



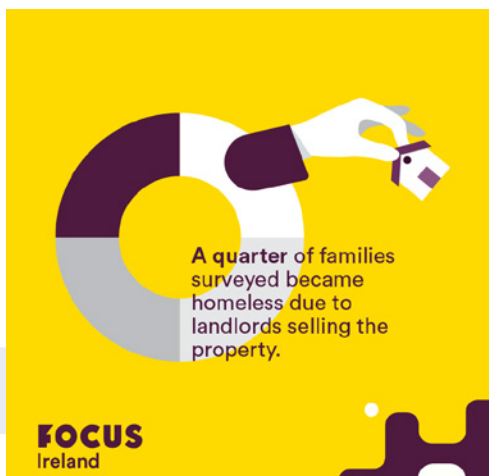
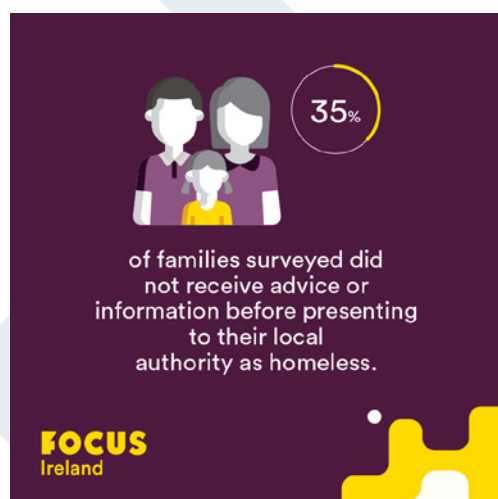
## Family Homelessness in Dublin

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Since 2014, the number of families experiencing homelessness in Ireland has grown rapidly. In August 2019, there were 1,726 families with 3,848 children living in emergency accommodation across Ireland<sup>1</sup>. In terms of family homelessness, this is an increase of 348% in five years. It is an unprecedented crisis.

The government produces monthly data on the numbers of those in emergency accommodation. However, very little is known about what is driving families into homelessness. To determine the root causes of family homelessness in Dublin, Focus Ireland began a research program in 2016 to examine the key drivers and dynamics of family homelessness in Dublin. The research design captured reasons why families lost their last stable home, families' housing histories (details of their last four homes prior to presenting as homeless), demographic profiles, and help seeking patterns e.g. whether families contacted any government agencies or homeless services.

In total, eight separate reports, two summary reports, and a recent substantial study have been produced<sup>2</sup>. The recent study follows the same research design and methodology of previous reports but with a larger sample of families who the Focus Ireland Family Homeless Action Team (HAT) are currently case managing. Additionally, the design and scope of the survey was broadened to capture experiences of looking for secure housing while residing in emergency accommodation. A total of 237 families who were on the Focus Ireland Family HAT caseload and had given consent were successfully contacted.



### Key findings from the research

A key aim of the research was to ascertain the location of last stable home for families. 68% of families (n=161) reported that their last stable home was in the private rental sector. While 22% (52%) had their last stable home with family or with a family member. All other types of accommodation accounted for the remaining 10% of families. Additionally, 60% of all respondents (n=142) were categorised as having very stable housing histories, i.e. – they reported lengthy, stable tenancies and never reported homelessness or hidden homelessness in the past (i.e. sofa-surfing or living in overcrowded conditions).

In terms of reasons why families left their last stable property, 36% (n=86) of respondents cited the property being removed from the market as their primary reason for leaving their last stable accommodation (most commonly due to the landlord selling); 22% (n=51) cited problems with private sector accommodation (predominantly affordability); while 30% (n=70) cited family circumstances (including domestic violence, and relationship breakdown).

A section of the survey instrument contained questions in relation to sourcing of housing through a government social housing support scheme for people who have a long-term housing need known as HAP (housing assistance payment). Many respondents had applied to over 20 rental properties through the scheme. Respondents reported extreme difficulty finding properties willing to accept HAP. 77% (n=183) of respondents had been actively looking for proper-

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (2019) Homelessness Report August 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Gambi, et al. (2018) Causes of Family Homelessness in Dublin Region during 2016 and 2017. Dublin: Focus Ireland. Available: <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Gambi-Sheridan-and-Hoey-2018-Insights-into-Family-Homelessness-No-16-Causes-of-family-homelessness-in-the-Dublin-region-during-2016-and-2017-Final-2.pdf>



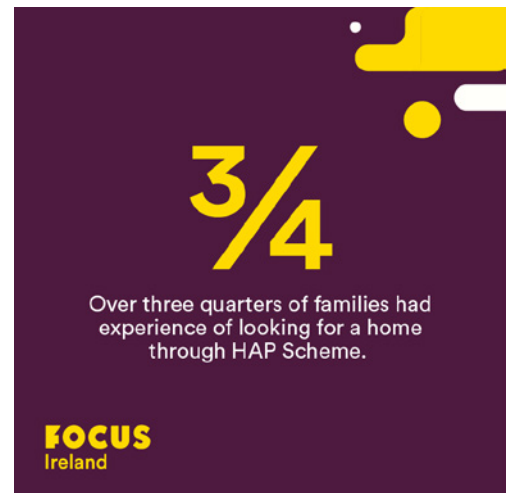
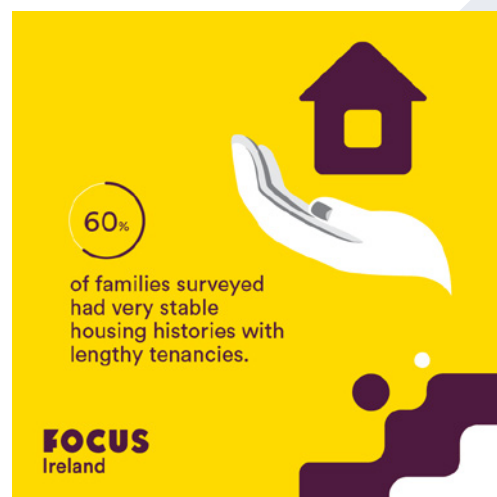
ties under the HAP Scheme. Of these, 61% (n=111) of those surveyed had applied to over 20 properties under the HAP Scheme without success.

Of considerable concern was the 35% (n=82) of respondents who did not seek advice or information before presenting as homeless despite several initiatives to make advice and information available to families at risk of homelessness. 55% (n=130) of respondents did seek assistance before presenting as homeless, primarily to their local authority, or services run by Focus Ireland or a tenancy protection service known as Threshold.

In line with previous research in the series, this study found that single mothers and migrants continue to face a disproportionate risk of homelessness. 58% (n=137) of the survey respondents were lone-parents, of which 95% were female. While 56% of the respondents were originally from a country outside Ireland, of which 41% (n=97) were from outside the EU and 15% (n=35) were from an EU country. Significantly, 80% of the migrant cohort reported a notably lengthy and stable housing history prior to becoming homeless.

## Implications for policy and service delivery

The research findings clearly demonstrate that the key drivers of family homelessness are rooted in the private rental sector. Families with stable housing histories are entering homelessness due to specific issues related to availability and affordability. The government's primary response to this worsening crisis has been to commit a significant amount of public money to emergency measures, including the development and expansion of 'Family Hub' type congregate accom-



modation. Not only is this policy decision extremely expensive for the exchequer, it is also highly inappropriate for families who are condemned to live for long periods of time in confined conditions<sup>3</sup>. This is particularly alarming considering a recently published report by the Ombudsman for Children capturing the perspectives of children and feelings of sadness, shame and embarrassment in relation to their living situation<sup>4</sup>.

What is needed, and needed urgently, are measures that prevent families becoming homeless in the first instance, such as stronger tenant rights and protections. Secondly, HAP is wholly unsuitable as a key plank of 'social housing support' for vulnerably housed families. As evidenced in this research, it is not a solution for many families. Additionally, it provides housing subsidies worth hundreds of millions a year to the private sector, which is of little value to the State. Instead local authorities must set ambitious targets for building new social, affordable and public housing - and must be held accountable to deliver on those targets. Above all, this research emphasises the failure of current policy and the urgent need for the government to introduce a dedicated Family Homelessness Strategy to adequately address the needs of families experiencing a crisis in their housing.

3 Share, M. and Hennessey, M. (2017) Food Access and Nutritional Health for Families in Emergency Accommodation. Dublin: Focus Ireland; Walsh and Harvey (2015) Family Experiences of Pathways into Homelessness: The Families' Perspective, Dublin: Housing Agency; Children's Rights Alliance (2017) Report Card 2017. Dublin: CRA

4 Ombudsman for Children's Office (2019) No Place Like Home: Children's views and experiences of living in Family Hubs, Dublin: OCO