

# Written submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Equality on Child Poverty and Deprivation

**September 2025**

## Introduction

Focus Ireland welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Equality as it prepares its 2025 Work Programme.

This submission is being written as we wait for the Government to finalise and publish its new Housing and Homelessness Plan which has the potential to significantly reduce child and family homelessness. Focus Ireland believes that long-term child homelessness can be ended by the end of this decade if the right policies are included in the forthcoming Plan.

Although family homelessness has grown from around 200 families in 2013 to nearly 2,350 families in July 2025, it has largely been ignored in Government housing and homelessness strategies over that period; ‘Rebuilding Ireland’ and ‘Housing for All’. The particular challenges faced by children who are homeless with their families have been the subject of no Government initiative, programme or written policy over the last decade.

Focus Ireland is the leading organisation working with homeless families and has repeatedly drawn attention to the need to address the specific drivers of family homelessness, and to introduce dedicated supports to minimise the harm done to children who experience homelessness. Instead, an entirely crisis-driven reactive response has resulted in family homelessness being much higher than it might otherwise have been, but also the harm being done to the life chances of children that could well have been avoided.

With family homelessness at a new record high, it is essential that a multi-agency approach throughout the State sets out a commitment to agree a dedicated child-focused set of policies and initiatives to respond to the specific causes and challenges of family homelessness. A number of elements in such an approach, such as providing a legal requirement to consider the best interests of the child, are drawn out later in this submission.

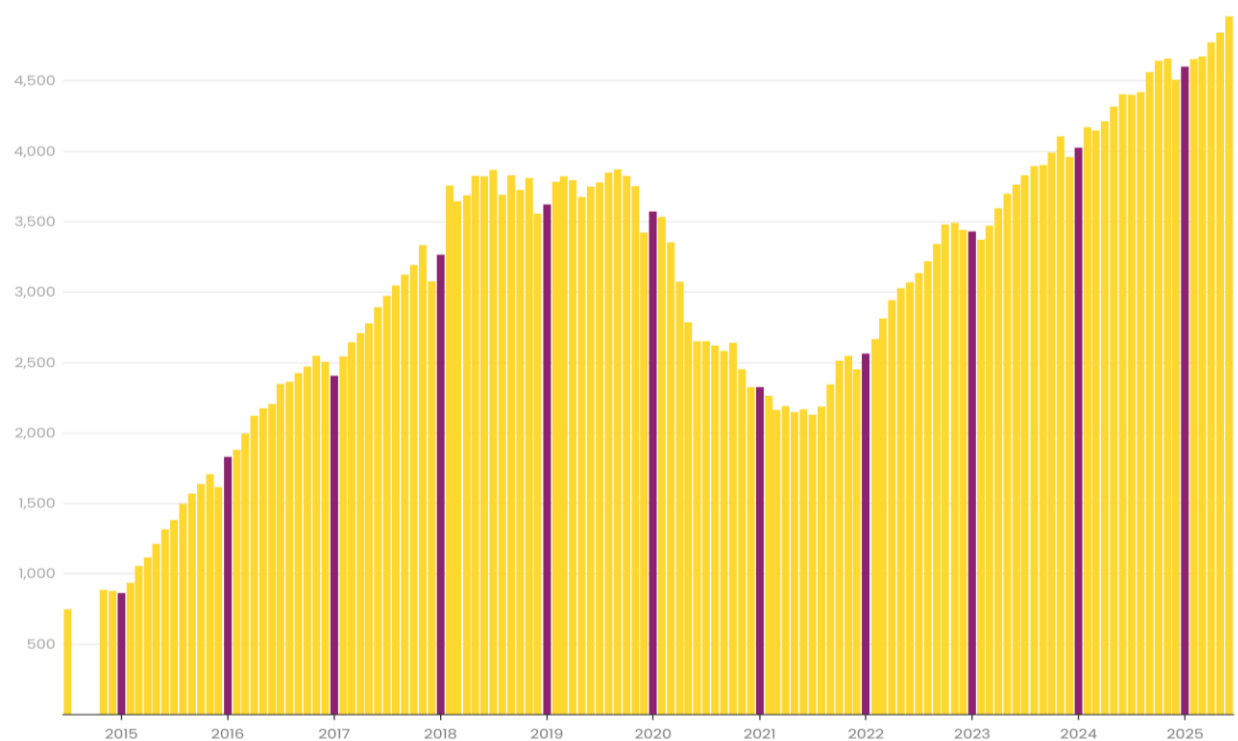
In May, Focus Ireland put forward our submission to the new Housing and Homeless Plan being presently prepared by the Department of Housing. Many of the recommendations we will make in this written submission are contained in our more detailed submission to the Plan available [here](#). We have chosen to repeat several key policy and budgetary proposals throughout this submission which we believe will be of particular interest to the members of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Equality and would welcome the opportunity to discuss these further throughout the Committee’s term.

## Child homelessness in Ireland today

There are over 5,000 children officially homeless in Ireland. Child homelessness has increased by over 135% in the last 4 years and all the progress in reducing child and family homelessness that was made in 2020 and 2021 has been tragically lost.

The below graph demonstrates how child homelessness has been allowed to steadily increase since early 2022. We have seen child homelessness increase month on month apart from the usual reduction in family homelessness around Christmas time and during the winter eviction ban 2022/23.

**Graph 1: Number of children who are homeless and relying on emergency homeless accommodation**

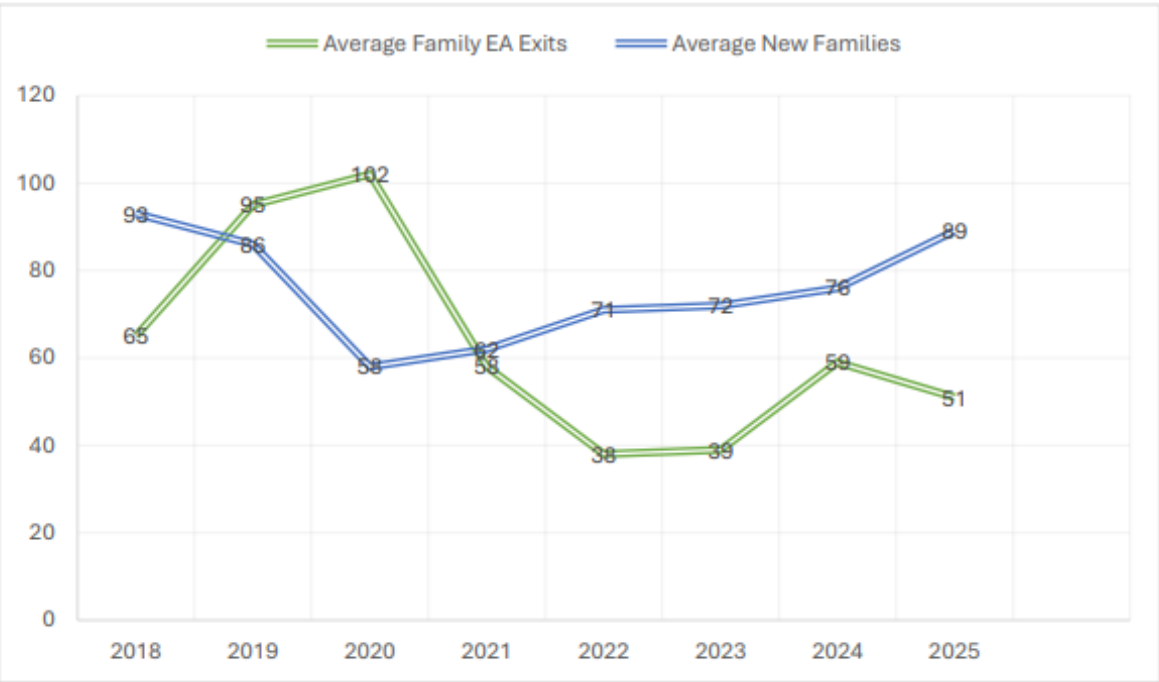


The COVID-related bans on evictions and other COVID-related measures by local authorities including the prioritisation of homeless families to social housing, were largely responsible for reducing child homelessness in 2020 and 2021. However, as seen in Graph 1, from mid-2019 we were already starting to see family homelessness starting to plateau. Since the Covid-related protections and policies ended and a 'business-as-usual' attitude returned to homelessness in 2022, these hard-won gains have been eroded over the last number of years.

In 2025, we are now seeing that the reason for growing child and family homelessness is not because of dramatic increased presentations to homeless services, but rather a very significant decline in the number of families able to exit homelessness. In Table 1 (pg.4 ) from the Dublin [July Homeless Report](#) from the DRHE, we can see that the number of families presenting to homeless

services has increased in 2025 compared to the previous 3 years, but is very similar to 2018 and 2019. What is different compared to those pre-pandemic years, is that family exits from homelessness have remained very low with half the number of families leaving homelessness every month this year compared to 2019 and 2020 despite the State building much more social housing in recent years compared to the pre-pandemic period. This decline in the numbers of families exiting homelessness has itself been largely driven by a decline in exits to private rental accommodation (with the support of HAP). The well-reported issues in the Private Rented Sector has meant that families can find it much more difficult to exit homelessness with the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and are much more reliant on local authority allocations to social housing. While the number of exits to social housing has increased slightly as more housing supply has become available, this has not fully compensated for the fall off in exits to the Private Rental Sector. To date in 2025, 75% of exits from homelessness have been to social housing, while before the Covid period exits tended to be equally divided between social housing and private rental (with HAP). This is reducing total family exits from homelessness.

Table 1: Average presentations and exits (families)



Source: Dublin Region Homeless Executive: Monthly Report to Dublin City Councillors on Homelessness. July 2025

The increased overall level of family homelessness has been accompanied by a significant increase in the number of families that are homeless for long periods. While the overall increase in family homelessness might be expected to result in some increase in long-term homelessness, the scale of the increase has been significantly higher than expected, with the number of families homeless for over 2 years more than doubling in Dublin since 2023. Many of these long-term homeless families have, under current local authority schemes of lettings, no prospect of being offered social housing in the foreseeable future and so, in the absence of affordable private rented

accommodation, are trapped disproportionately in very long-term homelessness. This has a detrimental impact on the lives of children.

## The impact of homelessness on children

While child poverty is a complex and multi-dimensional issue affecting the lives of over a quarter of a million children experiencing material deprivation in 2024<sup>1</sup>, the experiences of the children in families that are currently homeless are amongst the most extreme and harmful experience in the State. While we all understand that the causes of homelessness are complex, the most extensive analysis of the links between homelessness and poverty, carried out by the Rowntree Trust in the UK concluded that, while structural factors such as availability of work and housing cost had an impact, as did individual factors, the 'experience of (childhood) poverty very often predates, and is a powerful predictor of, (adulthood) homelessness'.<sup>2</sup>

Every day, Focus Ireland services observe the same thing and there is no doubt that if we had the data to repeat the Rowntree study in Ireland, we would confirm it. But while child poverty is a key part of the cause of homelessness for many adults and young adults, child poverty is part of the daily experience of life for children who are homeless with their families. Many children become homeless due to the poverty experienced by their families, but the experience of homelessness itself is a deeper and more traumatic form of poverty. We need to understand that the process of your family becoming homeless is in itself traumatic for children, and the experience of being homeless is a further trauma. With over 5,000 children experiencing homelessness currently, these children must be included in the scope of any initiative on child poverty, along with the many thousands of children who are at risk of homelessness due to the scale of our housing and homelessness crisis. Any reporting measures indicating progress on child poverty initiatives should consider children who are homeless to ensure a comprehensive picture of child poverty in Ireland.

We welcome the increase in the amount of new social housing built in recent years even if the number built is below national targets. We must recognise there will continue to be a serious shortage of homes for the foreseeable future – and we must plan in that knowledge and do whatever we can to protect children from experiencing the trauma of losing their home.

Most families entering homelessness have come from the Private Rented Sector and the primary causes of families becoming homeless continues to remain the same: landlords selling rental homes and rent arrears accruing because supports such as HAP or Rent Supplement fall far short of real rent. There are several key initiatives that we ask this Committee to consider when developing its Work Programme that we believe would make a considerable difference to preventing children from becoming homeless and supporting children through homelessness.

---

<sup>1</sup> Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2024

<sup>2</sup> Bramley, Glen, and Fitzpatrick, Suzanne. "Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?." Housing Studies 33.1 (2018): 96-116.

## 1. Housing Issues Relevant to Child Poverty

The harm done to children by experiencing homelessness has been extensively researched and widely recognised<sup>3</sup> but the many routes out of poverty for families, such as parental employment, become virtually impossible for families that are homeless. Both homelessness and child poverty are, in their own right, substantial, complex and hard to resolve. Nevertheless, there are a number of practical and impactful actions that could be taken to alleviate the particular harm that is done when the two problems overlap.

### 1.1. The Tenant-in-Situ scheme should be reinstated as a key homeless prevention tool

Focus Ireland has expressed significant concern over recent changes to the Tenant-in-Situ (TiS) scheme, which has been a crucial tool in preventing families and individuals from becoming homeless since the end of the eviction ban in Spring 2023. The TiS scheme was introduced as a safety net when the government decided not to extend the moratorium on 'no fault evictions,' which had raised widespread concerns about rising homelessness.

Despite its limitations, the TiS scheme has successfully prevented thousands of people from becoming homeless, saving the Department significant costs in emergency accommodation. The TiS scheme prevented over a thousand households from becoming homeless in 2024 alone.

The scheme is now so unreliable, and communications by local authorities to tenants and landlords so disrupted, that it will be very difficult in future to get any landlords who wish to sell up to take the long and uncertain route of TiS. In practical terms this has amounted to the removal of the 'safety-net' put in place at the end of the no-fault eviction moratorium and will likely contribute to further rises in homelessness this year. We are already seeing a drop in the number of homeless preventions in 2025 so far. The number of households prevented from becoming homeless was 771 in Q2 of this year, compared to nearly 1,000 in Q2 2024. Families and individuals do not usually present to homeless services immediately after becoming homeless so the impact of the significant decline in TiS purchases so far this year may not result in people presenting to homeless services for months. The new guidelines seem to treat the scheme as a 'last resort,' making the process longer and less appealing for landlords. This shift in policy suggests a preference for vacant-possession sales over protecting existing tenants, which undermines the scheme's effectiveness and will likely increase the numbers presenting to homelessness.

---

<sup>3</sup> D'Sa, S., Foley, D., Hannon, J. et al. The psychological impact of childhood homelessness—a literature review. *Ir J Med Sci* 190, 411–417 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11845-020-02256-w>

Given the significant challenges in delivering new social housing, Focus Ireland has argued that Government should reintroduce and adequately fund the TiS scheme as part of its new Housing and Homeless Plan, so that every household that qualifies under the scheme can avail of its protection.

## 1.2. Social housing allocations for families living in emergency accommodation

Access to social housing has always been a key route out of homelessness, and with the reduced availability of private rental property accessible through HAP in the last three years, this is an increasingly vital route. The transition of households from homelessness into the housing system is not a simple issue of supply and demand but is mediated by a range of different factors and shaped by specific policies. There have been assumptions in recent years that a ‘rising tide lifts all ships’ and that increased social housing supply will eventually start to reduce homelessness. But housing policies have not been designed to maximise the impact of housing supply on homelessness but rather to meet a number of different policy goals appropriate to different periods and different objectives. In the past, efforts to tackle family homelessness through increased social housing allocations has been met with resistance through claims that they lead families to become ‘voluntarily’ homeless. This claim was not supported by analysis by the Housing Agency<sup>4</sup> and all the evidence shows that the rate of families entering homelessness did not accelerate during that period.

To solve long-term family and child homelessness, we need a specific and targeted approach. Focus Ireland developed a proposal to end long-term family homelessness last year which can be [read here](#). New social housing targets were agreed in the Programme for Government, with the State now committed to a target of 12,000 new social homes per year but unless the proportion of social housing allocations to long-term homeless families is increased to compensate for the loss of private rental exits, the number of families who are long-term homeless will continue to increase, with corresponding harm to the children in those families. Measures to alleviate child poverty will have little impact on these families in the absence of a new home. Focus Ireland welcomes the Programme for Government commitment to ‘Focus social housing allocations on getting families out of long-term homelessness’. Government and Local Authorities now need to develop a plan to ensure that this commitment is met and ensure that long-term homeless families are allocated a fair proportion of these homes, commensurate to their level of social need.

---

<sup>4</sup> Housing Agency (April 2016) Review of Ministerial Direction on Housing Allocations for Homeless and Other Vulnerable Households

### 1.3. Reform of the HAP scheme including increasing rates in line with rising rents

The private rental sector has been used as quasi-social housing in the face of housing policy failure since the financial crash. By doing so, the State's use of private rental housing has in many ways caused the current crisis we see in the Private Rental Sector. We must return as much of this housing back to its original use as possible and directly build the social housing required to meet the long-term housing needs of low-income households. A core response to this challenge must be to increase the number of allocations to social housing as the amount of new social housing becomes available, as discussed above, but access to the private rental sector will always remain a key route out of homelessness for many families.

A commitment to 'reducing reliance on HAP' and ultimately phasing it out should not stand in the way of the reforms required to make it more effective in the immediate term and prevent a further, preventable increase in child homelessness. They are rather a regrettable but necessary requirement to support the households currently renting using subsidies. The 'discretionary' increase in the maximum rent limits on HAP announced in 2022 had very little impact on hard-pressed tenants as the Department of Housing made minimal effort to inform tenants of the measure and the application process was off-putting; wider, systematic rather than discretionary changes are required.

Focus Ireland welcomes the Minister for Housing's commitment to carrying out a review of the HAP Scheme. We have urged the Minister to carry out this long overdue review in an efficient and timely manner in order to ensure that the HAP scheme provides the adequate supports for vulnerable tenants. This review should be completed in tandem with the progression of the various measures to address supply and tenancy protections in the Private Rental Sector.

Focus Ireland's recent submission to the forthcoming Housing and Homelessness Plan outlines a number of problems with the HAP Scheme, many of which are echoed in the report of the recently published investigation of the Ombudsman. The problems with the scheme are well documented, affording the Minister a clear pathway to improving the scheme in the short term, many of which are process changes that do not require any additional budgetary allocation. What does require immediate attention this year, is the maximum monthly rent limits under the HAP scheme. Since 2016, the standardized average rent for new tenancies has increased by 75% but there has been no change to maximum monthly rent limits since that time. Unless the levels of general HAP and Homeless HAP are increased to re-establish its relative competitiveness in the market, homelessness will continue to rise and many people who are not currently eligible for social housing will remain homeless for many years.

## 2. Social Welfare and Homeless Supports Relevant to Child Poverty

### 2.1. Ensuring local authorities prioritise the best interests of children

Focus Ireland has long argued that adopting a 'Best Interest of the Child' approach, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) core principals, would lead to better outcomes for children experiencing homelessness. The Housing Act (1988) contains the definition of homelessness in Ireland but only considers the needs of a single homeless person and does not specifically address the needs of children. This legislation has not been updated to reflect the Thirty-first Amendment of the Constitution (Children) Act (2012), which emphasizes children's rights and the State's duty to protect them. Currently, local authorities conduct a Housing Needs Assessment for the parent or guardian, which includes counting the number of children in a household, but local authorities are not required to assess children's individual needs. Children in emergency accommodation face unique challenges while experiencing homelessness so their housing needs must be seen in the context of their long-term health and well-being. Focus Ireland believes that children, being particularly vulnerable after losing their homes, should have their needs individually assessed, and factors like access to education, medical support, and maintaining relationships with their wider family network should all be considered.

In 2017, the Labour Party introduced the Housing (Homeless Families) Bill, which aimed to recognise families as units, prioritise children's best interests, and provide appropriate accommodation to support family functioning and child welfare. This legislation would provide much needed guidance about the priorities which local authorities should apply when dealing with vulnerable families. Although the Bill had broad political support, it was not passed due to a change in Government. We have argued that Government should commitment to incorporating the contents of the Housing (Homeless Families) Bill into the next Housing Misc Bill to ensure that children's needs are central to decision-making and that families have access to safe accommodation. We would welcome the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Equality's support with this.

### 2.2. Working families experiencing homelessness should be supported to remain in employment, with particular focus on lone parent families

Homelessness is both a social and an economic problem. In recent years, as the scale of Ireland's housing problem has deepened, the number of households becoming homeless with no underlying social or behavioural issues has been rising. Increasingly, families have become homeless purely because they were renting their homes and their landlord has decided to sell up and wishes to sell the



house untenanted. As a result, it is no longer uncommon for homeless families to have one or more parents in active employment. CSO data shows that 1 in 5 people in emergency homeless accommodation on Census night in April 2022 were employed<sup>5</sup>, and this is likely to be higher now.

Local authorities take little or no account of this and the challenges it creates for the parent to continue that employment until new accommodation can be secured. As a poverty-prevention measure, all efforts should be made to facilitate working parents to retain their jobs. Guidelines and training to Local Authority staff should highlight the need to allocate such families to emergency accommodation that will support them to remain in their existing jobs. This means prioritising accommodation which is accessible to their support networks, school and childcare arrangements and place of employment. This is a particularly difficult problem for lone parents. Nearly 6 in 10 homeless families are headed by a lone-parent and the growth in family homelessness in 2025 has been largely a result of increasing lone-parent families in homelessness. A recent report from the ESRI<sup>6</sup> on poverty and deprivation showcases how lone-parent families and larger families face the highest rate of persistent at-risk-of-poverty and deprivation, alongside households with a working-age adult with a disability. On average a third of children in lone-parent families experienced persistent deprivation between 2016 and 2023. Every effort must be made to keep these parents employed during their time in homelessness to account for the poverty and deprivation already experienced by these families and the additional difficulties they face when trying to exit homelessness on one income.

### 2.3. Address childcare issues for families experiencing homelessness

While affordability and capacity issues within the current childcare system are well-documented, the impact of a lack of accessible supports is significant for families experiencing homelessness. It is a barrier for parents, and lone parents in particular, to accessing paid employment and/or education thus leading to families being trapped in poverty, preventing families from exiting homelessness and, for others, increasing the risk of becoming homeless in the first place. A lack of childcare supports also prevents parents from attending property viewings and various other housing-related appointments which can lead to prolonged periods in homelessness. For most families in emergency accommodation, it is almost impossible to have informal childcare arrangements in place. Many family hubs exclude external visitors including childminders. Working lone parents who are employed in hospitality, retail or the care sector can have irregular shift patterns and therefore rely on family/ friends to provide childcare. Strict rules in most emergency accommodation settings that prohibit teenagers

---

<sup>5</sup> [Census of Population 2022 Profile 6 - Homelessness](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Thematic Report on Persistent Income Poverty and Deprivation in Ireland](#)

under 18 years from staying in the premises unsupervised creates additional barriers for parents who are in employment.

Targeted measures such as the National Childcare Scheme sponsored subsidy are beneficial but are currently insufficient compared with the hourly fees charged by childcare providers. Likewise, the current threshold for maximum childcare supports does not reflect increases to the National Minimum Wage or thresholds for social welfare payments such as the Working Family Payment. Sponsored subsidy rates and relevant thresholds should be increased to reflect actual childcare costs and facilitate parents to take up or remain in education and employment without jeopardising their existing childcare entitlements. Focus Ireland would welcome focus on this issue by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Equality and a further examination of how these barriers could be reduced.

## 2.4. Provide enhanced supports to families with complex needs

Families experiencing homelessness can often require additional support to manage their situation. Some families have support needs which predate their entrance into homelessness, and others develop additional needs given the extended periods of time that they are spending in emergency accommodation. We estimate that 10–20% of families engaged in Focus Ireland services have more complex support needs. The lack of these supports reduces the chances of these families making a sustained exit from homelessness and exacerbates their existing needs.

The challenges facing these families is recognised in ‘Housing for All’ which states: ‘One notable issue that is evident concerns the length of time that some families (many with support needs requiring a multi-agency approach) spend in emergency accommodation. We will work with Local Authorities and NGOs to identify families experiencing long-term homelessness that have complex support needs. Those that do will be provided with enhanced tenancy sustainment supports to help them exit homelessness and maintain their homes’ Following this commitment in Housing for All, Focus Ireland commissioned a feasibility study into the potential, and challenges, of establishing ‘multi-disciplinary teams’, including clinical and therapeutic components, to support this group of vulnerable families.

[The full report can be read here.](#)

Focus Ireland has argued that the new Housing and Homelessness Plan must recommit to the Housing for All action to provide enhanced tenancy sustainment supports to families experiencing long-term homelessness to help them exit from homelessness and maintain their homes, but go further than

Housing for All by committing to piloting a multi-disciplinary team for families and put a funding mechanism and timeline in place to achieve this action.

## 2.5. Ensure that every child in homelessness should have timely access to a Child Support Worker

In the last four years, the number of homeless children has doubled. We know from evidence-based research on childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences that becoming homeless as a child is deeply traumatic. It is well-documented that the impact of homelessness carries many negative consequences for the physical, psychological, and emotional development of children which can have lifelong effects. We believe that the needs of every homeless child should be assessed, including factors such as access to their school, medical and therapeutic needs, and how to support family relationships.

Focus Ireland has long argued that every child in homelessness who needs one should have timely access to a Child Support Worker, to work 1:1 with children addressing their needs and minimising the trauma of homelessness. Focus Ireland has advocated for Government to build on the Programme for Government commitment to provide special supports for children impacted by homelessness by funding Child Support Workers. Children and parents consulted by the Ombudsman for Children's Office reported that Child Support Workers were one of the few positive aspects of being in a Family Hub; the Ombudsman recommended that "further attention should be given to identifying additional practical measures (for example, an increase in therapeutic supports and child support workers) that could be implemented to support the resilience, dignity and self-worth of children and parents while they are living in emergency accommodation". Not only do Child Support Workers help to address some of the detrimental impacts of homelessness, by extension, they can help to reduce the pressure and stress on parents. This enables parents to engage much more fully both with supporting their children through a traumatic experience, as well as on the process of exiting homelessness.

Currently, there are a considerable number of children with assessed needs who are unable to access childcare supports. Addressing this shortfall in support workers and expanding this support to parents and families could significantly improve family wellbeing while in emergency accommodation and support families to successfully exit homelessness for good.

## Conclusion

The number of homeless children in Ireland now exceeds 5,000. Child homelessness has risen by over 135% in the last four years. Homelessness deeply compounds child poverty, causing significant trauma and impacts severely on children's physical, psychological, and emotional wellbeing. Despite these rising figures, Focus Ireland believes that child homelessness in Ireland can be ended over the next decade if the right policy choices are made now.

Focus Ireland would welcome the opportunity to come before the Committee in the near future to present on this important topic and discuss the issues and solutions in further detail.