

Irish Homeless Policy Group Opening Statement to Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage concerning 'Homelessness' on Tuesday, 16th December 2025.

We would like to thank the Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage for the opportunity to talk to you about the issue of Homelessness.

I am Emma Byrne, the Chair of the Irish Homeless Policy Group and Policy Manager at Focus Ireland, and our delegation today includes Ber Grogan, Executive Director at the Simon Communities of Ireland and Adam Boyle, Solicitor at Mercy Law Resource Centre. The three of us represent the wider Irish Homeless Policy Group.

Our Group is a collective of policy staff in organisations which work with people who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness. Some of the organisations are part of the 'homeless sector', but given the scale of homelessness, organisations working with a wider range of people now need to be concerned with homeless policy. Our Group includes organisations providing direct housing supports, policy work, advocacy, and legal interventions for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The Group represents an important new stage in collaboration and while we are in relatively early stages of development, over the last year we established a number of new initiatives to address common challenges; elevate the voices and experiences of the people our organisations work with; and, critically, to put forward policy solutions that we believe can reduce, and ultimately end, homelessness. We believe that homelessness is solvable and that those who deliver homeless services are best placed to contribute to developing solutions to end homelessness in partnership with government and local authorities.

In January this year, as the Programme for Government was being agreed, we urged the new Government to commit to 10 actions that we believe would help work towards ending homelessness in Ireland by 2030, a goal which Ireland has committed to under the Lisbon Declaration. I have included the document setting out these 10 key actions as part of our submission which reflect the wide range of experiences captured within the Group. Some of these points are reflected in the Government's new Housing and Homelessness strategy, while others we will continue to work to get adopted next year.

We are an apolitical group and open to working with anyone who is committed to ending homelessness. Throughout 2025, our Group organised, with cross-party support from Sinn Féin, The Labour Party and the Social Democrats, the 'Understanding Homelessness' series of presentations in the Leinster House AV Briefing room. The aim of these events was to bring front-line knowledge and research to Oireachtas members and their staff and to help inform homeless policy.

We recognise that the solutions to ending homelessness in Ireland will be implemented at a local and national level, but our ability to implement these solutions may be impacted by decisions at an EU level so, this year, we met with Irish MEPs in Brussels, the Chair of the EU Housing Advisory Board and EU Commission staff who are drafting the first ever European Affordable Housing Plan. We highlighted that one of the core issues that will limit our ability to end homelessness in Ireland and across Europe is the lack of structures to ensure new public housing reaches marginalised people who have experienced homelessness. As we have seen in Ireland in recent years more social housing, is not, in itself, sufficient to guarantee a fall in homelessness and even less guaranteed to reduce long-term homelessness.

There are several key initiatives that we ask this Committee to consider that we believe would make a considerable difference to reducing homelessness in Ireland and make real progress towards our 2030 goal.

1. We ask that the Committee support our ambition that Ireland sets the goal of making sure no one is homeless for longer than 6 months by the end of this Government term.
2. We ask that the Committee recognise the importance of collaboration and partnership between local authorities, NGOs, and all relevant State agencies and government departments, and support our proposal for the development of new structures and processes to support collaboration.
3. We ask that this Committee reaffirm support for the recommendation by a previous iteration of this Committee which proposed the introduction of a new robust, independent and centralised appeals system that would provide an avenue to appeal decisions by local authorities regarding access to emergency accommodation, access to social housing supports and decisions impacting on tenants of local authority homes.
4. Finally, we ask that this Committee confirm that any amendments to the 1988 Housing Act, which would seek to add additional eligibility criteria for households seeking access to emergency homeless accommodation, undergo robust pre-legislative scrutiny, while encouraging a broad consultation with frontline services, independent legal experts, and IHREC to ensure no family in need is left without shelter.

Solving homelessness is a complex issue requiring persistent Government and political attention and requires shared problem solving. We welcome the Committee's decision to examine the issue of homelessness today and request it remains high on your Committee's agenda in 2026.

Thank you.

Organisations involved with the Irish Homeless Policy Group include:

Cope Galway, Crosscare, DePaul Ireland, Focus Ireland, The Irish Refugee Council, Novas, Respond, Threshold, Simon Communities of Ireland, Dublin Simon Community, SVP, the Irish Traveller Movement, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, the Irish Council for Social Housing, Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice.

Appendix 1

In 2026, we ask that this Committee examine the issue of Travellers and homelessness. We ask that the Committee pays special attention to two specific points.

1. The need for an ethnic identifier to be embedded across all homeless services. Travellers are significantly over-represented in emergency accommodation and the need to collect ongoing data for all ethnic minority groups has been evident for some time to develop targeted policy solutions.
2. Travellers are not included under any action in the 'homeless' section of Delivering Homes, Building Communities 2025-2030 despite a long-standing commitment to address Traveller youth homelessness in the National Youth Homelessness Strategy.