



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Strategic overview on homelessness

Actions underway across the
Department to combat and
eradicate homelessness

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1 Executive Summary

On 21 June 2021, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, with the support of Government, signed the 'Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness'. The Lisbon Declaration commits all signatories, Ireland included, to working towards the ending of homelessness by 2030, so that:

- no one sleeps rough for lack of accessible, safe and appropriate emergency accommodation;
- no one lives in emergency or transitional accommodation longer than is required for successful move-on to a permanent housing solution;
- no one is discharged from any institution (e.g. prison, hospital, care facility) without an offer of appropriate housing;
- evictions should be prevented whenever possible and no one is evicted without assistance for an appropriate housing solution, when needed;
- no one is discriminated against due to their homelessness status.

The Lisbon Declaration further commits national, regional and local authorities, to:

- promote the prevention of homelessness, access to permanent housing and the provision of enabling support services to the homeless;
- welcome the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the design and implementation of these policy measures;
- support our policy measures with adequate funding and, when appropriate, make use of EU funding as a lever to improve the way we address homelessness;
- share our good practices in combatting homelessness.

*Housing for All*¹, the Government's housing plan to 2030, reaffirms the commitments made through the Lisbon Declaration. The role of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of local

¹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ef5ec-housing-for-all-a-new-housing-plan-for-ireland/#>

authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual local authorities. The Department does not fund any homeless service directly but provides funding to local authorities towards the operational costs of homeless accommodation and related services under Section 10 of the Housing Act, 1988. The Department remains committed to working towards ending homelessness through continued close collaboration with local authorities, NGOs and other key stakeholders.

Housing for All recognises that many households experiencing homelessness have additional support needs and includes specific measures to address these needs. These include measures to engage with and support rough sleepers into sustainable accommodation; the continued expansion of the Housing First model; a focus on the construction and acquisition of one-bed homes; and ensuring provision of the necessary health and mental health supports required to assist homeless people with complex needs.

Critical to supporting households to exit homelessness is increasing the supply of housing. *Housing for All* includes more than 200 actions across four pathways which will collectively address housing issues, and all of those actions are contributing to creating a housing system that meets the needs of our people. Record state investment of over €5bn has been made available in 2024 to support the largest State home building programme ever, including 9,300 new build social homes.

This strategic overview details the cumulative actions both currently underway and planned across the Department, as they align with the Lisbon Declaration, which will work towards combatting and eradicating homelessness.

2 Current scale of homelessness

Under arrangements in place between the Department and the housing authorities, data is provided on the numbers of those accessing and exiting emergency accommodation across the country². There were 13,318 individuals, including 1,916 families, accessing emergency accommodation at the end of Q4 2023.

² <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/80ea8-homelessness-data/>

A key focus of homeless services is to support households experiencing homelessness, or at risk of homelessness, to secure a tenancy. Statistics are published on a quarterly basis detailing the numbers of adults who exit emergency accommodation to a tenancy in addition to adults at risk of homelessness who are prevented from becoming homeless. In 2023, 6,848 adults were either supported to exit homeless emergency accommodation or were prevented from becoming homeless. This represented a 25% increase on the 5,478 preventions and exits achieved in 2022.

The Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) conduct a rough sleeper count bi-annually to measure the level of street homelessness in the Dublin region and to enhance the understanding of the reasons for rough sleeping. Since Autumn 2020, the count has taken place over a full week, during which the Dublin Simon Outreach Team engage in a full region assessment of the people met sleeping rough, or at risk of sleeping rough. The Dublin rough sleeper count in November 2023 reported a year-on-year increase of 30% from 91 to 118.

3 Overview of the Department's alignment with the main commitments made in the Lisbon Declaration

This section sets out the actions underway across the Department, as they align with the main commitments made in the Lisbon Declaration, which will work towards combatting and eradicating homelessness. It also identifies the priorities for the Department to 2030.

3.1 No one sleeps rough for lack of accessible, safe and appropriate emergency accommodation;

3.1.1 Actions currently underway

Expansion of emergency accommodation to meet increased need

In order to respond to the increasing numbers of those in need of emergency accommodation support over the last two years, local authorities have ensured that additional emergency accommodation has been made available with support from the Department.

The Department worked with local authorities to bring an additional 2,000 beds into use in homeless emergency accommodation over the course of 2023. Budget 2023 provided funding of over €215m, an increase of 10% on 2022, for the delivery of homeless services. On 29 November 2023 an additional €102m was approved by Cabinet by way of a Supplementary Estimate for the provision of homeless services in 2023.

Street Outreach Services

Housing for All commits to expanding Street Outreach Services nationwide to areas where rough sleeping is a concern. There are now Outreach Programmes in place across all urban centres nationally. In addition, the Housing Agency, in partnership with the HSE and in consultation with key departments and agencies, has developed a good practice guide for the operation of Assertive Street Outreach Services. This guide is intended to be a flexible tool for sharing good practice and ideas for Assertive Street Outreach and will assist regions in expanding outreach services into areas in which rough sleeping is understood to be a concern. The guide is available on the Housing Manual website³.

As part of their annual expenditure programmes in 2024, funding proposals have been invited from regional authorities for the provision of appropriate, fit for purpose outreach services which will engage with people who are persistently rough sleeping. In December 2023, the DRHE tendered for an Assertive Outreach Service. This tender closed in January 2024 and submissions received are being assessed in March 2024 with a view to awarding a contract for this service. The contract is valued at €7.5m.

A survey was conducted early in 2023 which looked at the extent of outreach services outside of Dublin and whether a rough sleeper count was conducted in each region. This survey found variation in the extent to which regions counted individuals who were sleeping rough. The Department is exploring the expansion of the bi-

³ <https://www.housingmanual.ie/>

annual rough sleeper count to all urban areas in the country, utilising the methodology currently in place in the Dublin Region.

Development of further local authority/NGO emergency accommodation

Housing for All places an emphasis on the development of emergency accommodation through local authority or AHB owned facilities for those who are homeless. Such developments will include the acquisition of existing properties for conversion, and land or sites to develop purpose-built facilities, using the capital funding streams available to local authorities and AHBs. Looking to the future, such facilities in the ownership of local authorities and AHBs may have the scope in time to be repurposed to support social housing delivery. The Department is working with local authorities and the DRHE to develop further emergency accommodation where it is needed. Capital funding is available in 2024 to support this objective.

Guidelines for the development and refurbishment of emergency accommodation

Housing for All committed to preparing and publishing guidelines to assist local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBS) when they are considering acquiring existing buildings for conversion for use as emergency accommodation. The Guidelines for New Emergency Accommodation was published in September 2022⁴. The Guidelines were developed to ensure that there will be sufficient quality accommodation to meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness and that such accommodation affords those experiencing homelessness dignity and respect to minimise the trauma of homelessness.

Standards in Emergency Accommodation

It is critical that all emergency accommodation operates to a high standard. To assist in ensuring that homeless services provided are of a high standard, a National Quality Standards Framework (NQSF) was developed by the DRHE and is now in place nationally for all local authority and NGO services. The standards were modelled on HIQA standards, adapted to reflect the primary requirements of the homeless person or family i.e. finding suitable, affordable housing, and access to

⁴ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/3e596-guidelines-for-new-emergency-accommodation-september-2022/>

health, social and specialist housing supports, if needed. The Framework was developed to ensure a consistent approach in how local authorities and service providers respond to the needs of those experiencing homelessness and to improve the quality of services provided. The aim of the NQSF is to ensure that services for people experiencing homelessness are well organised, co-ordinated and integrated and focussed on moving people out of homelessness, as quickly as possible, into homes. The objectives of the standards are to promote safe and effective service provision to persons experiencing homelessness. Local authorities are responsible for the oversight of standards in emergency accommodation.

3.1.2 Priorities to 2030

- Continue to support local authorities to provide additional emergency accommodation to meet the demand.
- Ensure appropriate Outreach services in urban areas outside Dublin by ensuring that funding is provided for the expansion of outreach services where they are needed.
- Explore the expansion of the bi-annual rough sleeper count to all urban areas in the country, utilising the methodology currently in place in the Dublin Region.
- Continue to provide capital funding to develop further supported emergency accommodation for families and individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Safeguard standards in the development and refurbishment of EA by ensuring that new proposals received in relation to emergency accommodation have taken account of the Guidelines for the Development of Emergency Accommodation.

3.2 No one lives in emergency or transitional accommodation longer than is required for successful move-on to a permanent housing solution;

3.2.1 Actions currently underway

Increasing supply

The Department is focused on accelerating social and affordable housing supply through a combination of new build, targeted acquisitions and leasing. The availability of all forms of social housing is one of the key factors in addressing homelessness. *Housing for All* includes a target to deliver 90,000 new build social homes in the period 2022-2030 and this supply of social housing will be critical in addressing homelessness. It is also important that the right types of houses are delivered in the right locations. In this regard, *Housing for All* required local authorities to develop Housing Delivery Action Plans to include details of social and affordable housing delivery. The Plans were completed during 2022 and set out details of both social and affordable housing delivery as appropriate over the period 2022-2026. These Plans also set out details of proposed housing delivery by housing typology, including one bed units which are critical for exits for single homeless individuals, in addition to housing required by older people and people with a disability.

Local authorities have been encouraged to be proactive in ensuring the return of vacant properties to use through the use of the voids funding programme and through local authorities' own resources as well as the Buy and Renew and Repair and Lease Schemes⁵.

To increase the pace at which vacant and derelict properties are renovated for new housing, the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant for private properties has been increased from €30,000 to €50,000 for vacant properties and from €50,000 to €70,000 for derelict properties. This extra measure was agreed by Government on 25 April 2023 and will also be extended to cover houses built up to 2007 and will be

⁵ <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/5976a-vacant-homes-schemes/>

available for properties intended for rental which will bring much needed additional rental homes to the market.

Housing First

Housing First is a housing-led approach that enables people with a history of rough sleeping or long-term use of emergency accommodation, and with complex needs, to obtain permanent secure accommodation, with the provision of intensive supports to help them to maintain their tenancies.

Housing First was first introduced in Ireland with the Dublin Housing First Demonstration Project which ran for three years from 2011-2014. The considerable success of the project led to the establishment of a mainstream Dublin Housing First Service in 2014.

In September 2018, a Housing First National Implementation Plan 2018-2021 was published. By the Plan's conclusion at the end of December 2021, a total of 756 tenancies had been created with almost 600 individuals in a Housing First tenancy at the end of 2021

Housing First combines housing and health supports and the implementation of the Plan is managed jointly by the DHLGH, the Department of Health, the HSE and the local authorities, supported by NGOs.

The post of National Director of Housing First was established in early 2018 to drive national implementation. To continue the expansion of this programme and based upon a commitment in *Housing for All*, a Housing First National Implementation Plan 2022-2026⁶ was launched in December 2021. This Plan provides for the creation of 1,319 additional tenancies over the period 2022 to 2026 and will involve an average of 264 new tenancies per annum, with specific targets in place for each local authority and region. These targets are based on an analysis of need, which involved all key stakeholders and was supported by The Housing Agency.

In March 2022, a Housing First National Office was launched with responsibility for coordinating and driving a national, cross-Government approach to Housing First, as set out in the 'Housing First National Implementation Plan, 2022-2026'

⁶ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c49d0-housing-first-national-implementation-plan-2022-2026/>

In 2023, an additional 320 Housing First tenancies were recorded nationwide. This brings the total to 560 under the current plan, which exceeds the two-year target of 551. Almost 980 individuals were in a Housing First tenancy nationwide at the end of 2023. The number of tenancies delivered will differ to the number of individuals currently in a tenancy. The variance can occur when multiple tenancies have been created for one individual or an individual may have left the programme. The targets set out each year form part of an overall five-year plan and any shortfall in the delivery of tenancies are carried forward and will be delivered as part of the overall five-year target.

Housing First is one of Ireland's key responses in ending long-term homelessness among those with complex health and mental health needs.

Social Housing

New income eligibility limits for social housing came into effect on 1 January 2023, the first changes in over a decade. Eligibility thresholds in local authorities across the country have been increased by €5,000.

DHLGH is currently scoping options for a new social housing income eligibility model. Among other things, this work is considering how best to mitigate inequities between recipient and non-recipient households, including measures to avoid cliff-edge thresholds.

With the significant increase in social housing delivery achieved under *Housing for All*, the Minister has emphasised the need for local authorities to allocate more social housing to homeless households. The Minister wrote to all local authorities on this matter in November 2023 and the Department will continue to engage with local authorities on this matter during 2024.

HAP

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a form of social housing support available for people who have a long-term housing need. Any household assessed as eligible for social housing is eligible for HAP. Eligible households can source their own accommodation in the private rental sector which should be within the HAP rent limits provided to them by the local authority.

Since July 2022, each local authority has statutory discretion to agree to a HAP payment up to 35% (increased from 20%) above the prescribed maximum rent limit and, for new tenancies, to extend the couple's rate to single persons' households in recognition of the shared one-bed need and the particular challenges faced by single persons in securing accommodation.

From 1 May 2023, when a HAP tenant defaults on their differential rent payment to the local authority they will firstly be offered the option of a payment plan to assist them in maintaining their tenancy and allow the HAP payment to the landlord to continue. If the tenant defaults on payment of differential rent or the payment plan, under the Landlord Payment Guarantee, the HAP payment to the landlord will be guaranteed for a 12-month period or earlier if the tenancy ends. The implementation of this measure is intended to encourage landlords to remain in the private rental market and make properties available for HAP tenants.

Additional supports are available under HAP for homeless households or households at risk of homelessness nationwide. Discretion can be increased up to 50% above the prescribed maximum rent limits for Homeless HAP tenancies in Dublin. While eligible households or individuals may source accommodation for themselves under the Homeless HAP scheme, a dedicated resource, the Place Finder Service, has been established nationwide to provide assistance. The Place Finder Service assists households in or at immediate risk of homelessness, primarily by providing access to deposits and advance rental payments. An allowance towards the post of Place Finder is funded through Section 10. The operation of local homeless services, including the Place Finder Service, is a matter for each local authority.

Tenancy sustainment

Housing for All recognises the importance of providing appropriate supports for families and children in emergency accommodation in order to secure pathways out of homelessness. DHLGH provides funding to local authorities, through Section 10, for tenancy sustainment services. These services help individuals and families to move out of homelessness and puts in place the necessary supports for them to maintain their new home and settle into their community. These services also support households at risk of homelessness.

Action 3.18 within *Housing for All* is to identify and provide enhanced tenancy sustainment supports to families experiencing long-term homelessness to help them exit from homelessness and maintain their homes. DHLGH, the local authorities, DCEDIY and Tusla are responsible for implementing this action. The Department is leading on the development of a pilot scheme, providing housing-led supported accommodation to families with complex needs in Galway City and County. A Steering Group was established in June 2023 to develop this scheme, comprising representatives from DHLGH, Galway City and Galway County Councils and local representatives from the HSE and Tusla. A consultation with key stakeholders was held in October 2023 and an Expression of Interest launched in December 2023, seeking NGO providers to participate in the scheme. A provider has now been selected and it is anticipated that the pilot will commence in Galway in the first half of 2024. A similar pilot is also taking place in Dublin in 2024.

Homelessness Action Plans

As set out in Chapter 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, housing authorities must adopt a Homelessness Action Plan, to address homelessness in their administrative area.

The legislation provides that a Homelessness Action Plan should contain measures directed at achieving the objectives of preventing homelessness; reducing homelessness in its extent or duration; the provision of services, including accommodation, to address the needs of homeless households; the provision of services to persons who were formerly homeless (tenancy sustainment); and the promotion of effective co-ordination of activities proposed to be undertaken by certain bodies to address homelessness in the area concerned. In summary, the legislative underpinning requires local authorities to set out a strategic approach for addressing homelessness in their administrative areas.

3.2.2 Priorities to 2030

- The Department is focused on accelerating social and affordable housing supply through a combination of new build, targeted acquisitions and leasing. A record €5.1bn capital investment in housing was announced in Budget 2024, made up of €2.6bn exchequer funding, €978m Land Development

Agency (LDA) and €1.5bn Housing Finance Agency (HFA) funding. This will support the delivery of 9,300 new social homes and 6,400 affordable homes, to purchase or rent, in 2024.

- Continued expansion of Housing First.
- Liaison with the Housing Agency to acquire one-bed properties for Housing First using the Acquisition Fund
- Submit proposals for a new social housing income eligibility model.
- Continue to review allocations of social housing to households in emergency accommodation.
- Continue to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review and monitor the level of discretion being used by local authorities, taking into account other sources of data, including Residential Tenancies Board rent data published on a quarterly basis.
- Continued support for funding proposals from regional lead authorities for enhanced tenancy sustainment supports to those that have experienced long-term homelessness.
- Launch of pilot projects, providing housing-led supported accommodation to families in need in both Galway and Dublin.
- Continued engagement with regions to ensure that Homelessness Action Plans are up-to-date and reflect national policy.

3.3 No one is discharged from any institution (e.g. prison, hospital, care facility) without an offer of appropriate housing;

3.3.1 Actions currently underway

Individuals leaving prison

Housing for All recognises that prisoners and other persons convicted before the courts frequently present as homeless with high and complex support needs and that homelessness poses a significant risk for many post release.

The updated Housing First National Implementation Plan will build upon an existing Dublin-based pilot scheme aimed at those who have had contact with the criminal justice system by expanding the scheme nationally. Some people with criminal justice involvement can and do successfully access the general scheme of Housing First. However, there is a sub-set of people who find themselves within the Criminal Justice System who require a more targeted response.

The Dublin Regional Housing First Criminal Justice Strand supported service users (those leaving prison and/or subject to probation service supervision) presenting as homeless with a range of high and complex needs in the Criminal Justice sector. This Project maintained fidelity to the standard Housing First model but included the following additional programme components:

- Provision of a criminal justice specific intensive case management team supported by multi-disciplinary skillset sitting within the overall Housing First team structure; and
- This case management team had additional skillsets including an in-depth knowledge of the challenges facing those in the criminal justice system, including court procedures, post custody arrangements and obligations etc.

An evaluation of this pilot which will outline any learnings from the programme is currently underway. With regards to next steps, it is planned to mainstream this service with the Housing First programme.

There are also other measures in place across DHLGH for individuals leaving prison. In February 2024, guidance issued to local authorities from the Department of Housing setting out a revised local authority protocol regarding social housing applications by prisoners. The guidance included operational guidelines for the consistent treatment for persons in prison in relation to social housing applications.

The national Youth Homelessness Strategy also recognises that young people leaving prison are a vulnerable cohort who are at a heightened risk of homelessness. The Youth Homelessness Strategy Steering Group, which includes a representative from the Department of Justice, is currently exploring alternative pathways for young people leaving prison.

Individuals leaving hospital

HSE guidance provides that assessments should be carried out, prior to hospital discharge, to identify vulnerable service users who may be homeless or living in temporary or insecure accommodation to ensure appropriate and timely referral to primary care services and homelessness services. An evaluation of the homeless hospital discharge programme commenced as a 2-year pilot in 2020. This pilot reviewed the hospital discharge protocol through the hospital-based specialist homeless multidisciplinary teams in both St. James's Hospital and the Mater Misericordiae University hospital in Dublin. This evaluation has now been completed and the HSE is now progressing key recommendations. The Department of Housing's role is to engage with the HSE, as required, as they implement these recommendations.

Individuals leaving state care

Aftercare services are available for all young people that are between 16 and 21 years old and have spent 12 months in the care of the state with either Tusla or the HSE, between the ages 13-18. Aftercare services include an individual Aftercare Plan to outline the supports needed in areas such as education, employment and accommodation. An Aftercare Grant is also available as a once-off payment to assist with the costs of first month's rent, deposit and start-up costs.

In recognition of the risk of homelessness for care leavers with complex needs, a separate category was introduced under DHLGH's Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) in 2017. This means that where a local authority is informed by Tusla that there is a need for accommodation for people aged 18-21 (or up to 23 if in education/training) leaving State care and who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, it may invite AHBs to apply for CAS funding to provide appropriate accommodation. This funding is provided on a demand-led basis.

Furthermore, the national Youth Homelessness Strategy recognises that young people leaving state care are a vulnerable cohort who are at a heightened risk of homelessness. The Strategy provides for a review and update of the Protocol on Young People Leaving State Care which was published in 2014. DHLGH, working with DCEDIY and Tusla, commenced this review in Q1 2024.

Survivors of Domestic Violence

The response to Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV) is a cross-Departmental and multi-agency issue with overall policy coordinated by the Department of Justice. Responsibility for the delivery of refuge accommodation and the provision of services to support victims transferred from DCEDIY and Tusla to DoJ and the new statutory agency, Cuan: the Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence Agency, since the establishment of the agency on 1 January 2024. Cuan is under the remit of DoJ.

DHLGH's role is to support the work of local authorities and NGOs who provide accommodation support to victims of DSGBV including capital funding support for the development of new refuges. Under *Housing for All*, the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) will continue to support the provision of new refuges. DHLGH is also committed to supporting the provision of additional refuge accommodation arising in the third National Strategy on DSGBV developed under the leadership of the Minister for Justice and also in line with the commitment set out in *Housing for All*. DHLGH is currently engaging with the DoJ and Cuan in relation to this work. DHLGH issued policy and procedural guidance in 2017 to housing authorities relating to the role they can play to assist victims of domestic violence. A review of this guidance is currently underway and it is anticipated that this review will be completed in the first half of 2024.

NHAC subgroup

Under the auspices of the National Homeless Action Committee, a subgroup was established in 2022 to explore the heightened risk of homelessness for those transitioning from residential settings and to make recommendations for this cohort. This subgroup made a series of recommendations to the Committee in November 2022. Recommendations related to training for local authority staff, the development of specific practices for those in recovery from addiction and a review to identify gaps in the ways in which HSE, LA and NGO data gathering systems are operating and how they interact. These recommendations are at various stages of progression.

3.3.2 Priorities to 2030

- Complete evaluation of the Dublin Regional Housing First Criminal Justice Strand with a view to mainstreaming this service with the Housing First programme.
- Through the Youth Homelessness Strategy Steering Group, consider the development of alternative pathways for young people leaving prison.
- Develop and publish an updated Protocol on Young People Leaving State Care.
- Complete review of Policy and Procedural Guidance for Housing Authorities in Relation to Assisting Victims of Domestic Violence with Emergency and Long-term Accommodation Needs to ensure continuing effectiveness and consistency in responses to assist victims of domestic violence.
- Continued progression of NHAC subgroup recommendations

3.4 Evictions should be prevented whenever possible and no one is evicted without assistance for an appropriate housing solution, when needed;

3.4.1 Actions currently underway

Tenant Protections

To enhance security of tenure for tenants, all new tenancies created on or after 11 June 2022 will become tenancies of unlimited duration once the tenancy has lasted more than six months and no valid notice of termination has been served on the tenant. A landlord may also consent to an existing tenancy being treated as of unlimited duration. The Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2022 continues to provide that a landlord may validly terminate a tenancy on limited grounds.

From 5 July 2022, Part 11 of the Regulation of Providers of Building Works and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2022 amends the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2022 to:

- Extend notice periods, by approximately two months, to be given to tenants when serving a notice of termination (where there has been no breach of tenant obligations) in tenancies of less than three years duration;
- Improve procedures where a landlord is required to make an offer of re-let;
- Require landlords to copy the RTB when serving a notice of termination; and
- Increase from 28 days to 90 days, the period from the date of receipt of a 'no fault' NOT for a tenant to submit a dispute as to the NOT's validity to the RTB for resolution.

The Department also funds Threshold's National Tenancy Protection Service, which is instrumental in preventing homelessness in the first instance and supporting people to remain in their homes.

Tenant-in-Situ Acquisitions

The Department is supporting local authorities to acquire homes for social housing for priority purposes, including acquisitions which support a household to exit homelessness, or with tenants in situ to prevent homelessness.

In March 2023, local authorities were advised of the increase of the number of social housing acquisitions from 200 per annum to 1,500 per annum. These acquisitions were focussed on properties where a HAP or RAS tenant has received a Notice of Termination, due to the landlord's intention to sell the property. This programme of work will continue in 2024 with local authorities again sanctioned to acquire up to 1,500 properties.

The Department also introduced the Cost Rental Tenant-in-Situ (CRTiS) Scheme on a temporary administrative basis from 1 April 2023. This scheme sees the Housing Agency purchase properties with tenants in-situ where a valid Notice of Termination has been served due to the intended sale of the property, the local authority judges the tenant to be at risk of homelessness, the tenant is not in receipt of social housing supports, and the net household income falls within the limits for standard Cost Rental (since 1 August 2023 €66,000 in Dublin and €59,000 elsewhere). This allows tenants to continue to reside in the property with the ultimate aim of transitioning these properties and tenants to the standard Cost Rental framework over the longer

term. Given its utility in tackling the ongoing and interlinked affordability and homelessness challenges, it is DHLGH's view that it is worth exploring the potential for a new version of CRTiS in 2024. Work is ongoing to provide for a revised scheme. In the meantime, the Housing Agency will continue administering the CRTiS scheme on an administrative basis while the revised scheme is being developed.

3.4.2 Priorities to 2030

- Continued implementation of the Tenant-in-Situ Scheme in 2024.
- Continued implementation of the Cost Rental Tenant-in-Situ (CRTiS) Scheme.
- On 7 March 2023, the Government agreed principles underpinning new measures for the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage to give tenants the opportunity to buy their home, by requiring a landlord selling a property to first offer it to the tenant. The Government's Legislation Programme for summer 2024 will include the Residential Tenancies (Right to Purchase) Bill for priority drafting and publication this session, taking account of the pre-legislative scrutiny report, published on 20 December 2023.

3.5 No one is discriminated against due to their homelessness status

3.5.1 Actions currently underway

The Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015 prohibit discrimination in relation to employment, including vocational training and work experience. The Equal Status Acts 2000-2018 prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods and services, accommodation and education. In addition, the Equal Status Acts prohibit discrimination in the provision of accommodation services against people who are in receipt of rent supplement, housing assistance, or social welfare payments. Both the Employment Equality Acts and the Equal Status Acts cover the nine grounds of gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion, and membership of the Traveller community.

The Programme for Government commits to examining the introduction of a new ground of discrimination, based on socio-economic disadvantaged status, to the Employment Equality and Equal Status Acts. DCEDIY is currently reviewing these

Acts. In July 2023, a report was published on submissions to a public consultation on this review⁷. Submissions were invited on a range of issues, including the scope of the current equality grounds, and whether new grounds should be added, such as the ground of socio-economic discrimination. Officials in DCEDIY are finalising policy and legislative proposals. It is anticipated that these will be brought to Government in 2024.

Separately, measures are in place to ensure that people experiencing homelessness are supported to participate in society. One recent example relates to the facilitation of electors who are homeless.

The Electoral Reform Act 2022 underpins the recent modernisation of the electoral registration process. The modernisation provides for the simplification of the overall process, the provision of an online option for the public to apply to register or update their details; the introduction of rolling (continuously updated) registration; and the use of PPSNs to enable cross-checking of information provided by applicants. It also provided for easier access to registration for specific cohorts of people including those who have no address at the time of registration. Rolling or continuous electoral registration (in contrast to the former annual registration process) provides for a more straightforward process making it easier and more accessible for people to register to vote or update their details, at any time of year up to the usual deadlines in advance of an electoral event. This means that those who may move house more frequently or who may move between different accommodations can now update their details quickly and easily at www.checktheregister.ie or (www.voter.ie if they're in Dublin) using their PPSN and Date of Birth. This can be done at any time using a phone, other online access or a paper form to update a new place of residence to ensure that they are correctly registered in advance of polling day.

To further remove barriers to electoral registration and to facilitate those who are not ordinarily resident at any premises, they too now can register by setting out the location where they commonly spend a substantial part of their time. The applicant will need to set out a reason why they are choosing the particular location address

⁷ www.gov.ie/en/press-release/cafb4-minister-ogorman-publishes-report-on-the-submissions-to-the-public-consultation-on-the-review-of-the-equality-acts/.

and their connection to it (e.g. they may avail of outreach services daily at this location). Applicants can indicate an address where they can pick up post such as a polling information card and if they have no such address the local authority will arrange for the applicant to collect it from them. Applications can be made online at www.checktheregister.ie or using the ERF2 form if in Dublin, and local authorities will also assist with the completion the relevant application when requested.

3.5.2 Priorities to 2030

- Ensure continued implementation and introduction of measures to ensure that those experiencing homelessness are not discriminated against.

4 Overview of the Department's alignment with the Lisbon Declaration's specific commitments for national, regional and local authorities

This section sets out the actions underway across the Department, as they align with the specific commitments made in the Lisbon Declaration for national, regional and local authorities. It also identifies the priorities to 2030 for the Department.

4.1 Promote the prevention of homelessness, access to permanent housing and the provision of enabling support services to the homeless;

4.1.1 Actions currently underway

Prevention of homelessness

Every effort is being made to address the issues giving rise to increases in homelessness through measures contained in *Housing for All*.

In the short term, actions are being taken through maximising available interventions including rental protections and interventions and measures, including the Tenant-in-Situ and Cost Rental Tenant-in-Situ Schemes, being undertaken by local authorities and the voluntary sector supported by the Department and other statutory bodies.

Local authorities are actively engaged in seeking to prevent homelessness through their various supports. They are seeking to retain HAP properties, and identify further

units. They are also using tenancy sustainment officers and the HAP Place Finder service.

From Q1 2022, regional quarterly performance reports have included detail on the number of adults who have exited from emergency accommodation to social housing supported tenancies, as well as persons who were assessed as homeless but were prevented from entering emergency accommodation through the creation of a social housing supported tenancy.

A national Youth Homelessness Strategy was published in November 2022. The Strategy sets out 27 distinct actions to help people who are aged 18-24 and who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. A Steering Group was established in January 2023 to drive the delivery of the Strategy and work has commenced on all 27 actions. The Strategy recognises that supporting young people at risk of becoming homeless through strategic interventions can help avoid a cycle of longer-term homelessness. A key action in the Strategy is the development of a housing-led intervention called Supported Housing for Youth.

The Department has undertaken a comprehensive review of the private rental sector, which involved significant stakeholder engagement and a public consultation process during 2023.

Another review that is currently underway relates to the legislation. Section 2 of the Housing Act 1988 sets out the requirements for a housing authority to determine if a person is homeless while section 10 sets out the arrangements, assistance and accommodation that can be offered by housing authorities to homeless households. There have been significant changes in homelessness since the drafting of the 1988 Act including increased numbers accessing emergency accommodation; a change in the demographic make-up of those in emergency accommodation; and the expectations upon and responsibilities of housing authorities.

In recognition of these changes and in response to concerns raised by the County and City Managers Association (CCMA), the Department reviewed sections 2 and 10 of the 1988 Act. A group comprising officials from the Department and Regional Homelessness Leads, nominated by the CCMA, was established to conduct the review and make recommendations on any policy changes that may be necessary.

The review and subsequent consideration and consultation identified several issues. Legislative amendments have been proposed and a consultation with key stakeholders was held in Q4 2023. The Department is currently considering feedback received from this consultation.

If Europe is to achieve the ambition of the Lisbon declaration, efforts must be made to address homelessness among mobile EU citizens who are exercising their right to Freedom of Movement but do not always have the means to support themselves and their families in the States they move to, or who experience challenges in relation to accommodation and employment after their arrival. The first steps in addressing this issue must be to ensure that member states are including migrants in their reported homeless numbers and to agree, as signatories of the Lisbon Declaration, to the level of support that should be made available to all mobile EU citizens by member States. Ireland remains committed to engaging with member states on this matter.

Access to permanent housing

As outlined above, the Department is focused on accelerating supply through a combination of new build, targeted acquisitions and leasing. 32,695 new homes were completed in 2023, representing the largest annual delivery of new homes in fifteen years and exceeding the 29,000 target set in *Housing for All*. The number of new homes delivered last year is up 10% on 2022. Almost 70,000 new homes have now been delivered since the launch of *Housing for All* in September 2021.

Statistics published on 28 March 2024 show that 11,939 new social homes were delivered in 2023. Including HAP (8,292) and RAS (Rental Accommodation Scheme - 1,542), 21,773 housing solutions were delivered in 2023. Furthermore, 4,011 affordable homes were delivered nationally in 2023: 3,045 through Affordable Purchase Schemes and 966 through Cost Rental. ⁸This strong momentum in delivery is set to continue into 2024 with 32,801 new homes having commenced construction in 2023 – an increase of almost 22% on 2022.

Provision of enabling support services to the homeless

⁸ <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/6060e-overall-social-housing-provision/>

While all homeless people have a need for stable housing, homelessness is a complex issue and a variety of other supports and interventions can be required to meet individual needs. Indeed, many homeless persons, in particular those engaged in rough sleeping, have complex health and social care needs, including in relation to addiction and mental health issues, that require care and supports beyond the simple provision of accommodation via the housing authority. Consequently, a multi-agency approach is considered necessary to successfully address rough sleeping. The Department works closely with multiple key stakeholders to ensure a collaborative approach is taken to addressing homelessness, including the provision of enabling support services to the homeless.

4.1.2 Priorities to 2030

- The Department will continue to work with local authorities to monitor the data available in relation to homelessness and to further improve information gathered on preventions, entries to, and exits from, emergency accommodation.
- Continued implementation of the Youth Homelessness Strategy.
- Establishment of a Prevention and Early Intervention subgroup under the Youth Homelessness Strategy Steering Group.
- Launch of the Supported Housing for Youth pilot programme whereby 25 young people in emergency accommodation in Dublin will be moved into their own accommodation with wraparound supports.
- Finalise report detailing the findings of the review of the private rental sector and outlining a range of policy options
- Review adequacy of the legislative provisions relating to homelessness in the Housing Act 1988.
- Continued engagement with EU member states in relation to homelessness among mobile EU citizens

4.2 Welcome the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the design and implementation of these policy measures;

4.2.1 Actions currently underway

National Homeless Action Committee

In line with the commitment in *Housing for All*, a National Homeless Action Committee (NHAC) was established in Q4 2021.

NHAC is a cross-governmental and inter-agency oversight group with membership drawn from key Departments, agencies and stakeholders. 22 different organisations, all with a role in addressing homelessness, are represented on the Committee. The overarching objective of the Committee is to ensure that a renewed emphasis is brought to collaborating across Government to implement actions in *Housing for All*, along with bringing better coherence and coordination of homeless-related services in delivering policy measures and actions to address homelessness. Beyond this, the Committee also has a role in addressing emerging homeless-related issues and in developing further responses.

The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage chairs the Committee which meets, at a minimum, on a quarterly basis.

Homelessness prevention was identified as an immediate priority area for NHAC. Throughout 2022, NHAC members and three specific subgroups considered recommendations to be made in the area of homelessness prevention. By the end of 2022, a total of 66 homelessness prevention recommendations had been made. Since Q1 2023, the Homelessness unit within DHLGH has worked with key stakeholders to further consider and progress these recommendations. These recommendations are at varying stages of progression.

4.2.2 Priorities to 2030

- The Committee will continue to meet on a regular basis to implement actions in *Housing for All* and to address emerging homeless-related issues.
- Continued progression of recommendations made by NHAC members and subgroups established in 2022.

4.3 Support our policy measures with adequate funding and, when appropriate, make use of EU funding as a lever to improve the way we address homelessness;

4.3.1 Actions currently underway

Exchequer Funding

Funding of €242 million is being made available for the delivery of homeless services in 2024. This will ensure that local authorities can provide emergency accommodation, homeless prevention and tenancy sustainment services (including Housing First) and other services to households experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness, and that these households in emergency accommodation are supported to exit homelessness to tenancies as quickly as possible. This funding will be kept under continual review in 2024 with a commitment to provide any necessary funding required.

Housing for All also commits to the provision of capital funding to develop further supported emergency accommodation for families and individuals experiencing homelessness. €10 million in capital funding is being provided for supported emergency accommodation for families and individuals experiencing homelessness.

Housing for All also commits to a strategic review of the Section 10 funding model in 2024.

4.3.2 Priorities to 2030

- Complete a strategic review of the Section 10 funding model underpinning the provision of Homeless Services.
- Effective management and oversight of funding provided to local authorities under section 10 of the Housing Act 1988 to include evaluation of regional expenditure programmes and funding proposals submitted and regular engagement with lead authorities in relation to expenditure programmes and performance in terms of service delivery and costs.
- Continued participation in EPOCH's Working Group on Access to Finance.

4.4 Share our good practices in combatting homelessness.

4.4.1 Actions currently underway

Participation in EPOCH

Since its establishment in 2021, and in line with commitments made in *Housing for All* (Action 3.1), Ireland is actively participating in the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness. Officials attend meetings across Europe every quarter, engaging with other EU Member States, the European institutions as well as international organisations that support homeless persons, in working towards a shared goal of eradicating homelessness.

Officials have participated in Mutual Learning Events where topics have included the use of homelessness data in policymaking; social and healthcare services for homeless people; and EU mobile citizens. Officials have also presented both on Ireland's housing strategy, with a focus on the actions to combat homelessness, and Ireland's Youth Homelessness Strategy.

4.4.2 Priorities to 2030

- Continued engagement with the Platform to advance the Lisbon Declaration on Combatting Homelessness.

5 Conclusion

Resolving homelessness is one of the most important challenges facing the State. This strategic overview details the cumulative actions, both currently underway and planned, across the Department which will work towards combatting and eradicating homelessness. The Department of Housing remains committed to addressing homelessness through continued close collaboration with local authorities, NGOs and other key stakeholders.

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The Department of
Housing, Local Government and Heritage



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
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