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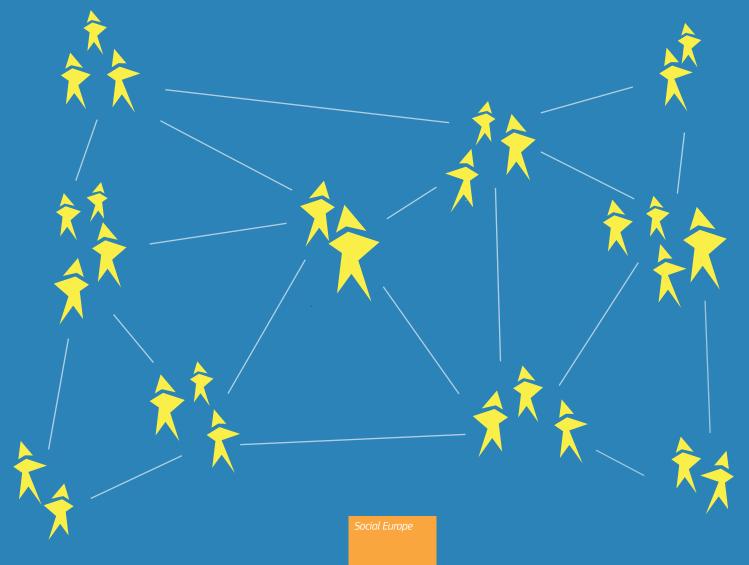
National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion

Ireland

Mary Daly

European Social Policy Network (ESPN)

ESPN Thematic Report on National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion

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The European Social Policy Network (ESPN) was established in July 2014 on the initiative of the European Commission to provide high-quality and timely independent information, advice, analysis and expertise on social policy issues in the European Union and neighbouring countries.

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Summary

Homelessness as a problem is generally well recognised in Ireland and has been one of the foremost social concerns of the parliament over the last years. Ireland has both an operational definition of homelessness (although it is narrow and contested) and also a national strategy on homelessness. Housing vulnerability is much less recognised, which among other things means that prevention is not prominent in the Irish approach.

Homelessness has long been a problem in Ireland but the numbers keep growing. At the last count – in March 2019 – there were over 10,000 people counted as homeless including 3,821 children. The growing presence of the latter indicates a change in the composition of homelessness in Ireland with family homelessness a growing problem. If we take those placed on the housing waiting lists as an indicator of housing exclusion, then over 71,000 households were judged as being in such need in June 2018 (in addition to the 10,000 counted as homeless).

Policy is active in this regard. The general strategy in place for homelessness has three main pillars: income supplementation with rent, a housing and rehousing programme, and supportive services. Of these, the former two comprise the prioritised pillars of the Irish approach. At least 80,000 people receive income support with rent for example, much of it in the private sector. A range of housing-related plans is also in place, under the auspices of the overarching strategy from 2016: Rebuilding Ireland. This prioritises housing provision, through a range of means including housebuilding and housing acquisition in order to increase the public housing stock. There is a particular cast to this though in that public building is gradually being replaced by acquisition from the private sector and private accommodation is coming to replace (rather than complement) public housing in the response to homelessness and housing exclusion (HHE) and other housing-related problems. Supported service provision in the form of emergency housing for individuals and especially families is also a foundation of the approach in Ireland. But there is an almost exclusive reliance on the voluntary sector for service provision for the homeless in Ireland and the voluntary service providers regard themselves as under-funded. This means especially that supported and flexible services are not available in the volume required. Hence, the exits from homelessness and HHE are fewer than the numbers entering. In sum, the recent story of meeting housing need can be told in terms of three over-arching trends: over-reliance on private-sector housing which has little security for tenants; almost complete dependence on (an under-resourced) voluntary sector for service provision; reliance on short-term solutions and plans that are too ambitious in the context of the resources made available.

The analysis highlights three major weaknesses and recommendations as follows. The first relates to **definition, measurement and hence available statistics** and information. At present there is statistical obfuscation if not 'corruption'. It is recommended that Ireland adopt the ETHOS Light classification and use it to create the foundation for a bespoke data system. **Prevention** is another key weakness. To rectify this means enhancing homeless and general housing support services and much stronger rent control measures as well as regulation of the private-rented housing sector with a particular focus on tenant protection and rights. The **low stock and insufficient supply of social housing** (currently at 8% of total stock) is another issue of concern and arguably the fundamental issue. A suggested improvement in the supply of local authority homes would be to allow local authorities and approved housing bodies to combine their property portfolios for the purpose of leveraging finance to increase their capacity to build and manage social housing. Also, social housing regions might be developed to allow flexibility for applicants to be housed in neighbouring local authorities and local authorities encouraged to work together to fill their vacant stock with suitable applicants from other areas.

1   The nature and extent of homelessness and housing exclusion

The most important legislation relating to homelessness in Ireland includes the *Health Act,* 1953 and *Childcare Act*, 1991, *the Housing Act, 1988* and, most recently, the *Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009*. There is no explicit right to housing in Ireland, although the Constitutional Convention recommended in 2014 that the Constitution should be amended to include economic, social and cultural rights including housing (Convention on the Constitution 2014). No decision has been made on this but the current government is generally not favourable to the proposition. As far as is known, the government position appears to be that conferring such rights would not make any difference and that countries which have such constitutional rights have poor records on housing and homelessness.

There is an official definition of homelessness. Section 2 of the *Housing Act, 1988* states that a person should be considered to be homeless if:

a) there is no accommodation available which, in the opinion of the authority, he, together with any other person who normally resides with him or who might reasonably be expected to reside with him, can reasonably occupy or remain in occupation of; or

b) he is living a hospital, county home, night shelter or other such institution, and is so living because he has no accommodation of the kind referred to in paragraph (a); and

c) he cannot provide accommodation from his own resources.

It should be noted that this act was introduced following intensive lobbying by a coalition of voluntary organisations, organised as the National Campaign for the Homeless. The Act provided the first legal definition of homelessness in Ireland.

The official definition of the homeless in Ireland for the purposes of gathering statistics is narrower: defined as those individuals accessing state-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities.[1] Hence in relation to the ETHOS Light categories, homelessness in Ireland is defined as a combination of categories 2 and 3 (see Tables A1 and A2 in Annex). The focus is on emergency accommodation, differentiated into three categories: private emergency accommodation (which may include hotels, Bed and Breakfasts (B&Bs) and other residential facilities that are used on an emergency basis); supported temporary accommodation (which includes hostels with onsite professional support); and temporary emergency accommodation (emergency accommodation with no (or minimal) support). Hence, the monthly data reports do not cover rough sleeping, hidden homelessness, those in long-term supported accommodation or families in domestic violence refuges. In 2018, in a move that gave rise to some considerable confusion and debate, the Department excluded families with children in some, but not all, 'own door' temporary accommodation from these monthly reports. Excluding these reduced the numbers of homeless by at least 600 and up to 1,600 people.[2] Hence, categories 4, 5 and 6 of the ETHOS Light classification are not defined or counted as 'homeless'. Category 1 – people living rough – is somewhat ambivalent as a category – it is not officially in the definition but is counted on a biannual basis in the Dublin region and in the national Census (which takes place every 5 years or so). It should be noted that the headcount manner in which the statistics are compiled is not conducive to counting families which are homeless. A further point to note is that Ireland does not have a clear operational distinction between emergency and temporary accommodation (European Observatory on Homelessness 2018, p. 38).

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[1] The statistics are produced by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, see https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/homeless_report_-_february_2019.pdf

[2] https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/minister-murphys-statement-march-homeless-figures.
See also Dáil Eireann Debates 28 March 2019 at https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2019-03-28/

On the basis of the counting conventions as outlined above, homelessness is at its highest recorded level ever in Ireland. The most recent official count of homelessness on the above basis enumerated some 6,484 adults and 3,821 children as 'homeless' by this definition in the week of 25-31 March 2019 (see Table A.2) (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government 2019). This amounted to 1,733 families. Of these families, 59% were single parents with children. Information on rough sleeping is less widely available – counts are institutionalised only for the Dublin region.[3] For the country as a whole, the latest evidence is from the national Census (undertaken on the night of 24 April 2016). This indicated that 127 people were sleeping rough in urban areas on that night (the vast majority of whom were in Dublin) (Central Statistics Office 2017). More recent information is only available for Dublin. This indicates that on the night of 27 November 2018 there were some 156 people counted as sleeping rough in Dublin (Dublin Region Homeless Executive 2018). Figures for rough sleeping vary quite a lot over time, although they too are on a generally upward curve, reaching their highest level in Winter 2017 and since then on a slightly downward trend.

Concentrating on the population enumerated as homeless in March 2019, the bulk of the homeless adults are men - 58% as of March 2019 - although the number of women is increasing rapidly) (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government 2019). In terms of age, the greatest concentration of those affected was in the 25 to 44-year age group (also 59%) but note also that the numbers of those aged between 18 and 24 has increased rather rapidly. In addition to the adults, there were some 3,821 children (ibid). Hence, children make up over a third of those counted as homeless in Ireland. In regard to ethnicity, there is little information available from the counts but there is evidence from other sources that suggests a relationship between homelessness and migration in Ireland. For example, the telephone survey data of families entering into homelessness carried out by the homeless NGO Focus Ireland in 2016 found that between 35% and 59% of such families were of migrant origin (Focus Ireland 2016). The situation of Travellers must be part of any discussion of housing need and housing exclusion in Ireland, although their accommodation needs are officially part of a different section in the relevant ministry (Housing, Planning and Local Government) and their integration is dealt with by the Department of Justice and Equality. But housing is a defining element in their problem situation and in fact individuals and families from this background have been found to have the highest risk of family homelessness of any population group (Grotti et al 2018).

The annual trends in the official counts (which as mentioned encompass only ETHOS Light categories 2 and 3) are relentlessly upward (with some variation month by month within years). In the four years between mid-July 2014 to mid-July 2018 for example, the total counted numbers went from 3,258 to 9,872 (Focus Ireland 2019). The numbers of children rose much more rapidly as compared with those for adults. This – together with a trend of increasing female homelessness - is acting to change the profile of those affected. This is generally reflective of a greater presence and even perhaps a shift in homelessness from a single adult to a family phenomenon. For some, the continued growth in family homelessness is an indication that the plans and policies are not working (Hearne and Murphy 2017, p. 13).

In terms of drivers of the problem, one has to see these in terms of a constellation of factors and also recognise that there may be different drivers for different population sectors. In regard to the general explanatory constellation, housing (and its particularities and weaknesses in Ireland) has to figure prominently. This too consists of diverse drivers though, including rapidly-rising rents (and the absence of a mechanism of rent control), a shortage of available accommodation, much housing-related disruption and hardship caused by the recession (which was in Ireland fundamentally linked to housing – see Daly 2019) and a shortage of (and gradual disinvestment in) social housing (O'Sullivan 2016). The primary role of what might be accurately termed 'the distressed housing market' is confirmed also by other research (Focus Ireland 2016). One of the main weaknesses of

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[3] Enumerated on a twice-yearly basis by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (see
https://www.homelessdublin.ie/info/figures)

housing policy and provision in Ireland is an inadequate supply of dwellings in light of existing and future demand. This in turn is closely associated with the economic crisis and the policy response to it which saw the virtual cessation of social house building for at least 5 years – the number of such housing built in 2015 was 75 compared to 5,000 in 2008 (O'Sullivan 2016). Social housing comprises only around 8% of the total housing stock in Ireland. The high and relatively long waiting lists – although the numbers are decreasing – should be taken as exerting a causal impact. As of June 2018, there were 71,858 households on the social housing waiting lists across the 31 Local Authorities. There is evidence also of inadequacies in quality or suitability of some existing accommodation. For example, around 45% of households on local authority housing lists are single persons but the bulk of the local authority housing stock is for family accommodation (Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government 2018a).

In regard to the causes of the growth of family homelessness, the available evidence pinpoints two major reasons: families leaving private-rented accommodation following receipt of a Notice of Termination (NOT) and leaving family or friends' accommodation due to relationship breakdown or overcrowding (Morrin and O'Donoghue-Hynes 2018). The former is especially important confirming affordability and security of tenure as major issues in Ireland which have become more urgent over time. In regard to the second reason – relationship breakdown – this might well be a form of homelessness which was more hidden in the past in that there is some evidence from smaller studies that such families tended to stay with family and friends for months if not years (European Observatory on Homelessness 2017, p. 27). High levels and rapid growth in mortgage arrears also contributed to familial homelessness (Hearne and Murphy 2017).

2　Relevant strategies and policies tackling homelessness and housing exclusion

2.1 National and regional strategies

Ireland is one of the few countries, together with the UK, with a statutory legal system in the field of homelessness services and housing provision for the homeless (European Observatory on Homelessness 2018, p. 60). Various acts provide a statutory structure to address the needs of people who are experiencing homelessness. In particular, the *Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009* mandates a statutory obligation on each local authority to have an action plan in place and also to institute a 'Homelessness Consultative Forum' and a 'Statutory Management Group'. There are further duties placed on local authorities under laws designed to protect the welfare of young people, which centre on providing services for anyone under 18 years who becomes homeless, and to provide protection from homelessness for any young person who has been in the care of social services.

Local authorities, then, have primary statutory responsibility for the provision of homeless services in Ireland. Although legally they are not obliged to house people, they do have general legal responsibility for the provision of housing for adults who cannot afford to provide it for themselves. They may help with accommodation either by providing housing directly or through arrangements with voluntary housing organisations and other voluntary bodies. They may also provide funding to voluntary bodies for emergency accommodation and for long-term housing for homeless people. This has a long history in Ireland and is widely used - indeed all the accommodation services are provided by voluntary bodies (on contract from the local authorities) (O'Sullivan 2016). The law also requires that local authorities carry out periodic assessments of the number of people who are homeless in their administrative area, as part of their housing needs assessment.

In regard to other needs and services, the Health Service Executive (HSE) has general responsibility for the health and in-house care needs of homeless people. There is a funding division for this purpose, with local authorities responsible for the costs of providing accommodation while the HSE provides funding for the care and welfare needs of homeless

people, including in-house care. Finally, The Child and Family Agency (Tusla) has responsibility for providing accommodation for people under the age of 18 who are homeless or in need of care. It may also provide aftercare facilities for young people aged over 18.

Ireland has taken a strategic approach to homelessness for at least the last two decades. There has been much policy activity and many plans and strategies in the last decade especially as the volume of homelessness has escalated and the situation become more politicised. Concentrating on the last 5 years Table 1 shows the main plans and strategies.

Table 1: HHE Strategies and Plans 2013-2018*	
Homelessness Policy Statement	February 2013
Implementation Plan on the State's Response to Homelessness	December 2013
Social Housing Strategy 2020	November 2014
Action Plan to Address Homelessness	December 2014
Stabilising Rents, Boosting Supply	November 2015
Laying the Foundations: Housing Action Plans	April 2016
Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness	July 2016
Rebuilding Ireland: Homelessness Pillar	September 2016
Updated Rebuilding Ireland	April 2017

Adapted and updated from Table 1 in O'Sullivan, 2016, p. 16.

A number of elements are obvious from the table. A first is the concentrated and consistent (in a temporal sense) attention given to homelessness, especially given that the period covers the terms of two different governments. A second striking point is that homelessness is sometimes addressed through targeted policy and at others through more general policy. Thirdly – prefiguring a consistent and robust finding of this report - the focus on housing provision as a response to homelessness is striking.

We do not have sufficient space to discuss each of these strategies in detail so we will focus on the most significant aspects of each individually and how they cohere into an overall strategy.

One of the most significant things about the *Homelessness Policy Statement* of February 2013 (a time when the austerity policy introduced to deal with the recession was still in place) was its promise to end long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. The latter was later defined as living in emergency accommodation for longer than six months and the need to sleep rough. This was dropped as an explicit promise a few years later. The main policy strategy to be pursued to achieve this end was a 'housing-led' approach, which was defined as 'the rapid provision of secure housing, with support as needed to ensure sustainable tenancies' (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2013, p. 2).

This was followed in 2014 by the *Social Housing Strategy 2020* which provided for funding to allow local authorities and approved housing bodies to build, acquire or lease 35,000 units of social housing over a six-year period, and to provide new social housing supports for eligible households utilising the private-rented sector (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government 2014). In April 2016, *Laying the Foundations: Housing Actions Repor*t laid out 31 actions that were underway to address the housing and homelessness crisis (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government 2016). Five of the actions related to homelessness: the provision of rapid-build

(prefabricated) housing for 153 homeless families by the end of 2016; the maintenance of the Housing First approach to ending rough sleeping; directing local authorities to provide up to 50% of social housing allocations to homeless families; enhancing the levels of rent support for homeless households; the provision of substantially increased levels of central government funding to local government to ensure adequate services.

On 19 July 2016, and within 100 days of the formation of a new government, an Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, entitled *Rebuilding Ireland*, was launched (Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government 2016). This is a €6 billion, multi-annual (2016-2021), broadly-based action plan which seeks to: increase the overall supply of new homes to 25,000 per annum by 2020; deliver an additional 50,000 social housing units in the period to 2021; and meet the housing needs of an additional 87,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme and the Rental Accommodation Scheme. The degree of ambition is striking. In terms of the commitments on social housing, there is a substantial public building plan but, that said, there is also a substantial reliance on the private sector for some 15,000 out of the planned 50,000 units. A Rapid Build programme was also part of *Rebuilding Ireland*. The Plan also promises to limit the use of hotels for accommodating homeless families by mid-2017; to increase Housing First tenancies in Dublin from 100 to 300 by 2017; to extend tenancy sustainment services across the country; and to increase the amount of rent subsidy available to homeless households. In September 2016, an elaboration of the homelessness actions was published, which, in addition to the earlier actions, promised to accelerate the rapid-build programme to ensure the provision of 1,500 units by the end of 2018, and the addition of 200 emergency beds for rough sleepers by the end of 2016. This is the strategy currently in place (and which will be reported on below in Section 3).

2.2 Funding

The increase in homelessness in recent years has seen a corresponding increase in funding available to the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government for the provision of homelessness services. In 2018, €116 million was provided by the Exchequer for homelessness services, an increase of 18% on the 2017 budget allocation (Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government 2018b). Budget 2019 saw an increase of 25% in the spending budget for homelessness services, bringing the total to €146 million for 2019. A significant proportion of funding for homelessness services is for the provision of accommodation for families experiencing homelessness, including families in hotels and in Family Hubs (which will be elucidated in Section 3 below). The Department recently informed the Children's Rights Alliance that housing authorities spent €14.8 million on the operation of the Family Hub programme in the first nine months of 2018 (reported in Ombudsman for Children's Office 2019). Capital funding for the development of additional Family Hubs was estimated at €45 million and a significant portion of the additional €60 million in capital spending targeted at tackling homelessness is being assigned to the Family Hubs programme. This level of funding and the prioritisation of Family Hubs underlines the government's commitment to this form of temporary accommodation response as a policy solution. It has been pointed out that such expenditure would make a significant contribution to building permanent homes for people (Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning, Community and Local Development 2017). Although increasing, the general sense – especially from the NGO sector - is that the available funding is inadequate in Ireland (Threshold 2018; Social Justice Ireland 2018a). Note also that most of the spending goes on emergency accommodation and since 2015 most of it is resourcing private accommodation in Dublin (O'Sullivan 2016).

The amount of funding going to social housing has also been increased but nowhere near enough to meet the targets set out in Rebuilding Ireland. In Budget 2018 additional capital funding of €326m was provided for social housing construction and acquisition. This was to be supplemented with €77m in local authority self-financing. In Budget 2019 the housing allocation was of the order of €2.4 billion. But of the capital allocation of €1.33 billion, only

€1.25 billion was allocated for the delivery of just 10,000 new social homes (to be delivered through a mix of construction, acquisition and leasing). It is simply too little money to meet the demand.

As far as is known, EU funding has not played a significant role in addressing HHE in Ireland. Nor have EU indicators of housing been used for the purposes of information, monitoring and planning.

2.3 Implementation of strategies

The strategies – especially Rebuilding Ireland - are in the process of being implemented and regular monitoring is in place – for example an Action Plan Progress Report on Rebuilding Ireland is produced every quarter (by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government). As mentioned, counts of those using emergency services are undertaken and reported on a monthly basis (also by the Department). Local authorities also have to produce quarterly financial reports on how the funding is allocated. In addition, housing need assessments are produced annually – under the rubric of 'Summary of Social Housing Assessments' by the local authorities and reported through the Rebuilding Ireland process (e.g., Housing Agency 2018). However, as noted above there are significant exclusions from those counted for this purpose; in particular people on particular rent supplement payments – which could number up to 40,000 - are not on the list even if their accommodation is poor. In addition, as mentioned, many populations of the ETHOS Light classification are not included in the statistics on homelessness (e.g., rough sleeping, those in long-term supported accommodation, those in domestic violence refuges).

In regard to whether the strategies have been implemented or not, in general they have. In terms of achievements of the latest programme Rebuilding Ireland, the following are some of the most notable reported at end 2018 (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government 2018a):

- under the rapid delivery programme 423 homes had been delivered, making a total delivery of over 1,100 social homes to the 1,500 planned by 2021;
- the Dublin Region Homeless Executive had set-up over 4,900 tenancies, with over 6,100 tenancies set up nationally;
- a number of provisions have been put in place to support vulnerable groups (such as children, young people leaving care, prisoners, pregnant women);
- the rolling out of Housing First nationally and the resourcing of a further 200 places in the Dublin Housing First programme.

Hence, it is important to note that there have been some achievements. However, high and rising rates of homelessness give ground to question whether implementation, speed and the balance of the financial investment.

As far as is known none of the EU indicators on housing need are used systematically by the public authorities to monitor HHE in Ireland.

3   Analysis of the current patterns of service provision and challenges in implementing Ireland's responses to homelessness and housing exclusion

3.1 Service provision for HHE in Ireland

Ireland has a mixed system in place which includes an emphasis on support services (provided almost exclusively by the voluntary sector) and income and other housing-based responses.

All but 2% of those counted as homeless in March 2019 were in the first two types of accommodation (that is, private emergency accommodation and supported temporary accommodation and they were roughly evenly divided between the two). Hence, the majority of individuals classified as being in emergency accommodation (and hence homeless) are in (usually small family-run) hotels/B&Bs, hubs, hostels and other forms of emergency accommodation. The scale of use of hotels/B&Bs is extensive - it has been estimated that some 600 families were being housed in emergency hotel accommodation in May 2017 and a further 50 in B&Bs (Hearne and Murphy 2017, p. 14). Reducing this has been adopted by the current government as one of its main aims regarding homelessness.

In regard to rough sleepers, homeless shelters (provided and run by the voluntary sector) are the main form of emergency accommodation used; these are single-site buildings with on-site support staff offering bedrooms and shared living rooms or dormitories (shared sleeping areas). Some services provide meals, and some charge a fee for staying there. These services can be both short term or long term. Additional emergency shelter is provided during the winter months in the bigger cities (also by the voluntary sector).

In addition to emergency accommodation, a major policy plank in meeting the housing needs of low-income people in Ireland is through rent supplements, a cash subsidy towards the cost of private rent for benefit recipients. This was introduced first in 1977, known as Rent Supplement - replacing an ad hoc and Poor Law-oriented system of state support for housing costs. Over time cash subsidies have become a major element. The primary driver of the growth was not necessarily new claimants but the lengthening duration of existing claims (Byrne and Norris 2019, p. 9). Effectively then, over time the income supplements have transformed from being a temporary housing support to a de facto, marketised quasi social housing sector, albeit one where tenants have no long-term security (Hearne and Murphy 2017). Byrne and Norris (2019) suggest that actually supplementing rent has come to replace social housing in Irish housing policy. They refer especially here to the establishment in 2014 of a second rent supplement scheme - the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) - which is essentially an extension of rent supplementation to the employed and a recourse to the private housing market for public housing needs. Recipients pay a weekly, wage-based contribution to their local authority which in turn pays the landlord the rent. It should be noted the recipients of some rent supplementation (and especially HAP) are removed from the waiting lists for access to mainstream social housing on the grounds that their long-term housing need has been met. This, however, is more a statistical artefact than a real solution as these people are dependent upon the private landlord system which in Ireland is notorious for guaranteeing secure tenure.

There is also a Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) in place whereby the local authority is responsible for finding suitable accommodation in the private sector for qualified tenants and enters into a direct contract with the landlord to lease the property for a minimum of four years. This gives the tenant the same basic rights as local authority tenants. It has never catered for large numbers however – either because major cuts to local authority budgets meant that they did not have the resources to maintain the scheme or because landlords were unhappy with the regulations and standards and reluctant to sign away their properties for 4 years at 80% of market rent. The HAP has come to dwarf the RAS. Unlike the RAS the local authority is not responsible for sourcing accommodation for HAP clients – rather tenants source their own accommodation in the private-rented sector and make an agreement of tenancy with the landlord. This means that if or when the tenancy

ends, the local authority is under no obligation to rehouse the tenant (Hearne and Murphy 2017, p. 11). Some 86,000 tenants were in one of the three rent supplementation schemes in 2016 (ibid, p. 11).

As well as rent supplementation, Ireland's policies on HHE focus strongly on housing provision. There are serval aspects to this, including Housing First, Family Hubs and hostel (as well as other forms of emergency accommodation described above).

Ireland's Housing First programme is more or less limited to the Dublin area – with a Demonstration Project first set up there in 2011 which later became Dublin Housing First and has since late last year started to be rolled out nationally (Canning et al 2018). The scale of the programme is small: at end Q4 2018, the Dublin Region Housing First Service had created 290 Housing First tenancies for 243 individuals of which 210 (86%) have successfully retained housing (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government 2018b). A recent assessment concluded that the big challenge to the initiative is structural in nature – a lack of affordable housing (Canning et al 2018).

Driven by a recognition that hotel and B&B accommodation is inappropriate to the needs of families with children, Family Hubs have emerged over the past two years as a preferred approach to providing emergency, temporary accommodation to homeless families This is a form of colocation and collective living, with common facilities and services and more private bedroom accommodation. The Hubs are intended as an alternative to living in hotels and B&Bs which had become the major – largely ad hoc - response as family homelessness has grown, and in 2016/7 was identified by government as an inappropriate response and targeted for elimination. The aim of Family Hubs is to provide a form of emergency accommodation that offers greater stability for homeless families, facilitates more coordinated needs assessment and support planning, including on-site access to required services (such as welfare, health and housing services), and provides appropriate family supports and surroundings. At the end of 2018 there were 26 Family Hubs operating nationally with a total capacity for over 600 families - 22 Family Hubs in Dublin and one each in Kildare Cork, Limerick and Louth (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2018b). Some of these Family Hubs are run by private operators while others are run by housing charities. Although the Department has indicated that the length of stay in Family Hubs is not currently captured for monitoring purposes, the Minister for Housing recently reported that the average length of time families are spending in Family Hubs is about six months (Ombudsman for Children's Office 2019, p. 13). It is expected that additional Family Hubs will be provided in 2019 for, as mentioned, this is now relied on as a major response.

A housebuilding/procurement policy – as described earlier – is a major plank of Irish policy. It should be noted that a rapid build housing programme is also included in *Rebuilding Ireland* as part of the policy response. But it is a minor element and it is not clear if it is still active as a policy.

In regard to the identity of the services providers in Ireland, as mentioned the local authorities have statutory responsibility for housing and homelessness matters. While they are likely to be a port of call for people with housing need, they are unlikely to be the first port of call. This is because much of the service provision – especially the support services including information and outreach - is provided by a number of voluntary bodies. No local authority operates homelessness accommodation services directly in Ireland. Most of the relevant services providers cater specifically for homeless people and their origins lie in civil society action – and in some cases protest – against homelessness and housing need. These include well-known NGO service providers operating in Dublin alone or in the major cities such as Focus Ireland, Simon Community, the Fr Peter McVerry Trust. The general poverty charities – and especially the Society of St Vincent de Paul – also play a role. The service landscape also includes housing associations, some of which are financially quite large e.g., Respond, Cluid. These are direct providers of affordable housing.

There are a number of things to note about the service provision landscape in Ireland. First, the high dependence on NGOs for services provision. This means – as pointed out by

O'Sullivan (2016, p. 22) - that the nature and structure of homelessness services largely reflects the mission and vision of a range of voluntary services. It also has another implication which is that HHE is one of the few areas of NGO growth in Ireland since the recession. That said, these NGOS have a significant dependence on donations a fund-raising for their activities. Second, the growth in homelessness services is mainly demand led. Thirdly, Ireland operates a relatively complicated service infrastructure (in general and in relation to those who are homeless). It is very group/problem specific. This means for example that services for particular groups, such as lone parents, young people leaving care, people with addictions, ex-offenders, may all be dealing with issues of homelessness along with the services provided by organisations targeted specifically at homeless people (European Observatory on Homelessness 2018, p. 28).

3.2 Effectiveness

There is considerable criticism of the services in Ireland for lacking effectiveness, especially in regard to providing comprehensive and flexible support. The rising levels of HHE are themselves indicative of this, opening up the question of whether Ireland's recourse to housing-related measures overshadows needed supportive services. The feedback on Family Hubs – discussed in the next section – gives a good indication of support service inadequacies. In addition, the services providers – especially the homeless charities – consistently indicate that the funding is insufficient (Focus Ireland 2018; Simon Communities Ireland 2018). Staffing levels and a greater range and depth of orientations in service provision (family mediation services, aftercare workers, child support case workers and case managers) are high on the list of voluntary sector service-related priorities (Focus Ireland 2018).

Prevention of HHE receives little attention in the Irish case. In addition to a lack of prevention-oriented support services, there are what might be called 'structural issues'. Evictions and notices of termination are common at short notice and tenants' rights – although somewhat improved – are minimal (Threshold 2017, 2018). The protections still favour the landlord.

With regard to social housing supply and support the latest policy *Rebuilding Ireland* relies heavily on this strategy. Its ambition – some 50,000 social housing units up to 2021 - is striking especially when set against the sharp drop in social housing that took place from 2008 on. In 2015, the local authorities built just 75 houses (note that during the period of severe cut-backs in Irish public expenditure between 2008 and 2012 the Department responsible for housing experienced the second largest proportionate cuts of any department (Hearne and Murphy 2017, p. 9)). It has been estimated that if social housing had been built at the same scale as prevailing in 2009 an additional 31,136 houses would have been built between 2010 and 2016 (ibid). Social housing as a proportion of the total housing stock has been undergoing a long-term decline in Ireland – from 18.4% in 1961, to 12.5% by 1981 and 8.7% in 2011 (Hearne and Murphy 2017, p. 9). This is one of a number of trends. Another is the strong reliance on the private sector to increase the supply of social housing. There are different strategies for this purpose. First, the reliance on and investment put into the income supplement HAP (described above) is in effect a reliance on the private-rented sector. Second, *Rebuilding Ireland* expects some 87,000 units to come from the private rental sector between 2016 and 2021. For some, this is an 'over dependence´ (Hearne and Murphy 2017, p. 13). Its sustainability as a solution has to be questioned.

Some have suggested that there is a bias against social housing in Irish housing policy, especially over the last decades (Hearne and Murphy 2017, p. 9). There has been a strong trend towards financialisation of the sector which in Ireland has especially affected the social housing sector. Various governments have proactively encouraged investors and speculators through attractive tax rates on rental income and profits and buy to let schemes. The subsidisation of private rental housing through the HAP alone amounts to a sizeable bonus to the sector, estimated at some €500 million annually (Hearne and Murphy 2017, p. 15). In addition, the rent supplementation schemes contributed to the growth of

private landlordism and inflated the yields of the sector. In the process, housing in general but also social housing has been embedded in volatile financial market cycles (Byrne and Norris 2019).

With regard to effectiveness in providing access to permanent accommodation at an affordable price, the truth is that it is the market that is in control in Ireland. And this is a market with high rental inflation, of almost 10% for the year 2018 (Lyons 2018). The average monthly rent in Ireland at the fourth quarter of 2018 was €1,347 and over €2,000 in Dublin. The average market rent nationwide has risen by 81% since bottoming out in late 2011 (ibid).

Among the suggested proposals are:

- The development of an affordable rental scheme (Irish Council for Social Housing 2017). The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) (2015) highlighted this but also the need for a secure occupancy model through a disciplined market-sensitive form of regulation and adjustment and a move to indefinite leases. Among proposals regarding improving the supply of rental housing are a much better land management scheme, the provision of low-cost loans and vigorous moves towards affordability in the rental sector;

- The desirability of setting a base threshold (of say 20%) of overall housing stock in permanent social and affordable housing over a medium timeframe (Irish Council for Social Housing 2017);

- The establishment of a national Social Housing Agency to build housing on behalf of social authorities and administer funding for not-for-profit housing associations (Brooke 2016);

- The use of National Assets Management Agency as a housing agency with the ability to access and distribute appropriate off-balance sheet funding and to take an active role in the direction and support of Approved Housing Bodies in the provision of social housing (Social Justice Ireland 2016);

- The putting in place of a new financial structure to generate sufficient capital to fund social housing by either: (i) securing a change to the Fiscal Rules to allow for greater flexibility for public investment in social infrastructure; (ii) establishing a special purposes vehicle to put in place an off-balance-sheet mechanism that would access low cost finance to address under-supply of social housing (Social Justice Ireland 2017, p. 4).

On a broader housing policy NESC (2014) has questioned the coherence of Ireland's policy approach to social segregation and disadvantage. Taking an overview, NESC outlined three main goals for Irish housing in the coming years (2014a):

- affordable house purchase in a stable market that prioritises housing for occupation rather than speculation;

- affordable and secure rental accommodation available to a significant share of the population;

- future supply and a growing stock of homes, in well-designed sustainable neighbourhoods, available to those on lower incomes.

In order to achieve the latter two goals, a fourth requirement was identified, that is, the need for new institutional arrangements for housing finance, planning and land management, development, construction and housing management. The NESC (2014) report proceeds to identify an interdependent three-strand approach for achieving the ultimate goals, based on supply, finance and cost rental. In the Budget for 2018, the government announced that a new body to be known as the Home Building Finance Ireland is to be established to work with National Assets Management Agency to support the provision of an additional €750m of the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund to finance commercial investment in housing finance (rather than social housing). These measures

and the attention to housing are important but they will make little dent in the numbers (over 70,000 households) on the social housing lists.

3.3 Innovations

As will be appreciated from the foregoing, the field of HHE (and homelessness in particular) has been vibrant in Ireland over the years. And there have been a number of innovations. One is the Family Hub which has been described above and which are now being heavily relied on to address family homelessness. This is a major government commitment. This is not necessarily a positive or good practice story as implied by the term 'innovations'. It should be noted that as a policy Family Hubs are underpinned neither by an evidence-based approach nor by an initial pilot phase to demonstrate how the policy might work (Hearne and Murphy 2017). Feedback on them from users and other sources is mixed (Hearne and Murphy 2017; Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission 2017; Walsh and Harvey 2017; Ombudsman for Children's Office 2019). When they are regarded positively by users, it tends to be for their safety and stability, the availability and kindness of staff, and cooking and laundry facilities on site. However, parents (and children) report experiencing them as a form of dependent rather than independent living and underline the difficulty of parenting and conducting a normal family life while living in the hubs (Walsh and Harvey 2017). 'Homes not hubs' is how once recent critique termed it (Social Justice Ireland 2018a, p. 5). A recent report from the Ombudsman for Children's Office (2019) which undertook some direct research with children and their families underlined that children and their parents experience the hubs as institutionalised living (for example as rule and timetable bound, lacking in privacy, excessively noisy). Hearne and Murphy (2017) have termed it 'therapeutic incarceration', and see parallels with the direct provision systems used for asylum seekers and Ireland's longer history of institutionalisation as a way of solving social problems. One of the particular issued raised by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2017) is the impact of long-term stays in such Hubs – it expresses the worry that Family Hubs may normalise family homelessness and has recommended the imposition of maximum time limits on individual family stays in such facilities.

3.4 Weaknesses and Gaps

The following are the main weaknesses and gaps.

There are serious gaps in the definition and counting of the extent of HHE in Ireland. As mentioned, homelessness is conceived only as encompassing those in emergency accommodation and there is only an approximation of HE (and no explicit definition) through the numbers assessed as being in housing need and therefore on the housing waiting lists. Clear and inclusive definitions and full enumeration of each should be a priority for the future. The current reality in Ireland is that the statistics are unreliable and incomplete and this also hampers planning as well as efficiency and effectiveness in service provisions. For example, weaknesses in the compilation of housing waiting lists have been identified (Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government 2018a). The many exclusions from the definition of those in housing need – for example, people in receipt of the main housing support payments - should be noted as confusing and potentially inaccurate for monitoring, assessment and planning purposes. Furthermore, there is double counting and potential inflation of success. To take an example: re-housing in Ireland used to mean people moving into a local authority housing but over time this has come to mean anyone moving into anywhere away from a shelter. To give an extreme case, if a homeless family were re-housed from a shelter into HAP, was subsequently evicted twice in the same year, this would be counted as three successful re-housings.

Prevention is another weakness. For example, in 2016 over €96m was spent on providing services for people who are homeless in Dublin, but less than 5% of this went on prevention, tenancy sustainment and resettlement supports (Focus Ireland 2018, p. 10).

While some of the measures in place in Ireland have implications for prevention, prevention of HHE itself needs to be a focus of policy. In this regard one of the most important recommendations is to enhance homeless and general housing support services, in particular to focus on prevention-oriented activities (as recommended by Social Justice Ireland 2018b). But there is also a need for much stronger rent control measures and regulation of the private-rented housing sector especially with regard to tenant rights. There is a further problem also which is that some of the measures introduced to deal with the issues of HHE exert a negative effect. For example, the private rental sector can increase pressure on housing waiting lists as the inconsistent nature of tenancies can result in more people losing accommodation and either presenting as homeless or applying for housing supports (Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning & Local Government (2018a).

The stock and supply of social housing is another issue of concern. While social housing supply is slowly increasing, it is not rapidly recovering from very low levels and a diminution of the role of local authorities in long-term social housing is a long-term trend. For example, in 2005 local authority 'builds' accounted for 60% of all social housing output; ten years later in 2015 it was 1%. This is a startling figure, mirrored by others. While there has been some increase in investment, in the first nine months of 2018 local authority builds accounted for just 4% of all social housing output (Social Justice Ireland 2019). Over time the reliance on the private rented market to provide 'social housing solutions' has grown and grown. There have been two signature trends here. First, direct provision of housing by the local authorities has declined rapidly as outlined above. Second, the role of rent supplementation has expanded rapidly as part of the Irish policy portfolio on homelessness and housing vulnerability. Since 2014, for example, the importance of HAP as a means of providing 'social housing supports' has increased from 11% of all 'Social Housing Output' in 2014 when it was introduced to 73% in the first three quarters of 2018 (Social Justice Ireland 2019). Note that this provides neither long-term security of tenure for the tenant nor additions to the supply of social housing or public assets. It also reduces the degree of counter-cyclicality housing output which may act as a buffer during periods of the economic cycle (Corrigan and Watson 2018).

A mixed policy is in effect in Ireland and this is probably advisable. That said however, the stock of social housing is too low and local authority housing is insufficiently recognised as a desirable good (and indeed an essential given the generally low capacity of the approved housing bodies and the contribution of the private housing sector to the problem). Ireland has over time developed a market-based housing system which functioned well enough until the economic and social crisis of 2008 put this system under extreme strain. Whereas most homeless people up to that point were single people or families which had broken up, after that period low-income families came to comprise the bulk of the sector. These were people who a generation earlier would have been in local authority homes but were now in the lower end of the private-rented market. For several years, if evicted, they were able to find other homes in the private rental market and were relatively skilled at doing so. From 2014 or so onwards, as prices rose, they were unable to get back in. So, they had to turn to homeless services (Walsh and Harvey 2017).

Against this backdrop it is difficult to see the Irish situation being significantly improved until the low end of the housing market is again supplied with local authority homes. The research shows that people at the low end of the housing market greatly prefer local authority homes because they are secure, affordable and in the communities that they know (Hearne and Murphy 2017). The government's current preference for the private-rented sector seems to indicate that it sees it as a permanent solution for a large part of housing demand, keeping its tenants in a permanent state of insecurity.

3.5 Recommendations

Ireland needs better and more accurate HHE data, analysis and monitoring. One recommendation is for the adoption of ETHOS light classificatory system by Ireland and for this to become the basis around which a bespoke HHE data system is put in place. In addition to the quantitative data, there is a need for qualitative data, especially from those who are affected by HHE and people's experience of the housing-related services.

Prevention of HHE needs to be the subject of much more intensive engagement. In this regard the enhancement of homeless and general housing support services would make a significant contribution. There is also a need to focus on the private-rented sector and to exert much stronger rent control and tenant rights. In this regard, the introduction of a cost rental system has been suggested, whereby rent is set to cover the cost of provision and management of housing, subsidised on a sliding scale for those experiencing affordability issues (Social Justice Ireland 2018b). A key part of this proposal is that it be financed 'off-balance-sheet' to allow for supply to scale up without adding to the general government debt.

The supply of public/social housing needs to be increased. One suggested improvement for this purpose would be to allow local authorities and approved housing bodies to combine their property portfolios for the purpose of leveraging finance to increase their capacity to build and manage social housing (as recommended by Social Justice Ireland 2018b). In regard to housing supply in general Social Justice Ireland (ibid) recommends better utilisation of existing properties by making additional loans available to owners of vacant properties in need of repair, particularly in Rent Pressure Zones, to return these properties to tenantable condition. In addition, it has been recommended that social housing regions be developed to allow flexibility for applicants to be housed in neighbouring local authorities and that local authorities be encouraged to work together to fill their vacant stock with suitable applicants from other areas (Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government 2018a).

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Annex

Table A1: ETHOS Light categories defined as homeless in Ireland

Operational category		Living situation		Definition	Defined as homeless in Ireland
1	People living rough	1	Public space/ external space	Living in the streets or public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters	No
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation	Yes
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homeless hostels	Where the period of stay is time limited and no long-term housing is provided	Yes, provided it is classified as emergency accommodation – the only exception here is category 6
		4	Temporary accommodation		
		5	Transitional supported accommodation		
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation		
4	People living in institutions	7	Healthcare institutions	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing	No
		8	Penal institutions	No housing available prior to release	No
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9	Mobile homes	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence	No
		10	Non-conventional building		No
		11	Temporary structures		No
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	12	Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence	No

Table A2: Latest available data on the number of homeless in Ireland

	Operational category		Living situation	Most recent number	Period covered	Source
1	People living rough	1	Public space/ external space	For Dublin region: 156 individuals For country as a whole: 127	27 Nov. 2018 24 Nov. 2016	Dublin Region Homeless Executive, (2018) (in references) Census 2016 (Central Statistics Office (2017) (in references)
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters			
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homeless hostels	3, 4 and 5 taken together: 10,305 individuals (including children)	25-31 March 2019	Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (2019) (monthly statistics) In references
		4	Temporary accommodation			
		5	Transitional supported accommodation			
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation	No numbers/ excluded from count		
4	People living in institutions	7	Healthcare institutions	No numbers/ excluded from count		
		8	Penal institutions	No numbers/ excluded from count		
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9	Mobile homes	No numbers/ excluded from count		
		10	Non-conventional building			
		11	Temporary structures			
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	12	Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence	No numbers/ excluded from count		