

Sorting, Supply and Prioritisation Systems: quantifying and explaining homeless applicants' access to social housing in Ireland.



Presentation to the Focus Ireland Conference - Ending Homelessness: Are we serious?

2-3 September, 2024

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An Ghníomhaireacht
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The Housing Agency

Radical increase in homelessness in Ireland over the last decade, despite:

- Repeated government commitments to end homelessness and numerous policy statements
- Increased funding, including the establishment of housing first
- Increased social housing output (recent years),

Why hasn't this policy innovation and increased social housing reduced homeless?

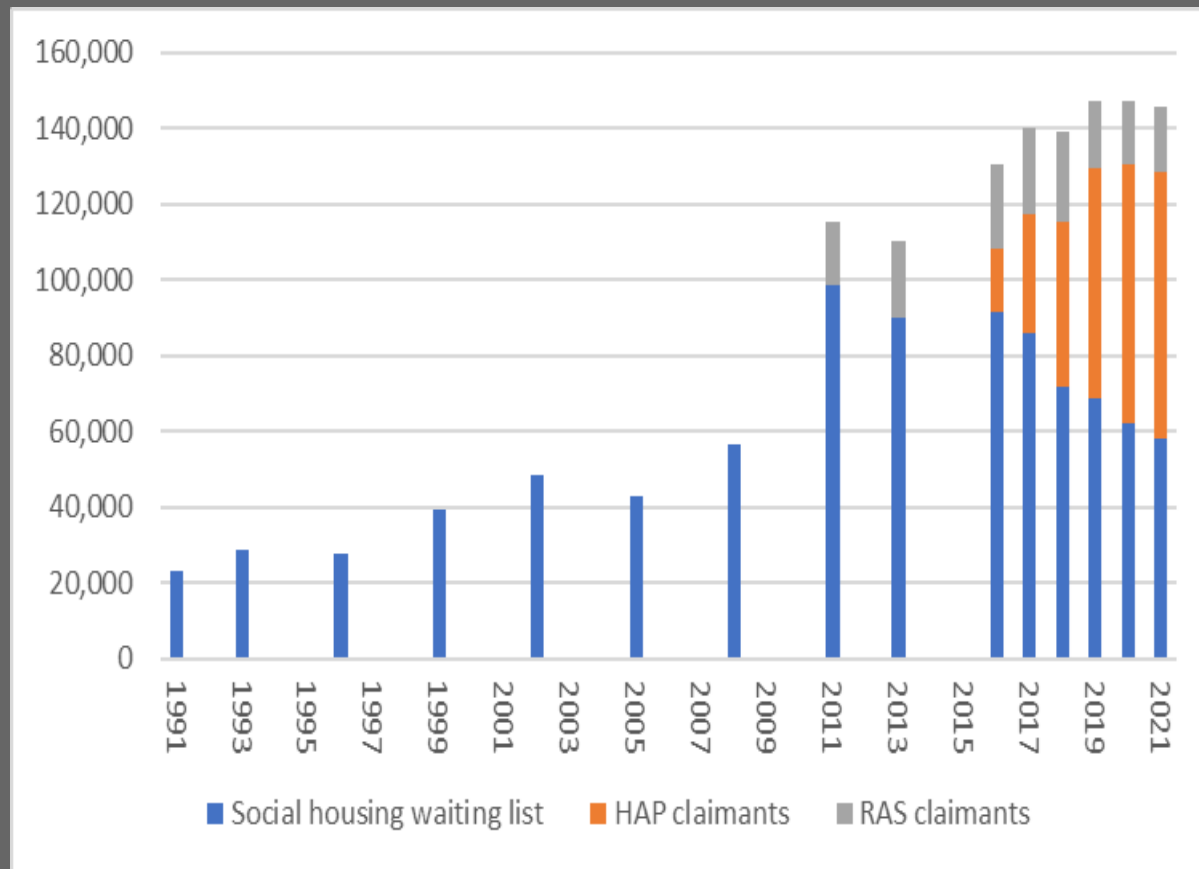
- Is the scale of the the response simply too weak for the scale of the problem?
- Or is something else going on?

This paper draws on:

- analysis of administrative data on applicants for social housing, and
 - analysis of social housing output conducted for the Housing Commission
- to explore these issues.



Context: Policy Change, Data Change and Social Housing Need



A note on the data:

From 1991 to 2013 the social housing needs assessment was carried out every 3 years, since 2016 it has been carried out annually. This means that all applicants have to reapply each year,

The methodology used to conduct these assessments changed several times:

- From 1996 households on the waiting list of more than one local authority were counted only once in the assessment of social housing need.
- From 2011 Rental Accommodation Scheme claimants were not included
- From 2016 Housing Assistance Payment claimant households were excluded
- RAS and HAP claimants can assess social housing from a separate 'transfer list'

Once claimants qualify for HAP their claim is not reassessed unless they:

- Move to a new dwelling
- Their household size changes (eg. due to the birth of a child).

If their income rises they pay a higher contribution to their rent but their HAP claim is not terminated.

Our Analysis of Data on Official and 'Unofficial' Social Housing Need

Data sources, size and timeframe:

- Annual social housing assessment (ie. review of social housing waiting lists)
 - Provided by all local authorities
 - Includes all 166,789 households on the waiting list at some time between 2016 and 2021
- Households whose application for social housing was terminated:
 - Assembled by the Housing Agency from local authority data,
 - Includes 69,559 households whose social housing application ended between 2016 - 2019.
- Housing Assistance Payment Claimant Households
 - Provided by the HAP coordination agency
 - Includes 87,181. Households who claimed HAP at some stage between 2016 and 2021

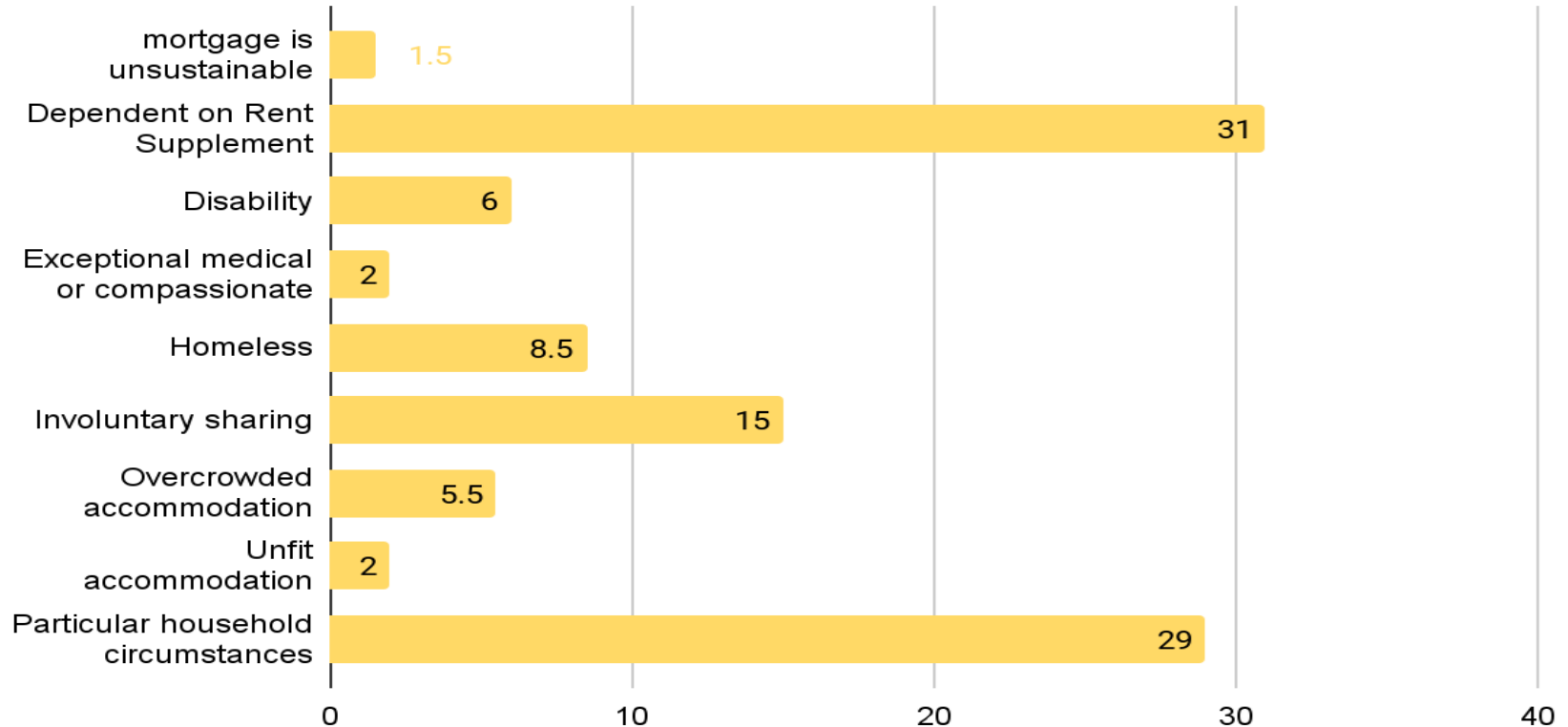
Data Treatment:

- Data cleaning
- Data mining
- Data analysis - descriptive statistics - primarily due to difficulties in comparing datasets.

Data Weaknesses

- Administrative data collected for another purpose but subject to strong validation checks
- Some issues are not included in all datasets - less information available on HAP claimants
- Datasets cover different time periods and are based on different data assembly strategies

Who is on the Social Housing Waiting List? Social Housing Applicants' Basis of Need, 2016-2021.



Qualifying Who Gets Social Housing

Part One: social housing applicants

- 10.45%-15.15% secured a social housing tenancy between 2016 and 2019
 - Maximum average of 5.05% and minimum average 3.48% per annum.
 - They waited 286.81 weeks on average for a tenancy

Quantifying Who Gets Social Housing. Part One: Basis of Need and Waiting Time of Social Housing Applicants who Secured a Social Housing Tenancy, 2016–2019

Basis of Need	Up to 3 months %	3 - 6 months %	6 - 12 months %	1 - 2 years %	2 - 3 years %	3 - 4 years %	4 - 5 years %	5 - 7 years %	More than 7 years	Total
At risk of homelessness	1	1	1	1	2	3	2	5	4	3
Currently dependent on Rent Supplement	19	17	21	18	19	23	24	23	28	23
Disability	11	12	10	13	17	12	12	10	11	12
Exceptional medical or Compass	2	3	5	7	4	6	4	4	4	4
Homeless	8	10	13	16	17	17	19	13	11	13
Involuntary sharing	3	6	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	6
Overcrowded	4	5	5	7	3	4	3	3	4	4
Particular household circumstances	27	30	23	19	20	19	17	22	19	21
Shared accommodation	22	13	16	7	7	6	7	8	8	9

Quantifying Who Gets Social Housing. Part Two: HAP Claimants

37% of HAP claimants secured a social housing tenancy between 2016 and 2021.

So an average of 7.4% of HAP claimants secured social housing each year.

The waited 135.1 weeks on average for a tenancy

22% of HAP claimants who ceased claiming this benefit within six months did so because they had secured a social housing tenancy.

Reason and Timeframe for Termination of Housing Assistance Payment Claims, 2016–2021

Cessation Reason	< 6 month s	6 - 12 month s	1 - 2 years	2 - 3 years	3 - 4 years	4 - 5 years	5 - 7 years	Total
Notice to Quit	21	22	21	16	15	14	18	19
Non-compliance	8	7	7	9	7	6	6	7
Social Housing	22	26	33	41	48	51	50	37
Tenant Choice/Behaviour	37	35	31	28	26	24	21	30
Tenant Deceased	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Exceptional Circumstances	9	8	6	4	3	2	3	5
Other	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0

Explaining Who Gets Social Housing

Three key influences:

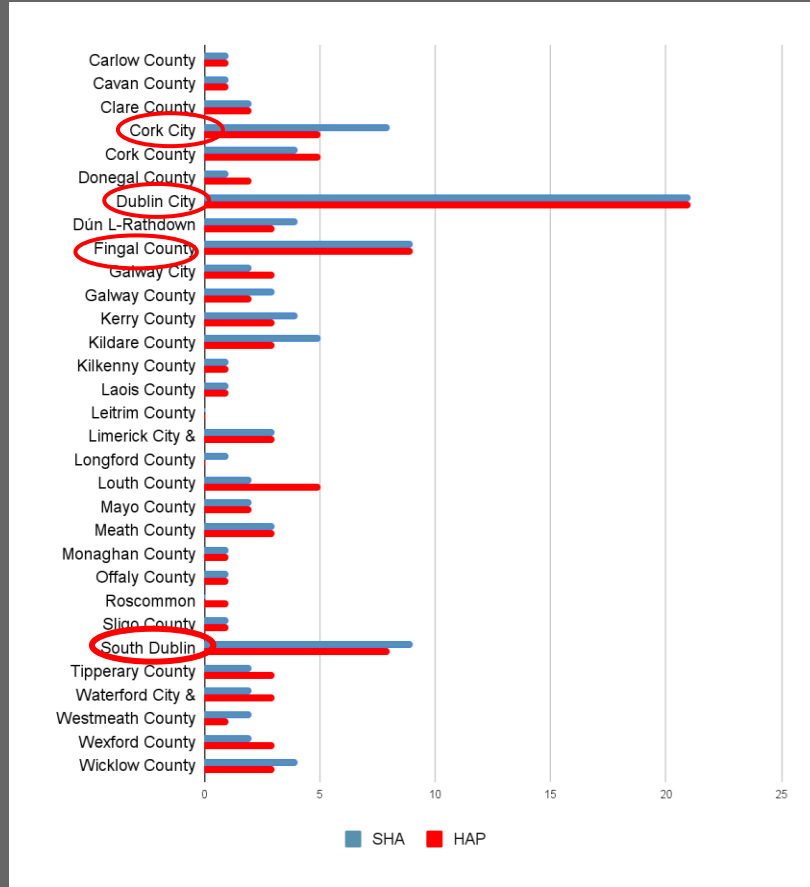
- Local authorities' prioritisation criteria
 - Level and spatial distribution and
- character of social housing supply compared to housing need.

Part One: Local Authorities' Prioritisation Criteria

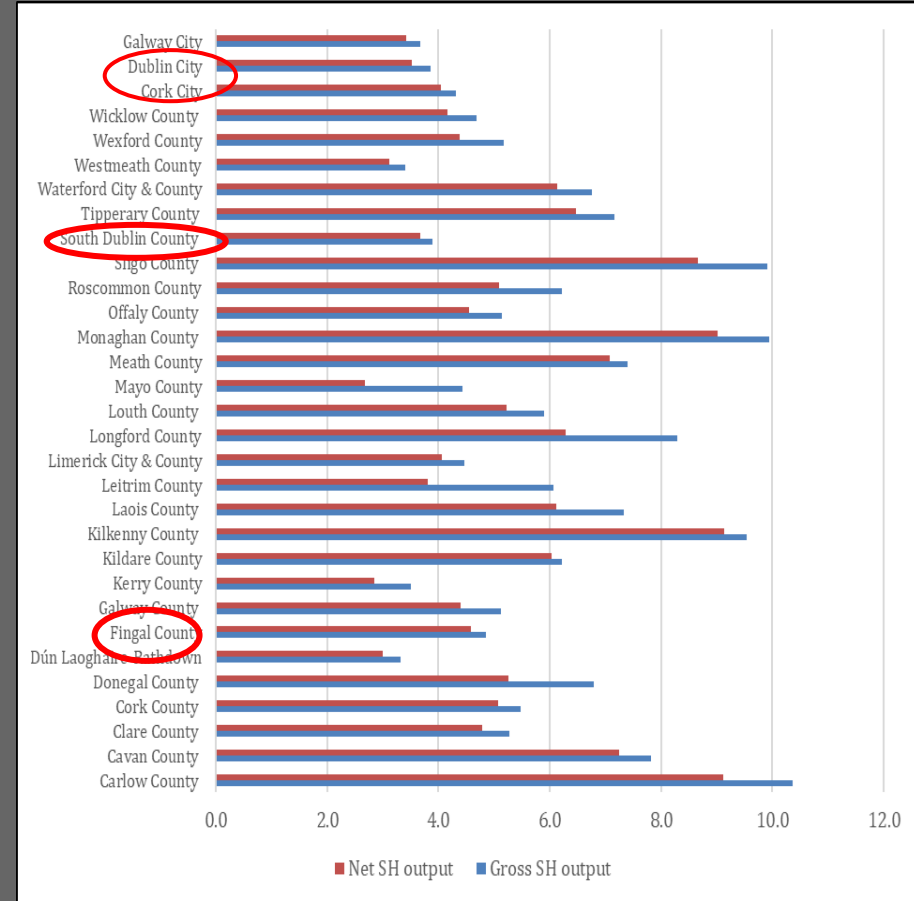
Priority criteria:	Local authorities applying criteria (n=31) %
Exceptional medical or compassionate grounds: the needs of applicants due to medical conditions or compassionate circumstances.	84
Homelessness priority: Housing Act, 1988.	81
Overcrowding: applicants living in accommodation deemed unfit for human habitation under the Housing Act, 1966.	74
Unfit accommodation: Housing Act 1966	68
Dangerous dwellings: Applicants living in dangerous conditions, as defined under Section 3(9) of the Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act, 1964	45

Part Two: Level and Spatial Distribution of Social Housing Supply

Social Housing Applicants and HAP Claimants by Local Authority (Households, %), 2021



Gross and net social housing output as a % of need, 2011-2020

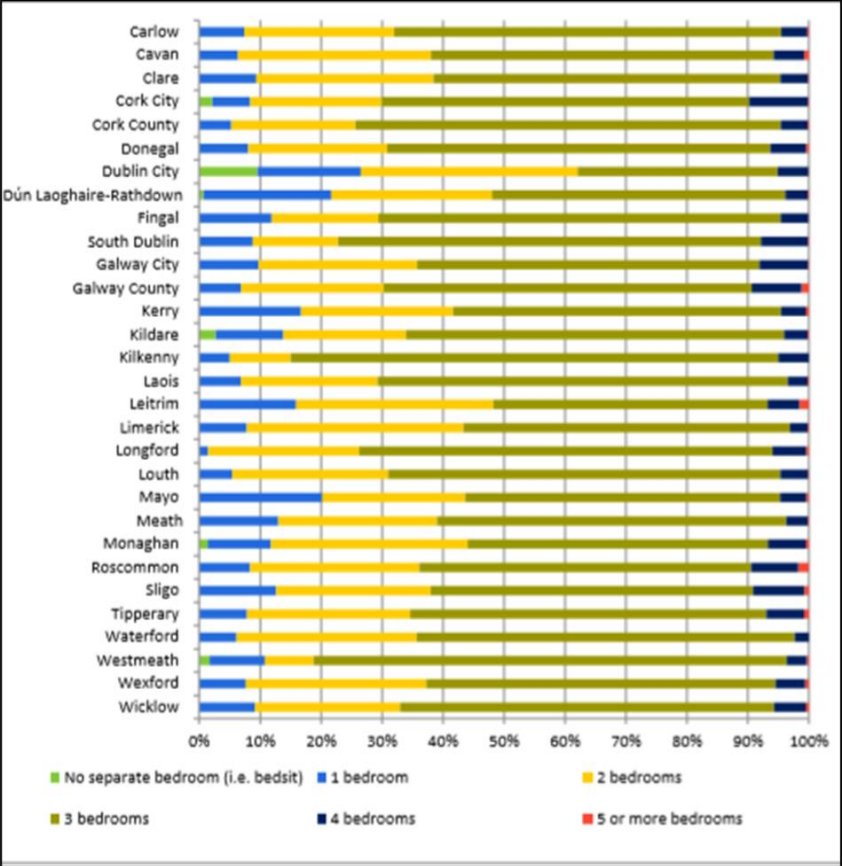


Part Three: Character of Social Housing Supply

Composition of Social Housing Applicant and HAP Claimant Households, 2017, 2021

Household Composition	SHA 2017 %	HAP 2017 %	SHA 2021 %	HAP 2021 %
Single adult	42	30	55	29
Single adult + 1-2 children	24	34	20	38
Single + 3 or more children	3	7	3	6
Couple	4	4	4	4
Couple with 1 - 2 children	12	16	7	16
Couple with 3 + children	5	9	3	7
Other Household Type	10		8	

Local Authority Social Housing Units by Number of Bedrooms, 2015



Conclusions

Homeless applicants make up 8.5% of the social housing waiting list but 13% of those allocated social housing.

People with disabilities were the only other applicant category who received a greater share of allocations than their share of the waiting list

But:

- other applicant categories (eg, shared accommodation and particular housing circumstances) were allocated social housing faster than homeless applicants
- Homeless applicants' situation does not appear so positive if large proportion of social housing allocated to HAP claimants is taken into account.

Homeless applicants are prioritised by the vast majority of local authorities.

The mismatch between the size of social rented dwellings and the size of homeless households appears to be the main influence on their share and speed of social housing allocations



An Coimisiún Tithíochta

The Housing Commission

Recommendation #71:

Increase the supply of social housing that better matches the size of homeless households and households in need of social housing.

Conclusions

The paper also provides useful information on HAP claimants' access to social housing and indicates they receive a larger proportion of allocations than social housing applicants.

Positive in view of the fact that:

- Many HAP claimants were formerly homeless or at risk of homelessness
- Many commentators had predicted they would be disadvantaged by their removal from the waiting list

However, operation of two parallel social housing systems and the lack of public information about allocations to people on the 'transfer list' raises transparency concerns.

It also means that the social housing waiting list is not a meaningful measure of housing need.

This is problematic in view of the legal functions of waiting lists - eg as the basis for Part V of the 2000 Planning Act.



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The Housing Commission

Recommendation #39:

Reform the Housing Assistance Payment and the Rental Accommodation Scheme, resetting them as short- to medium-term support measures for households eligible for social housing. Such households must remain on the social housing list, except where their income levels increase above the eligibility criteria for social housing.

Conclusions

More broadly the research sheds light on on the management of social housing waiting lists.

Introduction of annual social housing assessments in 2016 had a very significant impact on access to housing.

Between 2016 and 2019:

- 40.6% of applications were terminated for failing to reply to an information request
- 34.6% of applicants were terminated because applicants no longer qualified for social housing.

Applications are paper based and extremely user unfriendly for low income and vulnerable applicants.

Equity issue about lack of annual reviews of HAP claims.

Department of Housing did not review income limits for access to social housing (and HAP) between 2011 and 2021 - thereby significantly restricting access.



An Coimisiún Tithíochta
The Housing Commission

Recommendation #54:

Centralise arrangements for applying for and allocating social and cost-rental housing and make more extensive use of choice-based lettings.

Actions

1. Establish and manage centrally a single online application portal for all these types of housing.

Recommendation #52:

Review and streamline the arrangements for approving central capital grants and other public subsidies for social and affordable housing provision by the DHLGH to speed up the approval and payment processes.

4. The DHLGH should establish arrangements for annual review and updating of its subsidies for social and cost-rental housing provision and income limits for eligibility for social housing and housing allowances to take account of inflation or deflation in building costs, private rents, incomes and social welfare payments.