |
| A&I | 90 | 22 |
| TSS | 54 | 13 |
| STA | 49 | 12 |
| Youth | 23 | 5 |
| Day Services | 22 | 5 |
| Prevention | 13 | 3 |
| Education | 9 | 2 |
| Healthcare | 4 | 1 |
| Case Management | 2 | 1 |
| Total | 415⁷ | 100 |

Table 2: Breakdown of completed surveys by region

| Region | Number of surveys | % |
|--------------|------------------------|------------|
| Dublin | 236 | 57 |
| Waterford | 66 | 16 |
| Limerick | 34 | 7 |
| Carlow | 18 | 4 |
| Cork | 16 | 4 |
| Tipperary | 12 | 3 |
| Clare | 11 | 3 |
| Kilkenny | 11 | 3 |
| Sligo | 9 | 2 |
| Wexford | 2 | 1 |
| Total | 415⁸ | 100 |

The breakdown of calls and their outcomes can be found in Table 3 below. In this table the various reasons as to why a customer chose not to take part in this survey is included. This table also contains information on the total numbers obtained with consent, and completion rate of surveys.

7 Some of the data was missing from the spreadsheet for logging the outcomes of the survey calls.

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Table 3: Breakdown of customer consents and completed surveys

| 2020/2021 | Number |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Number of services at Focus Ireland | 100 (approx.) |
| Valid 'YES' consents and phone numbers obtained for survey | 1,053 |
| Phone numbers not in service | 60 |
| Customer unreachable (i.e., 3 unsuccessful attempts at contact) | 347 |
| Customers who chose not to participate at point of survey | 108 |
| Language barrier | 11 |
| Wrong number | 38 |
| Did not recall using Focus Ireland services | 7 |
| Incomplete survey/hung up | 24 |
| Other | 36 |
| Number of completed surveys | 422 |
| Percentage (%) of consenting customers who participated in surveys | 40% |

Research type

The research was completed by telephone survey by a team of three researchers (including one contract researcher). A small number of customers requested that the survey be posted to them, however, due to the restrictions in place because of Covid-19 this was not logistically possible. On each occasion this was explained to the customer, and they were thanked for their time. The project was managed by a Research Officer and Research Coordinator.

Survey design

The survey tool was developed with input from the Services Standards team in Focus Ireland. The survey was then reviewed, piloted, and finalised in collaboration with Peer Researchers during several workshops between October and November 2020.

The surveys were carried out over a seven-month period, October 2020 to May 2021. The survey included a mix of open and closed-ended questions, and there were twenty-seven questions in total. The survey mostly featured closed-ended questions that asked participants to choose from a scale such as “very satisfied” to “very unsatisfied”, or “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”, etc. However, there were three open-ended questions that gave customers an opportunity to voice their comments, concerns, and/or recommendations, including a question on what they would like to see in the upcoming Focus Ireland Strategy.

The telephone survey covered the following sections:

- › Customer satisfaction levels across key areas; including access and quality, support and inclusion, and overall satisfaction with support.
- › Support needs of customers including during Covid-19 and the subsequent public health measures.
- › Feedback from customers on the services that Focus Ireland provides, and what they would like to see in the new strategy.
- › Demographic information (e.g., age, family size, employment or training status, country of origin, first language, citizenship, support needs history, services history with Focus Ireland)

The survey took about 10–15 minutes to complete, but some calls were longer depending on information given by the survey participants.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are always placed at the heart of our evaluation projects with our customers and participants. Focus Ireland's Ethical Guidelines for Conducting Research,⁹ were always adhered to in the completion of this study. This ensures that no harm comes to a participant, consent is actively sought and understood by the participant, and the aims of the project and handling of customer information is fully explained to participants. The participant's privacy is always respected during the call, and information about the participant is anonymised and stored securely.¹⁰

This ethical framework was applied from the very beginning of this project. When the Research team collected phone numbers for survey calls the Project Leaders and their teams were asked to approve the numbers and let the research team know if a customer was not able to take the call. Some of Focus Ireland's customers may experience adverse circumstances, particularly with the restrictions and upheaval from Covid-19, and the Research team wanted to ensure that they were not disturbing customers and were being sensitive to their current needs.

Training was provided to the Research team on dealing with sensitive calls, or customers who may have needed extra support. The Research Officer or the Research Coordinator was always available to support the researchers making the calls and provide follow up contact with that customer's keyworker.

Customers were asked at the start of the telephone call whether they would like to participate in the survey. Customers were reminded that taking part in the survey was completely voluntary and that they were free to end the call whenever they wished or that they were free not to answer any question they wished. They were also reminded that everything they said was completely confidential unless there was a risk of harm to themselves or someone else. An added incentive for participants in this survey was the chance of winning a €100 One4All Voucher. There were five vouchers available from a draw, and successful survey participants received their voucher via registered post.

9 Focus Ireland (2011) *Ethical Guidelines for Conducting Research Involving People at Risk of or Experiencing Homelessness*. Focus Ireland, Dublin. Available at: <https://www.focusireland.ie/research/> (Accessed 5th October 2021).

10 Punch, K. (2014) *Introduction to Social Research Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. London: Sage Publications.

Confidentiality and privacy were always respected. The researchers replaced names with survey identifier reference numbers and any identifiable details were removed across all hard copies of surveys. Hard copy surveys were always stored in a secure cabinet. There was a group of customers who were personally known to the team of researchers responsible for making the telephone calls. As this was a clear ethical concern in terms of privacy, a contract researcher was employed on a temporary basis to make these telephone calls and complete the surveys.

If the customer did not answer the call, the researcher tried again at another time or on another day, and where possible left a voicemail. The researchers did not make more than three attempts to contact customers. In cases where there was a language barrier the researcher politely ended the call and where appropriate this was followed up with the customer's keyworker. Details of customers who had an immediate support need or concern, such as a complaint or query, were passed to the relevant Project Leader to be followed up on as soon as possible.

Data entry and analysis

Microsoft Forms was used to log the answers from the surveys and for initial data analysis.

The next level of data analysis was completed in workshops with the Peer Researchers. In these workshops Peer Researchers analysed and coded the qualitative questions in this survey (Q3.7, Q3.8 and Q3.9). The Peer Researchers also provided feedback on the other survey questions, and this was incorporated into the analysis. Microsoft Excel was used to create graphs and tables for this report.

Workshops were also held with the Peer Researchers to present an advanced draft of this report, and to also incorporate their feedback on the recommendations for this evaluation. These workshops were the safest and most realistic method given the time constraints and public health guidelines.

Study limitations

This study represents a small sample of the total number of Focus Ireland customers who have used or are currently availing of our services (n=422). It does not claim to be representative of all customers but rather gives an insight into a significant group who were successfully contacted. Focus Ireland works in 13 counties, and 10 were represented in this survey. Customers from 59 services completed surveys in this evaluation, which represents approximately 59% of our 100 services.

Findings

Demographic profile

More women (59%) than men (40%) participated in this survey, and most participants were single (61%). 25–34 years was the most represented age group at 29%. Over half (52%) did not have children living with them. Just over a quarter (27%) of participants were in receipt of disability welfare payment. The majority of survey participants (73%) were from Ireland, and over half (53%) had been with Focus Ireland services for 2 years or more. The majority (70%) had a Support Worker at the time of the survey and most (78%) had never used Focus Ireland services prior to their current engagement with services.

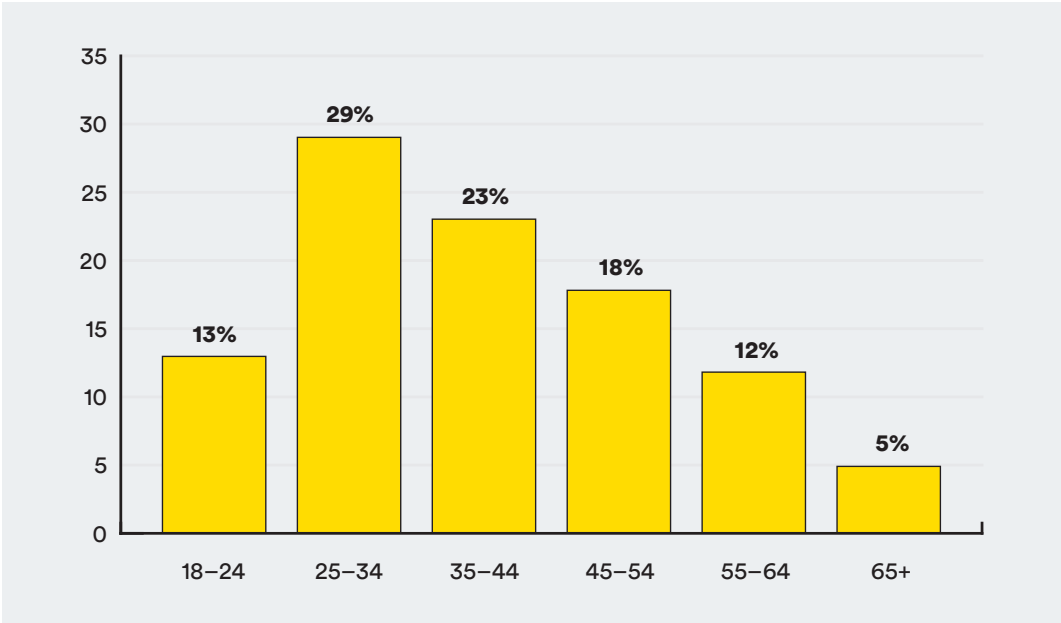
Gender

- › 250 identified as female (59%)
- › 170 identified as male (40%)
- › 2 preferred not to answer (1%)

Age

- › 53 participants were aged between 18 and 24 years of age (13%)
- › 124 were 25 to 34 years (29%)
- › 97 were aged between 35 and 44 years (23%)
- › 74 were aged between 45 and 54 years (18%)
- › 52 were aged between 55 and 64 years (12%)
- › 22 were over the age of 65 (5%)

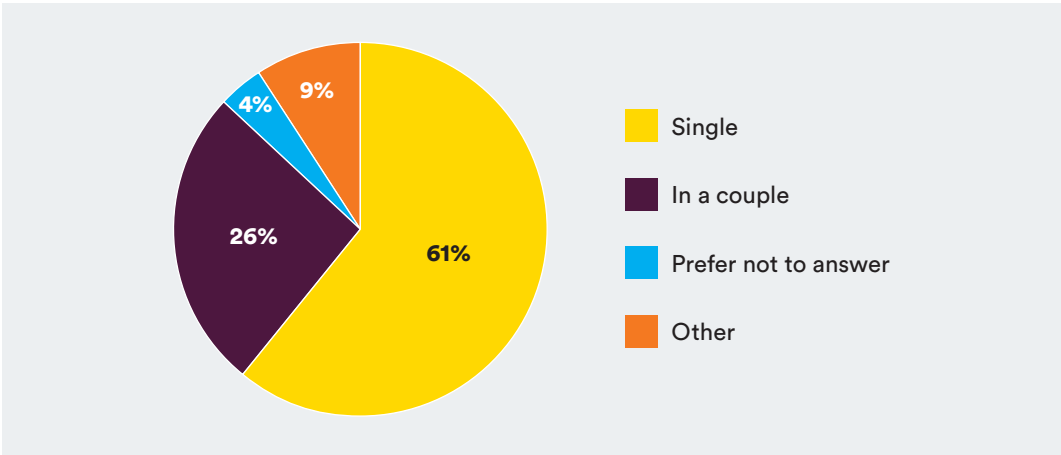
Graph 1: Ages of survey participants



Relationship status

- > 257 identified as single (61%)
- > 109 identified as being in a couple (26%)
- > 16 preferred not to answer (4%)
- > 40 identified as other (9%)

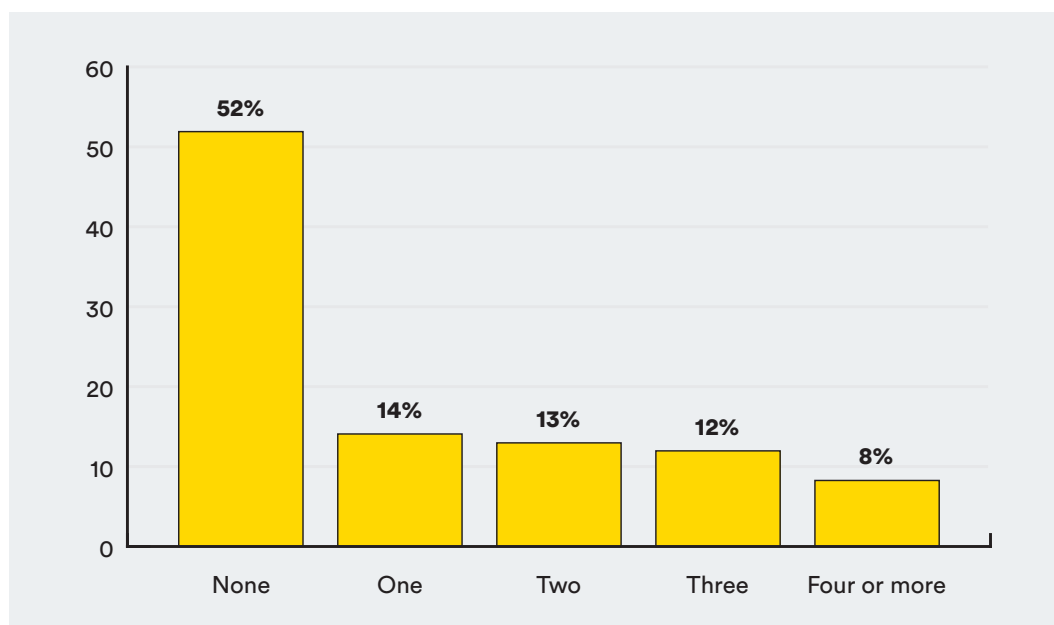
Graph 2: Relationship status of survey participants



Family type

- 200 (47%) survey participants **had children living with them**, 220 (52%) did not, and 2 (1%) preferred not to answer.
- 58 (14%) had one child living with them, 56 (13%) had two, 51 (12%) had three, and 35 (8%) had four or more children living with them.
- Of those participants who had children living with them, 101 (51%) were **one-parent households**. 91% (n=92) of these one-parent households were headed by a female.

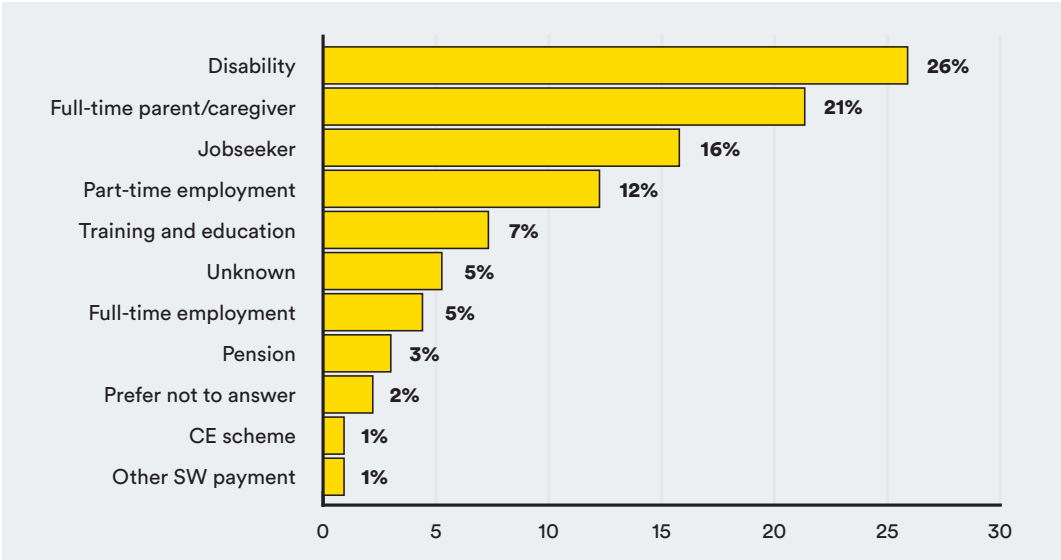
Graph 3: Percentage of participants who had children living with them



Employment status of respondents

- 126 (26%) were on disability payment
- 104 (21%) were full-time parents/caregivers
- 77 (16%) were jobseekers
- 60 (12%) were in part-time employment
- 36 (7%) were in training/education
- 26 (5%) did not know their employment status
- 22 (5%) were in full-time employment
- 15 (3%) were in receipt of a pension
- 11 (2%) prefer not to answer
- 5 (1%) were on other social welfare payment
- 5 (1%) were on a CE Scheme

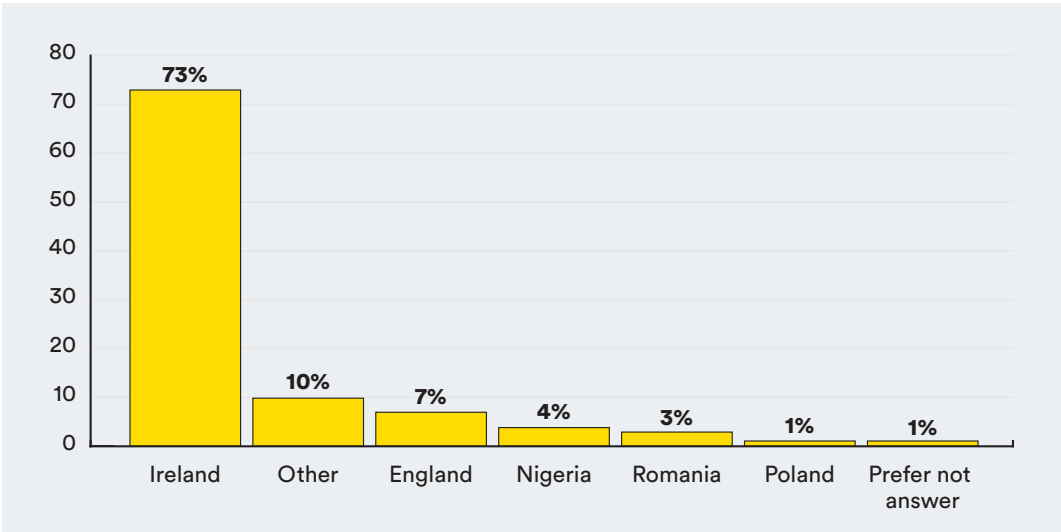
Graph 4: Employment status of participants



Nationality and ethnic/cultural background

- 309 (73%) participants identified their **country of origin** as Ireland, 29 (7%) identified England, 16 (4%) identified Nigeria, 11 (3%) identified Romania, 4 (1%) identified Poland, 3 (0.7%) identified Lithuania, 2 (0.4%) identified Latvia, 1 (0.2%) person identified Brazil, 3 (0.7%) preferred not to answer, and 44 (10%) were from various countries. These are categorised as ‘other’.
- English was the **first spoken language** by most survey participants at 86%. 30 (7%) participants identified ‘other’ as their first language, 11 (3%) stated that Romanian was their first language.
- 372 (88%) participants had **Irish citizenship**, 21 (5%) did not, 14 (3%) identified their citizenship as EU, and 9 (2%) were in the process of applying.

Graph 5: Country of origin of survey participants



Support services history with Focus Ireland

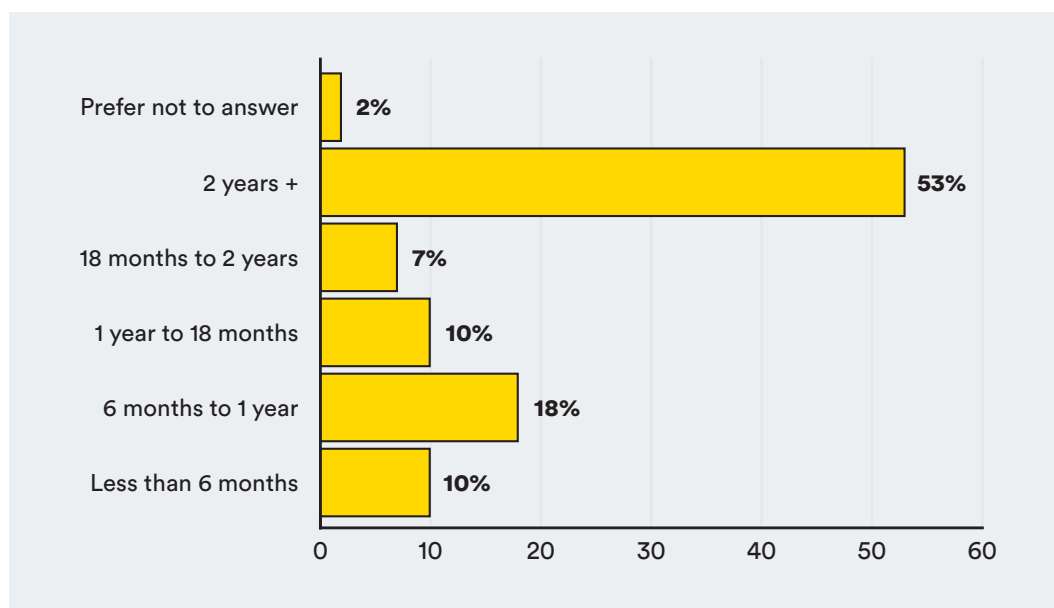
Over half of survey participants (53%) had been engaged with Focus Ireland services for **two years or more**. 18% had been using the service for 6 months to a year, 10% had been using it for 1 year to 18 months, and 10% were using it for less than 6 months. 7% were with Focus Ireland services for 18 months to 2 years, and 2% chose not to answer this question.

When participants were asked if they had a **current support worker** with Focus Ireland, the majority, 70% (n=294), said that they did. 18% (n=76) felt that they did not need the support, 4% (n=16) did not have a support worker, but were awaiting on one, and only 2% (n=8) had never discussed the option of having a support worker. 6% (n=26) of survey participants felt that this question was not applicable to them.

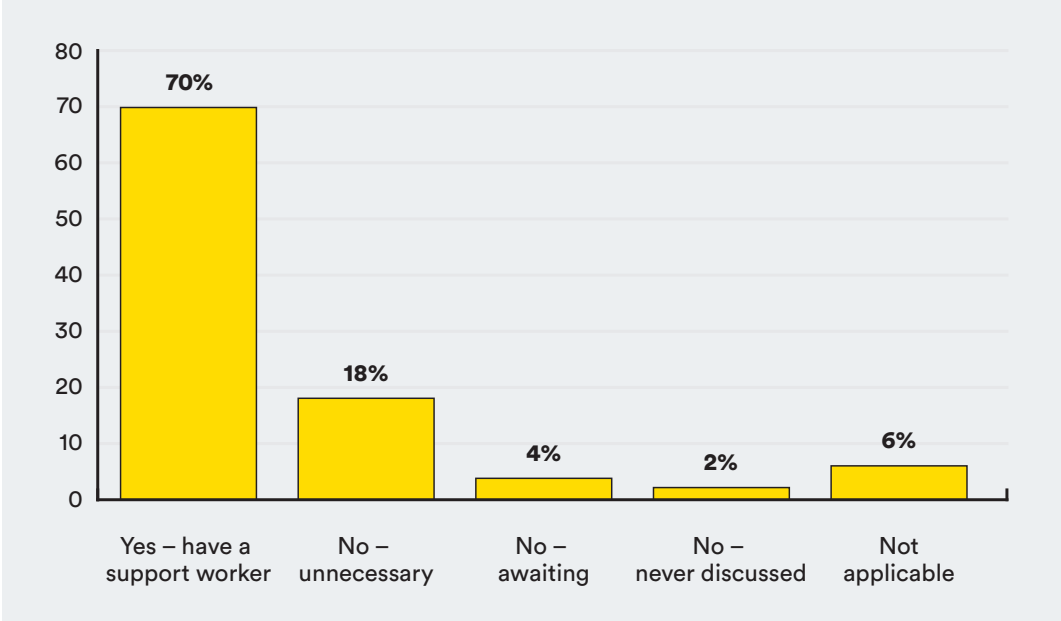
For those participants who did have a support worker with Focus Ireland, the most cited **type of worker** was ‘Support Worker’, and ‘Housing Support Worker’.

The vast majority (78%) of survey participants had **not previously utilised Focus Ireland support services**. For the 73 people who had, the top three services they had used were ‘Coffee Shop’ (n=27), ‘Housing/Homeless’ (n=11), and ‘Advice and Information’(n=9) ‘Aftercare Services’ (n=4), and ‘Youth Services’ (n=4). 20 (27%) participants had used this service for 2 years or more, 18 (25%) said less than 6 months, 10 (14%) said they had used it for 1 year to 18 months and 4 (5%) less than a year.

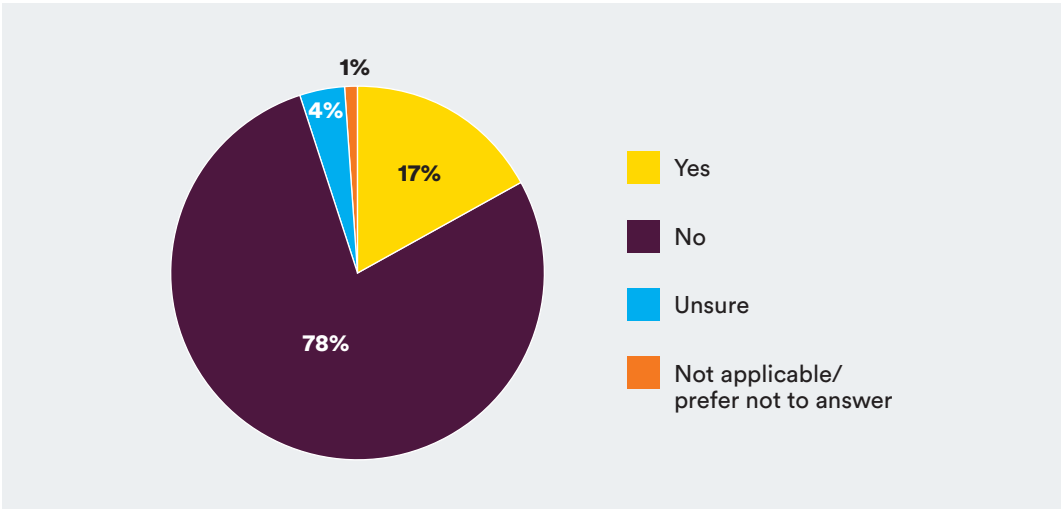
Graph 6: Length of time participants spent in Focus Ireland’s support services



Graph 7: Support worker status with Focus Ireland



Graph 8: Previous use of Focus Ireland services and supports



Access and quality

Overall, participants were very satisfied with their **access to and the quality of Focus Ireland services** and provided positive responses in this section (see Graph 9 below).

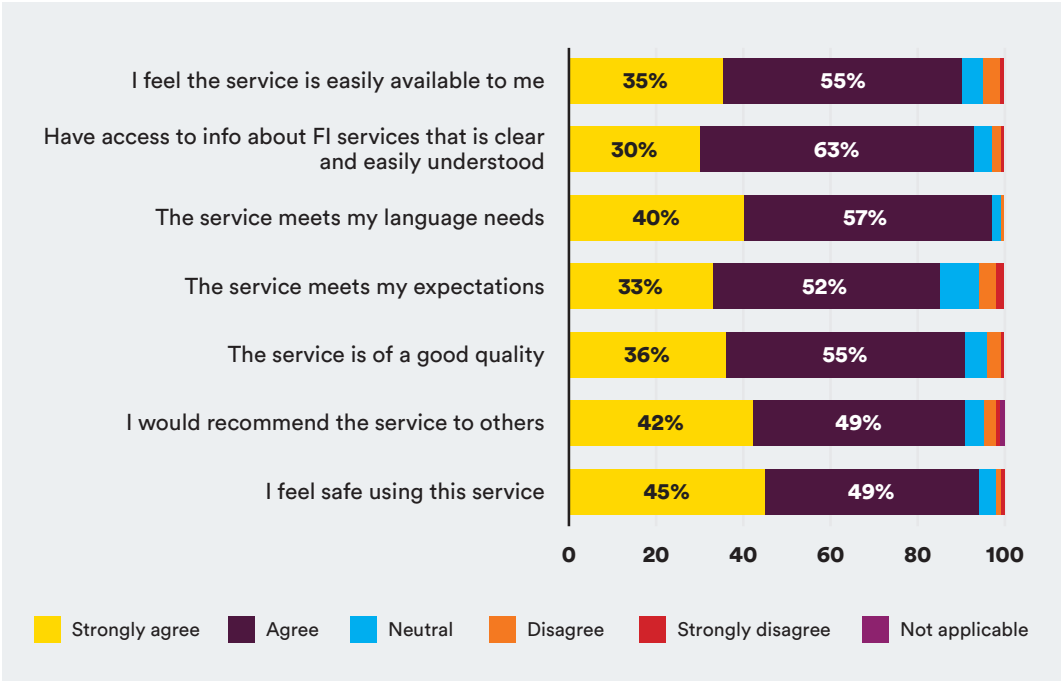
90% were generally satisfied that the **service was easily available** to them, with 35% strongly agreeing, and 55% agreeing. 93% of participants agreed (30% strongly agreed, 63% agreed) they had access to information about Focus Ireland services that was clear and easily understood.

One of the highest rates of agreement related to participants having their **language needs being met** at 97% (40% strongly agreeing, and 57% agreeing). 85% agreed that the service met their expectations (33% strongly agreeing, and 52% agreeing). 91% felt that the service was of good quality (36% strongly agreeing, and 55% agreeing).

Reassuringly, some of the highest rates of satisfaction amongst participants were for **recommending this service to others** at 91% (42% strongly agreeing, 49% agreeing) and 94% agreeing (45% strongly agreeing, 49% agreeing) in some way that they felt safe in using Focus Ireland services.

While these rates of satisfaction were mostly positive, there were some **areas that might need to be addressed** and further investigated. 6% of participants disagreed in some way (4% disagreeing, 2% strongly disagreeing) that the service met their expectations, and 5% disagreed in some way (4% disagreeing, 1% strongly disagreeing) that the service was easily available to them.

Graph 9: Access to and quality of support services at Focus Ireland



Support and inclusion

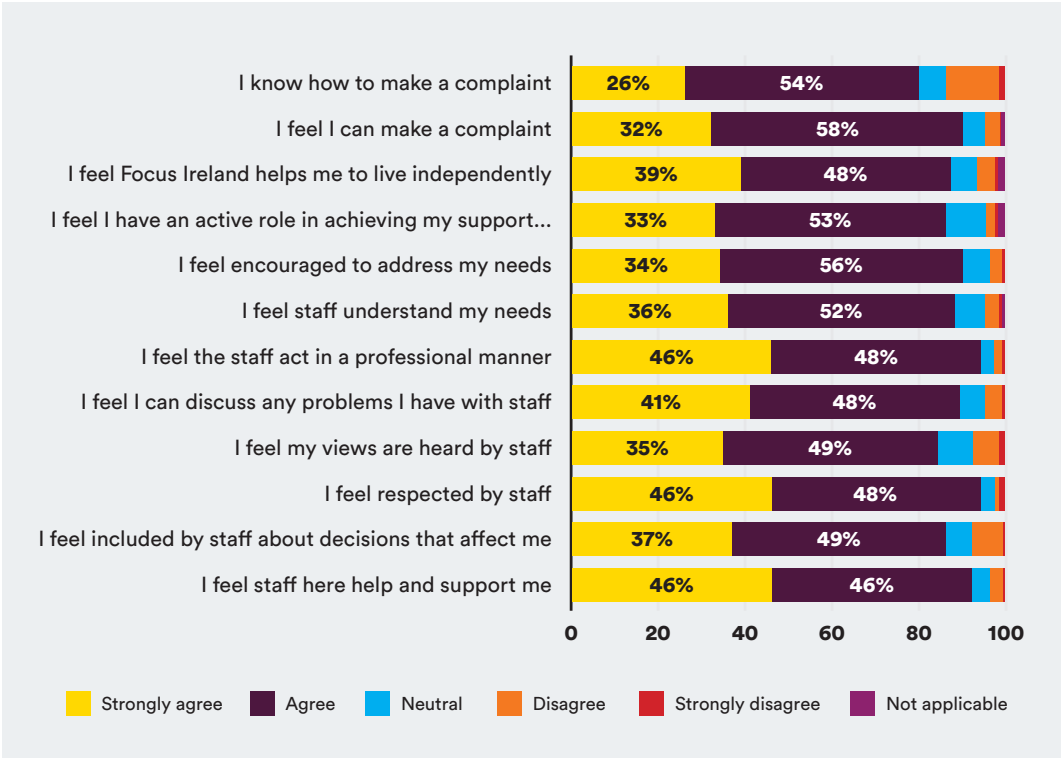
This section looked at satisfaction levels in terms of support and inclusion in Focus Ireland services. Survey participants were asked to rate their satisfaction levels on several statements about the support they received.

Overall, the results were positive and there were **high levels of satisfaction amongst participants** (see Graph 10 below). The help and support provided by staff, and their level of respect and professionalism towards customers scored the highest.

92% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that **staff helped and supported them**. 94% strongly agreed or agreed that **staff respected them and acted in a professional manner**. Also, the vast majority (89%) of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they could **discuss any problems** they were having with staff.

While the results from this section were overwhelmingly positive in terms of satisfaction levels of support and inclusion, there were some areas that scored lower. 14% of survey participants disagreed in some way that they **knew how to make a complaint**. 6% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed that they felt that their **views were heard by staff** and 8% also disagreed in some way that they were **included by staff in decisions** that affected them.

Graph 10: Satisfaction levels with support and inclusion



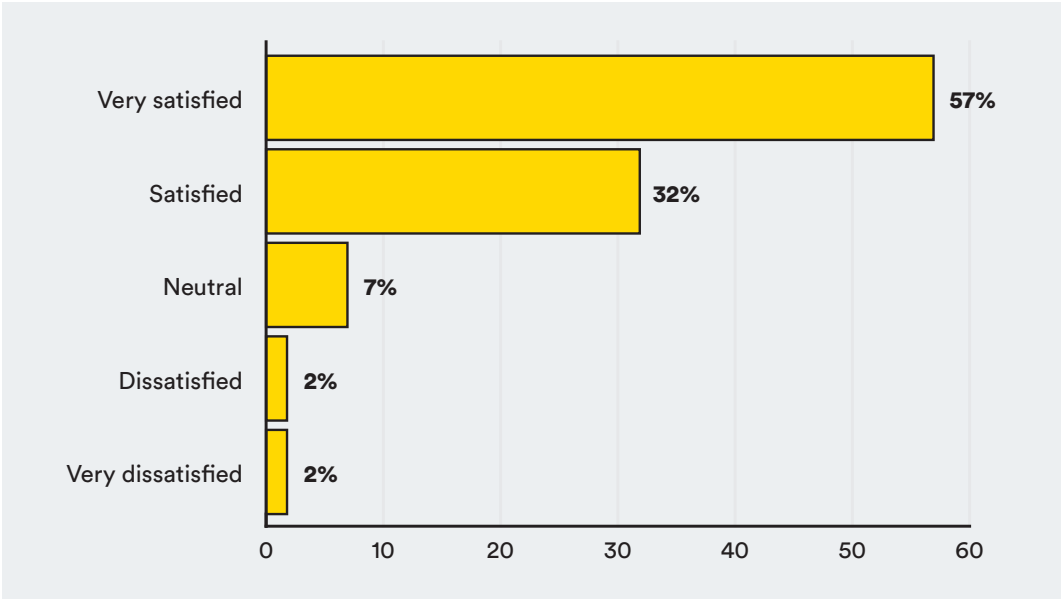
Overall satisfaction with support

Participants had **high levels of satisfaction for the overall support they received** from Focus Ireland, with 57% reporting that they were very satisfied and 32% were satisfied. As this survey took place during Covid-19 pandemic a question was included on the support received during this time. Considering that this was an unprecedented event, there were relatively high levels of satisfaction amongst participants. 49% stated that they were very satisfied with the support they received during this time, and 32% were satisfied.

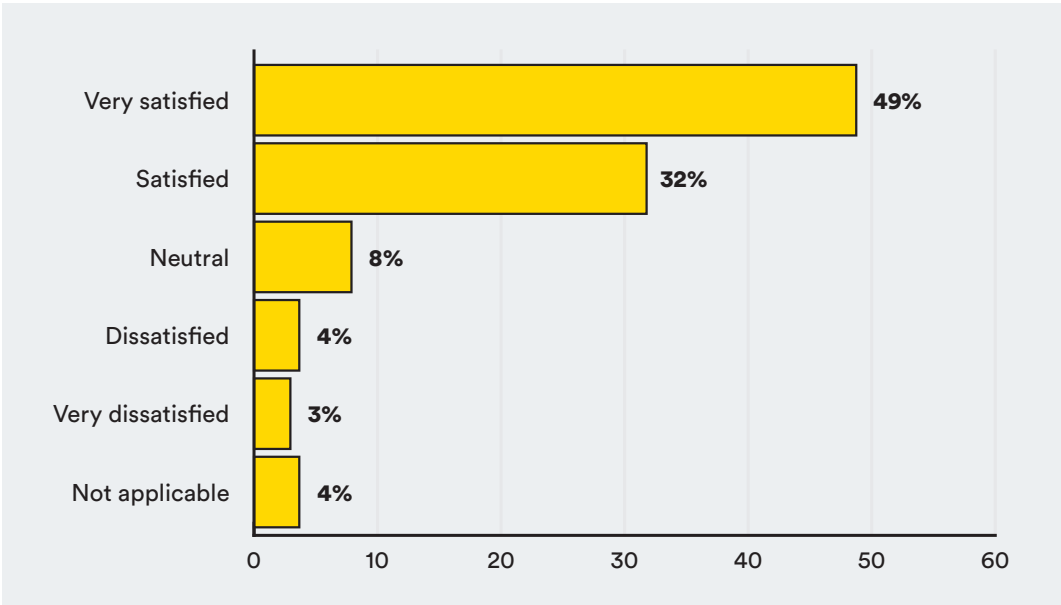
Participants were also asked about the change, if any, in their levels of support needs because of **Covid-19** and the subsequent public health measures. Over half (51%) stated that their **support needs had increased**, with 24% saying it was a lot more, and 27% saying it was a little more. 30% said that their level of need had not changed during this time.

In this survey, participants were asked about **areas that they might require support with**. The highest areas that required support were Training and Education (33%), Mental Health (30%), Social and Community Participation (26%) and Employment (26%). These areas of support need might be reflective of the Covid-19 restrictions and the negative impact it had on mental health and community interaction.

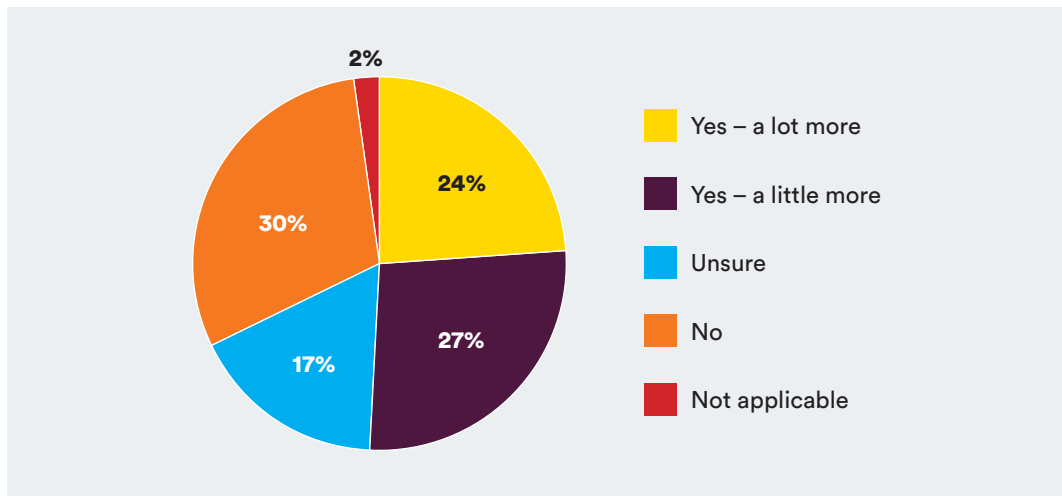
Graph 11: Overall level of satisfaction with Focus Ireland and support received



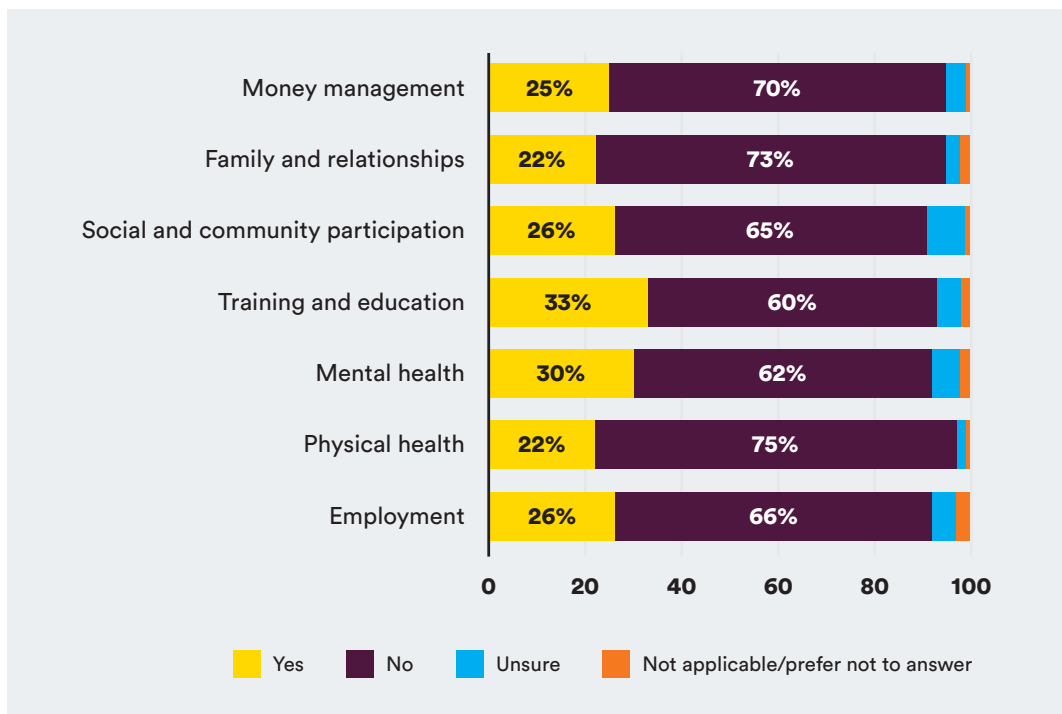
Graph 12: Overall satisfaction with Focus Ireland and support received during Covid-19



Graph 13: Change in support need levels because of Covid-19



Graph 14: Types of support need



In this Customer Satisfaction Survey, it was important to capture the communication preferences of participants, which can be found in Graph 15 below, and to also understand where they heard about Focus Ireland services in the first instance (Graph 16).

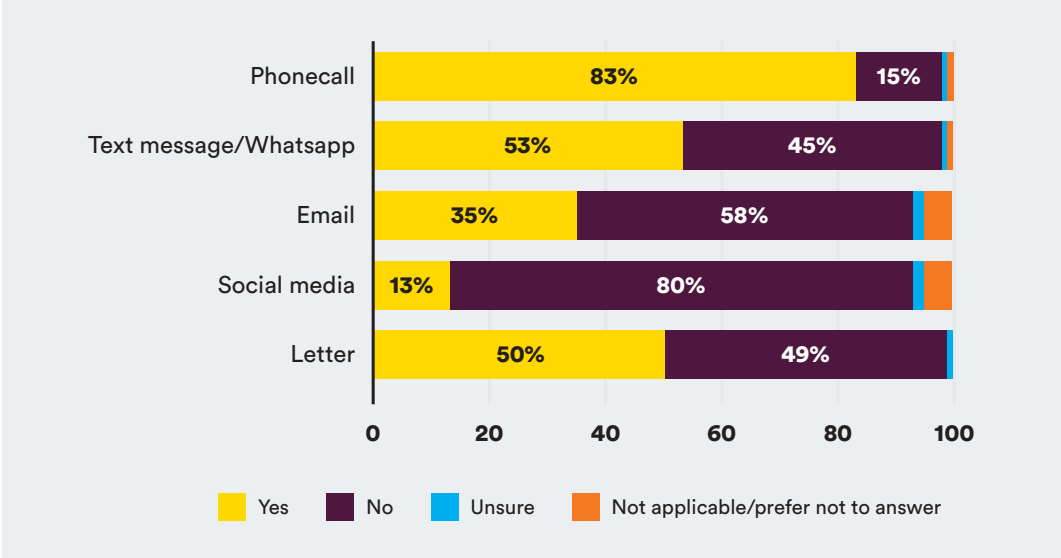
The vast majority (83%) of participants **preferred a phone call**. Text message/ WhatsApp were preferred by 53% of participants and Letter was a preference for 50%.

The most common way that participants had originally heard about Focus Ireland was through a friend or relative with 125 (30%) reporting this as the source. 96 (23%) participants were unsure or did not know how they had first heard about Focus Ireland,

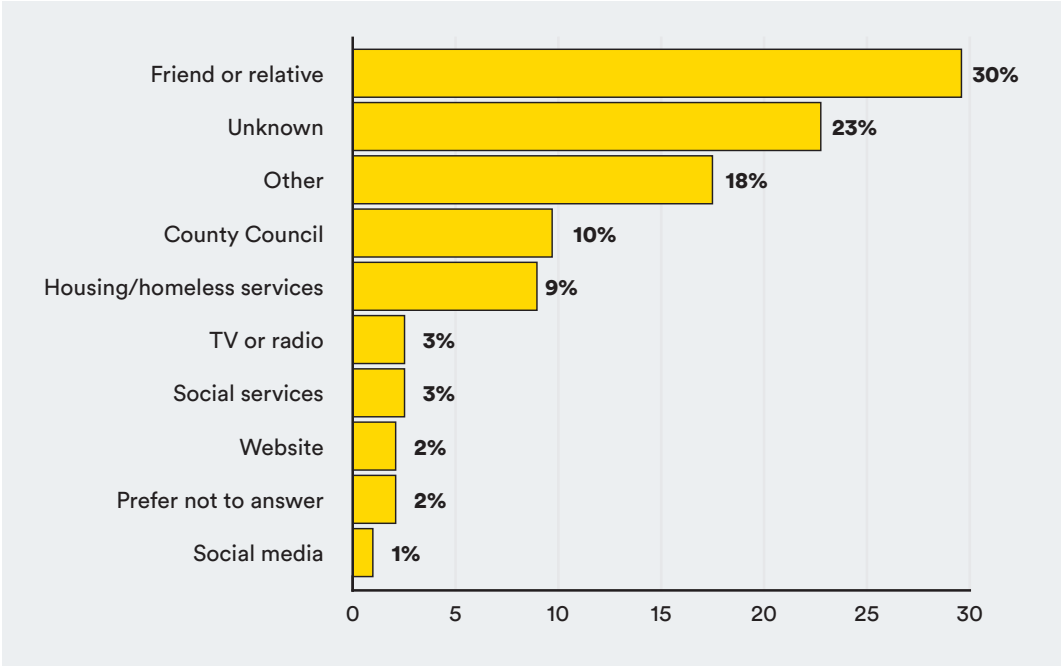
while 74 (18%) reported 'other'. 41 (10%) mentioned the local council as the source of where they had heard of Focus Ireland services, and 38 (9%) said that it was through other homeless services. 3% stated that they had first heard about Focus Ireland through social services. 3% reported TV or radio, 2% for Website, and 1% for social media.

Where participants had mentioned 'other' as the source for learning about Focus Ireland, there was a wide range of support services included here: prison services, religious organisations, a hospital/health referral, mental health or substance misuse organisations, aftercare services, and community organisations.

Graph 15: Communication preferences of participants



Graph 16: How participants heard about Focus Ireland



Feedback on Focus Ireland's supports and services

The next three questions in this survey were open-ended and qualitative in nature. The answers provided a lot of rich detail on the experiences of Focus Ireland's customers, how they viewed the services, and what they would like to see included in future plans for the organisation.

For the first open-ended question participants were asked what they felt Focus Ireland did well, and not so well. This gave participants the opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences of Focus Ireland supports and services in more depth.


About 167 (40%) participants responded to this question and the responses were **overwhelmingly positive**, with 71% (n=118) being very happy and positive about some or all aspects of the supports and services provided by Focus Ireland.

For approximately 31 (19%) participants their feedback was mixed, with some citing positive support services, but **maintenance or repairs were slow to be fixed**, or not at all. There were also a few instances where the quality of the accommodation was good, but there were **issues with the neighbours or anti-social behaviour**.


For the minority of participants who answered this question, 18 (10%), their experiences with Focus Ireland were not as positive. The main issues related to the quality of the accommodation and the maintenance and repairs that were needed. There were also concerns about problems with neighbours and anti-social behaviour, which they felt **was not being addressed adequately**.


Support workers/staff at Focus Ireland


Most of the positive feedback from participants related to the **dedication and care provided by Focus Ireland key workers and staff**. Participants felt supported with different aspects of their needs, including, education and training, entitlements, finding housing, mental health supports, and community participation. Participants remarked that there was extensive support provided by key workers and there seemed to be follow through where it was needed.

 Everything with Focus has worked very well, the work they do speaking up for the individual has been really top notch.'


 They're very supportive if you're sick, they're very helpful with shopping etc.'


 I've been supported with my transition of housing, from the hostel to getting an apartment – they were fantastic helping me sort out the paperwork, making sure my rent is paid. I really don't have any complaints.'


 My key worker has helped me with everything. I can't say enough about her, she's my lifesaver.'


 Friendly, welcoming and you feel at home, always giving advice and filling out forms and looking up information for you. I can't fault them from day one, always a positive attitude from the staff.'

While most of the feedback related to the support provided by Focus Ireland to customers was positive, there were some instances where this was not readily available to those who needed it. Some participants noted that there was **inconsistency with the support they received**. It is not clear whether this was due to the constraints of Covid-19 and restrictions. **More tailored support** was needed for some customers, as well as being able to reach their key worker more easily.

 I haven't really received any support from them, and I'd like to receive more.'

 They don't do well with me at all. I cannot reach them on the phone, my key worker never answers the phone, there's no support there at all. I haven't seen her since I moved in, the office is not available now during Covid-19. I'm in a 1 bed apartment with my family and there is no space at all for us (4 people).'

 Problem with turnover in case workers – I've had 4–5 in the last year.'

 They're doing very well with communication, always there at the end of the phone for a chat, helpful getting information from other public bodies or filling out forms. When there is an issue after 6pm it's harder to reach a staff member.'

Quality of Focus Ireland accommodation

Most participants were happy overall with the quality of Focus Ireland accommodation, and a lot of participants had no complaints or negative feedback with the service provided.

‘Accommodation here is done very well.’

‘They’re very obliging with everything, maintenance is sorted and they’re here if I need them and I appreciate that. Great communication here in the building.’

‘They are great at checking in, they’re on the ball with fixing the apartment.’

However, there were some participants that felt that the accommodation was not suitable, or of good quality.

‘When I moved into my flat there was a lot of damage in there, walls are cracked and has lots of holes – the person who brought me in didn’t take note of this – I still have damages in here but they have not been fixed since.’

‘I’ve been told for 5 years, every 6 months that I’ll have a house, and I haven’t. My flat was flooded, and I’ve not been helped by them at all regarding the cost of repair.’

This participant also had issues with anti-social behaviour.

‘Addicts have tried to rob my car; I’ve had neighbours cause such noise we cannot sleep. At the moment I haven’t heard from them for over a week.’

This kind of feedback was rare however and would suggest that most accommodation provided by Focus Ireland is of good standard. It is worth noting that where the feedback was negative and needed improving, it was affecting quality of life and health for some customers.

Maintenance and repairs

Like the quality of accommodation, negative feedback for maintenance and repairs was in the minority, but it did have a **significant impact on the lives of participants** where it was an issue.

‘No one has fixed my shower in months – and a few doors for my presses and a drawer in the kitchen – and they won’t fix it for me.’

‘Sometimes they leave us too much on our own, and complaints are listened to, but nothing happens with it. There could be more done with the heaters in here, they cost a fortune to run, and a neighbour of mine got new heaters put in but no one else got them.’

‘If you need a small job done you can’t do it yourself, you must do it through them, and it takes such a long time to get all the paperwork through – it took 12 months for me to get a wardrobe.’

Communication from Focus Ireland

An area of positive feedback from participants was **the level and quality of communication** from Focus Ireland to their customers and tenants. This included the sharing of relevant information as well as the **listening skills of support staff**. The supports offered and the knowledge of staff was also mentioned and proved helpful to participants in learning about services that may be of use to them and their needs.

‘Communication is great, staff are very helpful, and I cannot ask for more – from reception to key workers they are extraordinary.’

‘Very good informing me via letter about what is going on in the apartment. Support group information was very good.’

‘Great communication. They listen well and offer good advice. I can’t think of anything negative.’

Where there were **gaps in communication** and service provision this was mainly due to the Covid-19 public health measures and was recognised by the participants.

‘There’s a lot of talk but since Covid there isn’t much happening. They are there for you, but nothing much can be done.’

‘ Before Corona everything was running ok, but now, and I understand why, things are not running as well – we only receive visits from outside (agencies).’

Neighbours/safety in the area

Overall, **participants reported that they felt safe**, and at home in their accommodation with Focus Ireland. Participants also reported a sense of community and the loss of this during Covid-19 was felt keenly by some of the participants.

‘ Security is very good, feeling safe is a huge thing.’

‘ I feel at home here, I feel safe here and it’s my home 100%. I can’t fault them at all.’

‘ Focus in fairness did turn my life around, but I would like them to organise some events in the evenings, especially for the likes of me who live alone.’

While most participants who answered this question felt safe and comfortable in their area, for some this was not the case and they struggled with **anti-social behaviour and problems with neighbours**.

‘ I don’t think this place is good for kids, too many fights and people coming and going.’

‘ Recently a new neighbour moved in, and this person is not nice to us.’

‘ My only problem really has been ‘bad neighbours’, who seem to get away with anything, I even had to move from my last place because of anti-social behaviour. Now I live in a lovely new place, but again I’ve been unlucky and saddled with a neighbour who has no respect for me. I wish Focus had more power over how people are allowed to act.’

While these negative experiences do appear in the minority they can be distressing for the participants in these situations and can impact on their lives and well-being.

Covid-19 and Focus Ireland service provision

Not surprisingly Covid-19 and the public health measures was mentioned by several participants. Not all the feedback was negative however, and some **participants recognised the extra support** that was offered to them by Focus Ireland. They were understanding and appreciative, and even where there had been a drop in service provision they knew that it was because of extreme circumstances outside of Focus Ireland's control.



In spite of Covid-19 they're very good and I have no complaints.'



They've been great during Covid-19, texting me and ringing all the time checking in, so I'm very happy with them.'



They communicate well especially with me during Covid when I have withdrawn a lot. Maintenance side needs to improve, things were not done for me during Covid-19, and I struggle with being stuck in here and no one can come and repair or improve.'



They're doing well at the moment, during the Covid everything like courses are stopped, but I hope that gets started again.'

Not everyone had a good experience and invariably there were **instances when support needs were unable to be met**, or perhaps there was not an understanding of the level of need that was there because of Covid-19.



I feel, like, during Covid they could have checked in a bit more, not just for myself but with my neighbours, just to make sure that people were getting out and talking to their families and stuff. Other than that, I have had a good experience with Focus Ireland.'



My apartment is great, but I have an issue with mould that has not been sorted due to Covid-19.'

Feedback on Focus Ireland Strategy

Focus Ireland developed a new strategy, 2021–2025, and customer involvement is an important component in this strategic vision. This customer satisfaction survey was deemed a useful tool for gaining insight into what customers and tenants felt was important to them and areas that Focus Ireland should be aware of. A question was asked to participants about what they thought should be included in Focus Ireland’s new strategy. There was a high level of engagement, with approximately **265 (63%) responses from participants**.

Table 5 below outlines the themes that emerged from this question. These themes are explored in more detail in this section.

Table 5: Themes from survey participants for Focus Ireland strategy

| Strategy Themes |
|------------------------------------------------|
| Support and Advice |
| Services |
| Focus Ireland Accommodation and Maintenance |
| Government involvement and building more homes |
| Empowering Customers |
| Better Communication |
| Health and Wellbeing |
| Focus Ireland’s Advocacy work |

Support and advice

In this theme participants talked about the need for **more tailored supports** for different groups of people experiencing homelessness, as well as different levels of need.


The participants felt that the appropriate supports and services should be available for singles, families, lone parents, young people leaving care, people with mental health or physical support needs, substance misuse issues, and those in need of more general supports.




Support people from treatment centres, it’s important to house them, try to expand that service.’




Support with education and training and also to provide an addiction service. More help transitioning from supported to unsupported.’



Mental needs. More support and advice needed for clients, especially during lockdown or in isolation.’


 More support for family with children, people with medical conditions to be helped more. More houses.'

 I think Focus shouldn't be just for families, they should also allow single people come in and maybe share an apartment if it was bigger.'

As well as the need for more tailored supports according to a person's needs and circumstances, participants also cited more **general housing supports and living skills** as a priority for the Focus Ireland strategy.

 Housing – more support in accommodation.'


 More social housing and help people with housing needs.'

 Helping people if it is their first time living alone.'

Services

The previous question in this survey has already talked about the services that Focus Ireland does well and not so well, however, this theme also emerged here and is worth noting.

Some of the services that participants felt could be improved for the new strategy include, accommodation being of a good standard when customers move in, ensuring services are suitable for a person's needs and circumstances, a fair system for dealing with anti-social behaviour and conflicts between neighbours, following through on supports and applying these standards consistently, and more available and accessible services.

 They should help people more with progressing on in life, onto private accommodation and we're not pushed to get out of here. People that have children don't seem to have their needs met at certain times, they should be better looked after in their housing needs.'

 Better review of facilities for families, make sure that they're suitable for children.'

 Deal with anti-social behaviour and put a system in place so those who 'behave' aren't left suffering.'

‘When you phone Focus Ireland, you would appreciate them to do what you asked them to do, example, maintenance repairs, garden repairs.’

‘Open more smaller offices. More outreach on social media and on the ground to make people aware of Focus Ireland.’

A lot of feedback from participants on Focus Ireland’s strategy also stated that Focus Ireland should continue with the services and supports currently on offer. These included support staff, support and accommodation, mental, physical, and emotional supports.

‘Keep the great staff we have now.’

‘Keep going as they are. Give more people the chance I got.’

‘Their working strategy at the moment seems very good, keep going as you are. Of course, it would be great if there was more accommodation available.’

‘Support and accommodation. Mental, physical, and emotional support. [All] excellent.’

Focus Ireland accommodation and maintenance

A key issue that emerged in this strategy question was maintenance and repairs in Focus Ireland services and accommodation. Participants suggested a **more consistent approach** to repairs and **higher engagement** from Focus Ireland in relation to maintenance concerns.


‘Responding to maintenance issues more. Checking with clients more.’

‘More bins to be supplied and more attention to keeping the outside and inside of their buildings clean.’


‘A good maintenance system.’


The feedback for accommodation encompassed three main areas, **suitability of location**, **appropriate size for customer’s needs and circumstances** and **relevant supports in place**.

The location of accommodation and where an individual was placed was seen as important to maintain social supports, particularly during a stressful situation, such as experiencing homelessness.


 Better locations for apartments and houses, I don't have any family around where I was offered a place, and I had to get out of the hotel where I lived for 6 months.'

The size of some of the accommodation was also mentioned as well as **overcrowding** being an issue to be aware of for strategy planning.

 Not too much overcrowding.'


 Make the apartments a bit bigger, they're a bit small.'

As well as the location and quality of the accommodation, **appropriate level of supports** for customers was also mentioned as an area to be aware of when planning service provision at Focus Ireland.

 When they're giving long term accommodation, they should make sure that they are actually places where people can live comfortably. [And] engaging with people here to put supports in place to get out of here.'


 To make sure they are giving the right house that suits the client's needs.'

There were of course instances where Focus Ireland has provided an excellent accommodation service to a customer and the impact this had on their **quality-of-life and wellbeing** could not be understated.

 The one-bedroom unit conversion was a huge, huge advantage. Having your own space is hugely beneficial for my mental health, it feels like my own little house here. I'm sure everyone in this building would agree, self-sufficiency is an amazing feeling.'


Government involvement and building more homes

Participants were very clear that they felt that the government should be doing more to increase the supply of social housing and homes. Some also provided quite poignant feedback on the impact that this **lack of affordable housing** had on their family's lives and the stress caused by not having a secure home of their own.


 **Build more social houses. I was in a hub, and it was hard not to be allowed visitors and that is hard on your mental health, and it was hard to be independent as I couldn't work as no one was allowed in to mind my child.'**


 **I wish there were more options of social housing so that you don't have to move so far and maybe lose your job or school place.'**

These examples clearly illustrate the damaging effect that a lack of affordable housing has on other aspects of life and community for people and their families. This is their lived experience of trying to create stability and cohesion for themselves and their families.


 **It's all about student accommodation. The government aren't building any homes for those homeless, they should deal with greedy landlords to stop evictions and rents going up. They should build proper accommodation both for homeless and those coming here to start a new life, refugees.'**


Some participants also felt that the government should be supporting Focus Ireland through providing **more funding for supports and services**.

 **Keep doing what you're doing. Focus have improved their service up to scratch and the government need to provide Focus with more funding.'**

 **The government need to fund Focus Ireland properly, make an effort to make sure that people know about Focus Ireland, especially those who are new to Ireland and may not have enough English to seek out information.'**


The theme of **more homes and housing** appeared to be one of the most important to participants with nearly 70 mentioning this when asked this question. It was an area of concern for them, not only in terms of their own secure housing, but also for others in need as well.


 **More social housing for people.'**

 I wish they would build more homes for families.'

 Housing, push for more housing to be built.'


Participants felt that some of this responsibility lay with Focus Ireland and that **more appropriate housing supports** should be provided to those who needed it.


 Make sure people are moved on, don't leave them hanging for years waiting on a house.'


 They should help people more with progressing on in life, onto private accommodation and we're not pushed to get out of here. People that have children don't seem to have their needs met at certain times, they should be better looked after in their housing needs.'

 Make it easier to transfer to a permanent house after the contract here finishes.'

However, there was also recognition that **more social housing and the necessary supports** should be provided by the government and this was their responsibility.

 When we had anniversary and re-development of the building Simon Coveney made a speech about how smaller houses and apartments should be made available for people who choose to live alone, and I think it's important to press the government to honour this.'

 Engaging with the council for more houses and moving people on from where I am for example. Making sure that the people that do come in here behave.'

 Single men in Ireland have no hope of getting a council house – you should push the councils and the system to change.'

Empowering customers

Supporting and **listening to the needs of customers** emerged as an important theme related to empowering customers of Focus Ireland.



‘Listen to clients about what they need.’



‘When they do activities include younger children and parents, make sure that people suffering with their mental health are getting out of their apartments, and even something that can teach them a skill.’



‘Take on board people’s views. [And] a lot more of support and information around homelessness.’

Empowerment ranged from the supports and services provided by Focus Ireland, to helping customers **navigate more complicated bureaucratic systems**, such as council housing and HAP.



‘Local councils and authorities are not equipped to help men who have children to look after, lots of paperwork to fill out and people in authority often have questioned my status as a lone parent. Focus have been great, but the councils really have work to do.’



‘The key worker should be there for you to help you deal with the council.’



‘I think you should make it more obvious what Focus Ireland does for people; many are not aware of all the different services you offer – even helping with emails to other services etc. I don’t think everyone is aware that Focus Ireland can talk for them. Highlight some issues with HAP that you are aware of – I know so many people who’ve been mistreated by HAP.’

This customer empowerment sentiment is best captured in the following piece of feedback from one of the participants in this survey.



‘Keep focusing on the end user, social inclusion is important and that has been met by Focus – keep up the good work.’

Better communication

Clearer and more comprehensive communications on the supports and services that Focus Ireland provides was cited by numerous participants as an area to develop in the new strategy. This included **information sharing to the wider public** as well as Focus Ireland customers.

‘There are so many services out there, maybe there should be some kind of inclusive package or information about all of them that you could share with the customers.’

‘Increase your awareness campaign to let people know that you’re out there and what kind of services you offer. Maybe open some more offices around Ireland if possible.’

‘Straightforward information about what they (Focus Ireland) offer, sometimes it’s stressful where to find information, even on the website.’

With regards to sign-posting services to customers, some participants felt that this could be communicated more widely, and Focus Ireland should **make the link to relevant services for customers much clearer**.

‘Focus on mental health of those you support, make sure to link people with the correct service out there, there are so many options and not many people are aware of all the options.’

‘Communication [is important], I wish everyone had as good an experience as me, but I know when people feel vulnerable, they need reassurance.’


‘[There should be] more information about homelessness and how to go about payments/services.’


‘I suppose make it clearer that you don’t have to be homeless to use your service. Focus Ireland also help with other things.’

Health and wellbeing

Not surprisingly, mental, and physical health was mentioned by several participants as an area that required some attention from Focus Ireland. This survey took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, and this would have been to the forefront of many people's minds and experiences. The subsequent restrictions and public health guidelines meant that Focus Ireland services could not operate the way they had previously, and staff and supports were less readily available. The issue of housing and health was also a prominent topic in the media and wider society.

In a previous question about the type of needs that participants' felt they would like support with, **mental health was one of the highest scoring areas**, with 30% of participants stating they needed support.

 **More mental health supports all round.'**

 **Mental needs. More support and advice needed for clients, especially during lockdown or in isolation.'**


 **Help people get out of their houses now after Covid and get back into community participation.'**


Focus Ireland's advocacy work

Some of the issues that participants felt strongly about in this question related to Focus Ireland's advocacy work, have already been mentioned in the previous themes. However, it is useful to pull these together and talk about here.


Participants mentioned that they would like to see **Focus Ireland become more involved with the government and institutions involved with housing**, such as the council, financial institutions, and landlords.

 **Push better advice to the government to get them moving and solving this homeless crisis.'**

 **I feel like the whole issue of homelessness is being ignored by the government and I feel like Focus Ireland should be pushing them to do more. They need to fight the banks and landlords to prevent evictions.'**

 **More contact with landlords regarding eviction with communication between Focus Ireland and the landlord.'**


There was also a need for **more work with the public to communicate the issues** that people who were homeless or insecurely housed were facing.

 **Improvements: more communication, support from public, more housing.'**

Any other comments or feedback

This final qualitative question allowed participants the opportunity to provide feedback on anything else that they did not have a chance to share previously, and approximately 136 (32%) participants gave a comment regarding their experience with Focus Ireland.


For most participants (n= 107), gave positive feedback. Most of the comments were a general thanks to Focus Ireland or a compliment about Focus Ireland's supports and services. Some of these comments went into specifics as to **how Focus Ireland has helped and supported them.**


 5-and-a-half years ago I got the apartment and I have had nothing but great support from Focus Ireland...for me it has been super, always there for me. I feel staff here are very discreet, never interfere with me but they're open for me to contact them if I need anything.'

One participant even credited Focus Ireland with saving their life through the use of their supports and services.


 They've absolutely saved my life – I've found myself here and turned my life around.'

A cluster of comments giving positive feedback specifically thanked a worker and mentioned **the communication and listening skills of Focus Ireland staff.**


 Happier with Focus Ireland. I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for their support and listening ear, so thank you.'


 The person I was in contact with could not have done more for me, great advice throughout and even helped me to get sorted with a house. In fact, everyone I was in contact with was great.'

16 participants gave mixed feedback. In the mixed section, a couple of the comments mentioned how **changes in Focus Ireland staffing led to difficulties**, and one participant expressed their disappointment that a particular staff member had left.


 A great improvement generally since my initial tenancy, about 18 years ago or so. Although I'm sad to have seen some of the long-term staff and managers being 'streamlined' out of the service. I'm also sorry to hear of [staff member] departure, she contributed a lot to the service, was always open to listening to tenants.'

Another cluster of comments praised Focus Ireland's supports and services and then go on to mention ways in which the organisation can improve, such as: **allowing more visitors, hiring education support workers, arts gatherings in common areas, balconies, bigger apartments, more parks, and more events.** Only a couple of comments offered mixed criticism of Focus Ireland's staff and workers:

 My key worker is great, but the other staff here are not as friendly sometimes they don't even say hello to you. Night staff sometimes feels like they just look at you, and then look away and don't say anything.'


 A lot more information about education and stuff, we could use a dedicated education person who could be an expert that we could discuss options with.'

Mixed feedback was also provided on the area of accommodation, and suggestions were made as to how **the wider environment could be made a little nicer, such as more living space.**


 The area itself is fine, but the apartment is way too small there's no playground or park near which is a shame.'

13 participants gave negative feedback. A large number of negative comments mention difficulties with the maintenance service being inadequate:


 I have a lot of problems with damp in my apartment and that is not being sorted, only cleaned off.'


 Repairs, living conditions need to improve. Lack of support, bad management from Focus Ireland. Takes a long time for repairs to be done. Lack of communication.'

A few comments mention **a lack of communication between Focus Ireland and customers**, such as: not being aware that key workers exist, not knowing one had to register to be homeless, being promised support but not receiving it, and not adequately supporting people during legal matters.

 I wasn't aware of the existence of key workers. I didn't even know I had to be registered as homeless, no one told me that was the case until I met them the third time.'

Some of the negative comments also mentioned more complex issues, such as **anti-social behaviour in the locality**. While this feedback was in the minority, it does provide useful insight into the day-to-day experiences of some customers and how these issues can affect them.

 The area we're in, in (name of area), near the city centre is very rough. A lot of drugs, fighting and the Gardaí are here a lot. I am on my own with two kids and I really want to move from the area.'


 Most of the security guards are lovely, not many stay for long due to fights and screaming in the halls and apartments and this gives the whole building a bad name which is unfair. There needs to be more checks on who you're letting into the apartments, especially during Covid when there hasn't been as much contact or check in from staff.'


Finally, there are two smaller clusters of negative comments. The first cluster of responses mentioned the **unsuitability of some of the accommodation** provided by Focus Ireland. The second cluster of responses were complaints about some **services being restricted or cancelled due to Covid-19**. Overall, most comments giving negative feedback are about maintenance and communication issues.

There are a few general trends that exist throughout the feedback. There are no general bad comments about Focus Ireland, suggesting that experiences with Focus Ireland generally lean towards more positive. There are also **no negative comments about Focus Ireland staff and workers**, suggesting more of a positive experience with those people.

With regards to neighbours and the environment, most customers **felt safe and were happy with the standards of accommodation and had no issues with anti-social behaviour in the locality**.

 I feel safe and satisfied with staff and security in the building.'

 I'm happy in my environment.'

 I cannot think of anything bad, they genuinely helped me 100% and everything was resolved quickly. When I had an issue with a neighbour, they helped me and were so supportive.'

Conclusion

This project marks the third phase of a programme of monitoring and evaluation to verify our strategic objectives and service outcomes. The main aims of this evaluation were to capture customer satisfaction levels across key areas and understand the support needs of customers including during Covid-19 and the subsequent public health measures. This survey also sought to explore feedback from customers on the services that Focus Ireland provides, and what they would like to see in the new strategy.

Overall, participants were very satisfied with their access to and the quality of Focus Ireland services. Meeting the language needs of participants and feelings of safety using the service scored the highest at 97% and 94% respectively. While the satisfaction rates were high for access and quality, there may be some areas for improvement with regards to meeting the expectations of some participants and the service being easily available. 6% and 5% of participants somewhat disagreed with these two statements.

In terms of the support and inclusion of participants, 92% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that staff helped and supported them. 94% strongly agreed or agreed that staff respected them and acted in a professional manner. However, 14% of survey participants did not know how to make a complaint. 6% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed that their views were heard by staff and 8% disagreed in some way that they were included by staff in decisions that affected them. There does appear to be overlap in some of these areas of dissatisfaction amongst participants, which may suggest that there is a small group of people who are dissatisfied across several categories of Focus Ireland supports and services.

One of the main aims of this survey was to understand the support needs of customers, including during Covid-19. Over half (51%) stated that their support needs had increased in some way during this time, however there was a satisfaction rate of 81% for the supports participants received because of Covid-19. In this section participants were also asked what areas they felt they required support in, and Training and Education (33%), Mental Health (30%), Social and Community Participation (26%) and Employment (26%), were the top highest support needs.

These areas of support need might be reflective of the Covid-19 restrictions and the negative impact it had on mental health and community interaction. Supports around training and education and obtaining employment have increased since the previous

KPI evaluation project. Social engagement levels were also low in the previous customer survey.¹¹ Mental health support needs were not asked previously and may be an area that needs further investigation. It is also worth noting that in this survey most participants stated that they were single (61%), which may have posed a problem in relation to social isolation, particularly during lockdowns in the last year. Another possible area that certain customers might require support around is the understanding of entitlements and benefits. 5% of participants did not know what their employment status was, and while this is the minority, some may be missing out on entitlements that could be of use to them.

For this customer satisfaction survey, a series of three qualitative questions were included to capture the experiences and opinions of Focus Ireland customers. These three areas included: feedback on Focus Ireland supports and services, what should be included in the new strategy, and any other suggestions or feedback not previously mentioned. There were high levels of engagement for these questions and conveyed a rich landscape of experiences and views of Focus Ireland customers. These insights will prove invaluable as the organisation moves towards a new strategic vision and higher levels of customer engagement with the easing of restrictions and the Covid-19 vaccination roll-out.

The first of these qualitative questions was concerned with the supports and services that Focus Ireland did well, and what needed to be improved. Reassuringly the responses were overwhelmingly positive, with over 70% being very happy and positive about some or all aspects of the supports and services provided by Focus Ireland. The dedication and care of key workers and staff was most of the positive feedback, and there were instances where this support had provided a lifeline to customers and helped to change their lives for the better. The mixed and negative responses were in the minority, however they do provide good insight into areas for improvement, such as repairs and maintenance, quality standards of some of the Focus Ireland accommodation, and anti-social behaviour and conflicts between neighbours. While these issues were rare, they did have an impact on the quality of lives for these customers and need to be understood and addressed.

The question on what should be included in Focus Ireland's new strategy garnered the greatest number of responses for the qualitative questions, with 265 participants choosing to answer. The main themes that emerged were suggestions for improving services, such as support and advice, maintenance and repairs, quality of accommodation and customer empowerment. External facing work such as government involvement, the provision of more housing, better communication on Focus Ireland supports and services and more advocacy work on behalf of customers also emerged as important themes for the new strategy.

For the final qualitative question participants mainly provided feedback on Focus Ireland supports and services that they were thankful for. There were also suggestions for areas of improvement, such as quicker and more efficient maintenance and repairs, consistent communication and support work follow up, and more follow through when addressing anti-social behaviour.

¹¹ Focus Ireland (2020) *Satisfaction Levels Amongst Customers in Focus Ireland Long-term Housing*. Focus Ireland, Dublin. Internal Report

Recommendations

The recommendations in this report are based on the findings and feedback from survey participants. Certain themes and trends emerged in this survey, and it proved useful in providing an insight into the experiences and satisfaction levels of a sample of Focus Ireland customers across a range of services. This was also timely as this survey took place between October 2020- May 2021 and covered various lockdowns and restrictions because of Covid-19. The information in this evaluation project is important and should help to shape some of the supports and services as Ireland emerges out of strict restrictions, and the possibility of higher levels of engagement with customers.

The following list of recommendations arising from the research are grouped under the relevant teams in Focus Ireland and Focus Housing. They are as follows:

Property and development

- › Review of the current maintenance reporting system to ensure that those most in need of repairs are being addressed in a timely manner.
- › Improve the communications to customers on the timeframes for responses to maintenance/repairs notifications.
- › Better communication with tenants on the timetables of cyclical maintenance for properties.
- › Ensure that accommodation is of a suitable size and, where possible, that it is in the location of choice for the customer so that they are close to support networks and local community.

Services

- › A review of the complaints process for Focus Ireland and ensuring that it is widely communicated and easily accessible.
- › Preparation of an Action Plan to improve the supports for tenants in relation to:
 - › Access to suitable mental health supports
 - › Social and community participation, including innovative ways of building up community and engagement levels and activities.
 - › Access to training and education and employment
 - › Dealing with Anti-social behaviour in their area
- › Ensuring that customers are supported through Covid-19, and any residual impact from possible social isolation and upheaval caused by the pandemic.
- › Ensure that the overwhelmingly positive customer appreciation of support worker staff at Focus Ireland is communicated to the staff.

Advocacy and research

- › Improve the communication of Focus Ireland's Advocacy work to customers.
- › Review of communications and promotion of Focus Ireland's work through social media channels and website to the public.
- › Commit to undertake customer satisfaction survey every 2 years.
- › Develop and support capacity of peer research team towards taking a lead role in customer satisfaction survey projects.

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