

Focus Ireland Opening Statement to Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage concerning 'Homelessness' on Tuesday, 16th December 2025.

Firstly, we would like to thank the Committee for the invitation to speak to you today. While Focus Ireland works with people in a very wide range of circumstances, we have been the leading organisation working with families that are homeless for forty years, and particularly in the last decade during the continually shocking surge in family homelessness. This time of year, is particularly difficult for these families with their 5,274 children facing a Christmas in homeless accommodation. For half of them this is their second such Christmas, for quarter their third or even fourth.

That is why I want to first mention our recently launched national campaign, No Child Without a Home.

It focuses on five practical steps that can genuinely change the future for children:

- a. Stop no-fault evictions into homelessness.
- b. Prevent families losing their homes because of unaffordable rents.
- c. Build enough of the right homes in the right places.
- d. Prioritise social housing for families who have been homeless the longest.
- e. Put the best interests of the child at the centre of every housing decision.

These are not vague hopes. They are achievable, evidence-based solutions that put children first.

Secondly, I want to acknowledge the publication of “Delivering Homes, Building Communities 2025-2030: An Action Plan on Housing Supply and Targeting Homelessness” and the fact that it reflects a number of the proposals and ideas which we have been advocating for for many years. The crucial thing now, for us and the people we work with, is implementation, funding and delivery, and we look forward to discussing our priorities in relation to those issues with the Committee.

Third, I want to draw your attention to the series of reports which we published last week, exploring the way that homelessness varies across the country. We might get a chance to talk about the significance of these regional differences over the session. These reports are part of a growing body of evidence, including three excellent reports that the DRHE published last week, which highlight not just how destructive homelessness is but also where the solutions might lie. In that context I want to renew our call for the Government to re-establish an independently chaired Research and Data Sub-Committee of the National Homeless Action Committee (NHAC).

All this evidence re-emphasises the dynamic nature of homelessness and that homelessness is rising, not because of an increase in the number of households

becoming homeless but because of a decline the number of people able to move out into a secure home.

While there are a lot of people becoming homelessness, there is no significant increase in the rate. If it were not for the effectiveness of HHAP and TiS, we would be seeing increases in the number entering homelessness (making things even worse) - but we should not take the effectiveness of these measure for granted.

But we also need to pay more attention to the limited routes out of homelessness. We need to need to better link the increased housing supply to exits from homelessness. Some progress has been made in this, particularly in Dublin, this is an area which is entirely under policy control and more need to be done on this urgently, if we are to the benefits of increased social housing supply in falling homelessness.

But progress in social housing has been completely undermined by the collapse in exits to the private rental sector, particularly in Dublin. We should not take this as a given but look at measures like an enhanced, targeted Rental Assistance Scheme (RAS) and HAP levels that reflect market realities to make private rented tenancies more viable for both tenants and landlords.

A final option, which is important for certain groups is the ring-fenced purchase of housing from the market, for instance for very large families who would otherwise be trapped indefinitely. Government action on this is welcome but the scale may not be sufficient. All these measures need to be accompanied with funding to provide tenancy supports for those who need them to avoid a return to homelessness.

Finally, I want to refer to a further regional difference highlighted in Focus on Homelessness, which was the extent to which households leaving Direct Provision account for a large number of the newly homeless in Dublin but not elsewhere. These people have had their claim for asylum upheld by our rigorous system and most have lived in Ireland for many years, are working but, like so many, are unable to find an affordable home. Government failure to develop a plan for this entirely foreseeable challenge is now falling on homeless services in Dublin and on these households themselves. We need to recognise people in these circumstances as homeless and in need of housing and design a system to support their integration in society and contribution to the workforce. I am sure we can discuss this issue in more detail with the Committee members.