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SINN FÉIN SPOKESPERSON ON HOUSING

**WHAT IS THE
TRUE LEVEL OF
HOMELESSNESS?**

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HOUSING
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HUMANRIGHT

What is the true level of homelessness?

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Executive Summary

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLgH) produce a monthly homeless report detailing the number of families, adults and children accessing local authority funded emergency and transitional accommodation.

DHLgH's latest published homeless figures indicate that 6,905 adults, 2,642 children and 1,117 families were living in emergency accommodation in October 2020.

The data contained in the report is produced by local authorities through the Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS). The data is broken down on a regional basis and via different age groups. DHLgH provides funding to local authorities for emergency and transitional accommodation via Section 10 of the 1988 Housing Act. This is combined with 10% from local authorities own resources.

However, DHLgH is not the only government department that funds emergency and transitional accommodation for people who are homeless.

Through Tusla the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth funds domestic violence refuges and step down accommodation.

The same Department funds Direct Provision for adults and children who have secured their leave to remain but are unable to access accommodation either within the private rented sector or via a local authority social housing waiting list.

Emergency and transitional accommodation providers such as Morning Star and Regina Coeli, hostels in Dublin, are not funded by the government.

None of these people are included in DHLgH's official monthly homeless report.

Nor are rough sleepers as only Dublin City conducts a twice yearly count which is published by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive.

Therefore the monthly figures produced by DHLgH are not an accurate reflection of the true levels of homelessness in this State.

Based on the information provided by government departments and service providers Sinn Féin estimate that when the categories above are included in figures the real number of people accessing homeless services is closer to 10,500

At least 20% more people are accessing homeless services than the government is currently counting.

Even this figure is an underestimation as it does not include homeless individuals in temporary own door accommodation, sofa surfing or people living in overcrowded accommodation.

(See Table 1)

TABLE 1

Number of People in Emergency and Transitional Accommodation

	DHLGH funded emergency & transitional accommodation	DCYA/Tusla funded domestic violence accommodation	DoJ funded former asylum seekers in Direct Provision	DRHE Rough Sleepers Count	Hostels without government funding	Total
Adults	6,095	-	709	92	104	7,718
Dependents	2,642	-	311	n/a	n/a	2,953
Other	-					
Total	8,737	599	1,020	92	104	10,552

1. Background to the DHLgG monthly homeless report

The government issued a homeless policy statement in February 2013. It acknowledged that good data was critical and that extent of homelessness must be quantified with confidence so that realistic and practical solutions can be brought forward.

The National Homelessness and Consultative Committee involving government and NGOs tasked a data sub-group to develop a reporting methodology.

The monthly homeless reports followed. Using data from the PASS system, which was rolled out across the state in 2013, reports on the number of adults and children, the type of accommodation, their age and gender have been produced on a monthly basis since April 2014.

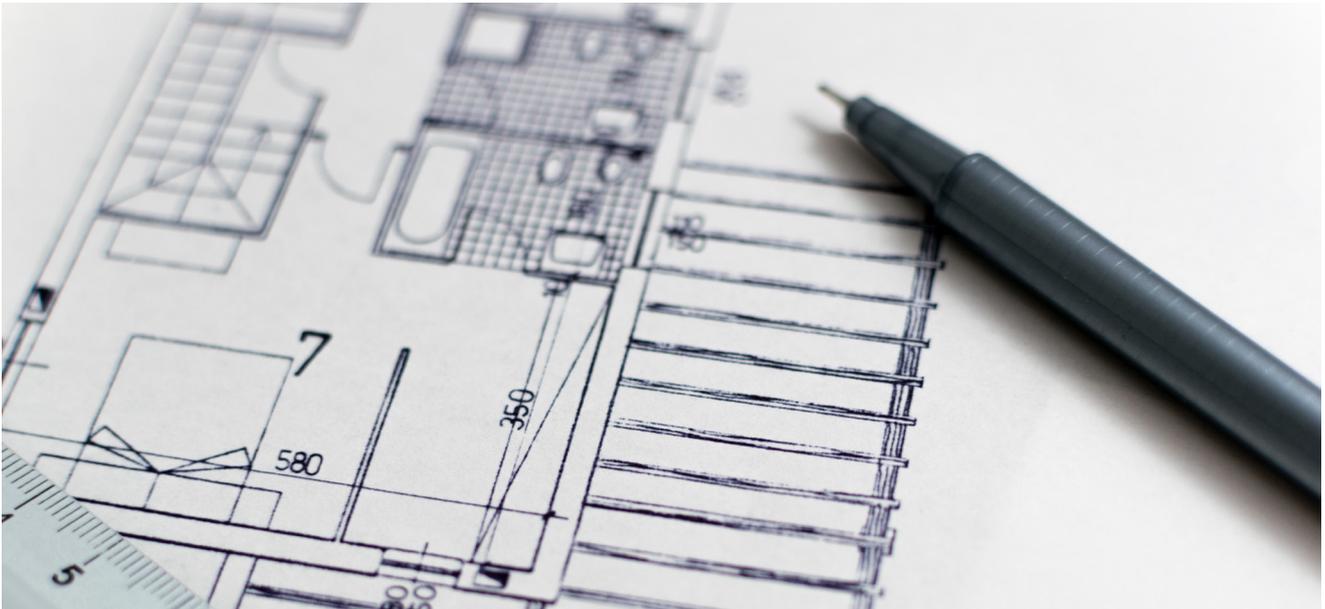
The reports included adults and children in DHLgH emergency and transitional accommodation funded through section 10 of the Housing Act. They did not include, rough sleepers or those in emergency hostels not in receipt of government funding.

At a hearing of the Housing Committee in November 2018, one of those involved in setting up this monthly reporting system, Prof. Eoin O'Sullivan from Trinity College explained the reasons for these exclusions.

In relation to non-section 10 funded providers, such as Morning Star and Regina Coelie, the data subgroup of the National Homeless Consultative Committee and the cross departmental committee conducted research with the Housing Agency, which concluded that there were fewer than 200 beds nationally. In terms of establishing a baseline figure the subgroup were aware of the limitation but the numbers were deemed to be not that significant.

For rough sleepers, the sub-group was of the view that there was an alternative source of data via the twice yearly count in Dublin and at the time, in the other local authority areas, apart from Cork, Galway and Limerick, rough sleeping was not an issue.

The DHLgH monthly data does not include information on the hidden homeless but at the time the data subgroup was of the view that the housing needs assessments collected that data, so there was an alternative source in place.



2. Domestic Violence

On the 1st January 2015 accommodation or refuges for those escaping from gender-based violence, funded via section 10, were removed from the monthly reports. This was following a recommendation of the homelessness oversight group in 2013 that they should be removed and that these agencies would be funded by Tusla. That was broadly supported by the national homelessness consultative committee and cross-departmental team and the data sub-group.

According to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth, in 2020 Tusla was provided with core funding of €25.3m for almost 60 organisations that deliver services for victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence¹.

Unfortunately, Tusla does not collect information in respect of the numbers of women and children who use funded domestic violence refuges and step down accommodation on a month by month basis. That data for 2019 is not yet available.

However Tusla data indicates that in 2018, 1,562 women and 2,223 children were forced to leave their homes as a result of domestic violence and were accommodated in domestic violence accommodation. The data on the numbers of women and children who used these services in 2019 is not yet available.

Tusla has confirmed that the number of beds provided by domestic violence support services on any given night is 599. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth has confirmed that indications from funded domestic violence services are that refuges consistently operate at full or near full-capacity.

¹ <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2020-10-21a.443>

3. Former asylum seekers in Direct provision

According to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth as of the end of September 2020, there were 709 adults and 311 children despite having been granted status, trapped in direct provision centres, effectively using it as emergency accommodation.

These people can access Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and in many cases are in full time employment, are on the social housing list and have access to Housing Assistance Payment.

However the number of adults and children who remain trapped in direct provision long after their status has been granted, is growing.





4. Covid 19 and Homeless Services

Concern was raised at the outset of Covid 19 that people living in emergency accommodation or direction provision would be particularly vulnerable to contracting Covid 19 due to the inability to practice social distancing.

The pandemic also brought an opportunity to bring some positive change to the provision of emergency homeless accommodation, including ending dormitory style accommodation and night to night bed spaces in hostels.

A lot of good work was done by Councils and voluntary service providers coordinated by the Department of Housing and Dublin Regional Homeless Executive in attempts to limit outbreaks of Covid 19 among those accessing emergency accommodation.

According to Dublin City Council at the end of October there were 239 homeless individuals residing in shielding facilities in the Dublin Region.²

At the end of October 2020, there were a total of 82 confirmed cases across Homeless Services in the Dublin Region since the onset of Covid-19 last March (with two deaths in a Long-Term Supported Accommodation Facility).

However, a number of issues emerged predominantly around access to emergency beds for homeless people who didn't have a "local connection" to Dublin City.

Unfortunately, these people are falling through the cracks and are ending up on the streets as they can't access homeless assessments. People shouldn't be denied access to emergency accommodation during this health crisis and when there is an extra amount of beds available.

² <https://www.homelessdublin.ie/content/files/Homeless-Update-No.10.pdf>

5. Deaths of people accessing homeless services

Unfortunately, there is a growing crisis with the rising number of deaths of people accessing homeless services. The number of reported deaths of people accessing homeless services in Dublin is 52 so far in 2020.

This is a significant increase in the number of deaths of people sleeping rough and in emergency accommodation compared to last year. Sinn Féin and others, have called for the government to implement an emergency response.

This response must also include increased funding for mental health and addiction supports, an end to dorm style emergency accommodation, a dramatic increase in Housing First tenancies, and Adult Safeguarding Reviews to ensure we learn the lessons of past mistakes.



Conclusion

Sinn Féin believe a number of changes must be made in relation to the collection and the publication of homeless data. This is not an academic matter. If we don't know the true level of adult and child homelessness how do we know what resources need to be allocated to tackle this problem.

Sinn Féin makes four recommendations below that we believe would aid the collation of accurate data and in turn an adequate provision of homeless accommodation services.

The Department of Housing must convene the Homeless Consultative Committee and its data sub group, which should include the Department of Housing and other government stakeholders including Tusla and the Reception and Integration Agency in the Department of Justice, Local Authorities, NGOs, the CSO and academics to agree once and for all for the methodology for the homeless reports.

Sinn Féin believe that an independent agency such as the CSO or the Housing Agency should take over the publication of the figures.

This monthly report must clearly set out the number of rough sleepers, women and children in domestic violence accommodation, adults and children with leave to remain but using direct provision centres as emergency accommodation and those in non-section ten funded emergency accommodation.

These reports should contain the number of emergency allocations under each department. This would include the number of people entering and exiting homelessness and the length of time they have been in emergency accommodation.



Appendix of PQ responses

Wednesday, 21 October 2020

Questions (172)

Eoin Ó Broin

QUESTION:

172. Deputy Eoin Ó Broin asked the Minister for Children, Disability, Equality and Integration the number of adults and children who accessed Tusla-funded domestic violence refuge accommodation to date in 2020; the average length of time families spent in such accommodation; and the number of beds available on a given night in 2019. [31923/20]

WRITTEN ANSWERS (Question to Children)

Minister for Children, Disability, Equality and Integration

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, provides funding and coordination supports to some 60 organisations that deliver a range of services for victims of domestic, sexual and gender based violence throughout the country.

In 2020, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs is providing Tusla with core funding of €25.3m for almost 60 organisations that deliver services for victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV). To date, Tusla has advised that it also has issued some €800,000 to DSGBV services to respond to the challenges arising from COVID-19 this year, with a further €400,000 in identified costs currently expected to maintain business-as-usual across all DSGBV services up to year end.

With regard to statistics relating to the use of Tusla-funded emergency domestic violence accommodation, Tusla has advised that data is collected retrospectively. The Department's understanding is that full data for 2019 is not yet available. I had hoped that a data report would be ready by Quarter 3 this year. However, Tusla had to prioritise the urgent needs of services after the outbreak of COVID-19, which delayed a number of processes. Tusla expects to finalise the substantive work of data verification later this year.

Wednesday, 21 October 2020

Questions (171)

Eoin Ó Broin

QUESTION:

171. Deputy Eoin Ó Broin asked the Minister for Children, Disability, Equality and Integration the number of adults and children remaining in direct provision centres after their leave to remain has been granted for the most recent date available. [31922/20]

WRITTEN ANSWERS (Question to Children)

Minister for Children, Disability, Equality and Integration

As of the end of September 2020, there were 709 adults and 311 children who have been granted status, residing in accommodation centres provided by my Department.

My Department has a specific team in place who work in collaboration with DePaul Ireland, the Jesuit Refugee Service, the Peter McVerry Trust, officials in the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, and the City and County Managers Association collectively to support these residents to access housing options. Between January and the end of September of this year, 900 people moved to accommodation in the community, of whom 644 received assistance from the support services outlined. This compares to a total of 837 people who moved to community housing in 2019 from accommodation centres.

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