



FIXING  HOUSING

**What
is the
true level of
homelessness?**

Sinn Féin
spokesperson
on Housing

**Eoin
Ó Broin TD**



JANUARY 2022

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 for December 2021 indicate that 6,463 adults, 2,451 children and 1,077 families were living in emergency accommodation.

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.

TABLE 1

Number of People in Emergency and Transitional Homeless Accommodation

	DHLGH funded emergency & transitional accommodation	Tusla funded domestic violence accommodation	DoJ funded former asylum seekers in Direct Provision	DRHE Rough Sleepers Count	Hostels without government funding	Total
Adults	6,463	-	-	94	-	100
Dependents	2,451	-	-	-	-	2,451
Other	-	599	-	-	-	-
Total	8,914	599	1,640	94	105	11,352

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.

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None of these people are included in DHLgH's official monthly homeless report. Nor are rough sleepers, as only Dublin City conducts a quarterly count which is published by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive.

Therefore, monthly figures produced are not an accurate reflection of the true level of homelessness in this state. DHLgH has no idea how many people are accessing homeless services and who are in urgent housing need.

This is not just a matter of statistics. If you do not have an accurate count, it is not possible to put in place an adequate plan to reduce and ultimately end homelessness.

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 11,352

At least 27% 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.

1 Background to the DHLgH 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 number of people sleeping rough in Dublin in October 2021 was 94.¹

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

1 <https://www.dublincity.ie/news/winter-2021-count-rough-sleepers-dublin-region>

2 <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/098b0-minister-ogorman-announces-increase-funding-for-domestic-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-services-for-2021/>

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 2021 was provided with core funding of €30m for almost 60 organisations that deliver services for victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

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.

In 2018, Tusla has confirmed that the number of beds provided organisations providing specialist emergency domestic violence accommodation on any given night is 599. They also confirmed that indications from funded domestic violence services are that refuges consistently operate at full or near full capacity. This is the most up to date figure we have in terms of bedspaces.

All the domestic violence support organisations reported a significant increase in domestic violence during covid 19. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that the 599 domestic violence refuge bed spaces reported in the 2018 PQ were full in Decemebe 2021.

Parliamentary questions have been submitted seeking updated figures for, 2019, 2020 and 2021, however none were available. The latest response has advised that the data will be compiled and analysed later in 2022.

3 Former asylum seekers in Direct Provision

According to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth as of December 2021, there were 1,640 adults and children who have been granted status, residing in direct provision centres.³ This is an increase of 60% in just one year.⁴

In October 2018, when we first started tracking this information there were 620 people still resident in direct provision centres despite having been granted some form of leave to remain. This is an increase of 165% in 3 years.⁵

They can access Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and are on the social housing list and have access to Housing Assistance Payment. However due to the housing crisis they cannot get out of direct provision. These people are effectively using direct provisions as emergency accommodation.

Following calls from Sinn Féin and others the Department of Housing in conjunction with the Department of Justice put in place additional support services to assist former asylum seekers who have been granted residency status to exit direct provision.

However, many adults and children remain trapped in direct provision long after their status has been granted.

3 https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2021-12-14/466/#pq_466

4 <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2020-12-15/395/?highlight%5B0%5D=direct&highlight%5B1%5D=provision>

5 https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2018/True_Level_of_Homelessness_doc.pdf

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.

- 1.** The Department of Housing must convene the Homeless Consultative Committee and its data subgroup, 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.
- 2.** Sinn Féin believe that an independent agency such as the CSO or the Housing Agency should take over the publication of the figures.
- 3.** 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 all adults and children in DHLGH funded emergency and transitional accommodation, including own door accommodation.
- 4.** 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.

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Appendix of PQ responses

January 18th 2022

Eoin Ó Broin TD
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the number of adults and children who accessed Tusla funded domestic violence refuge accommodation to date in 2021; the average length of time families spent in such accommodation; and the number of beds available on a given night in 2021.

61672 21

Dear Deputy,

I refer to your enquiry on the Tusla response to Parliamentary Question 61672/21.

Tusla does not currently have data available to respond to the query. We do collect relevant data from funded domestic violence services and will have data compiled and analysed later in 2022.

The number of specialist domestic violence accommodation units/family spaces is 149, including 137 refuge units and 18 safe home units. Each family place/unit can accommodate one woman and her children/other dependents. Typically most of these units are occupied most of the time, so would be an approximate guide to the number of women/families accommodated on any night. It should be noted that since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and necessary changes required to provide accommodation services has resulted in a greater degree of flux around accommodation than previously, including access to additional accommodation on an ad hoc basis, so there can be some variations in numbers accommodation from night to night.

January 6th 2022

Eoin Ó Broin TD
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the number of adults and children who accessed Tusla funded domestic violence refuge accommodation to date in 2021; the average length of time families spent in such accommodation; and the number of beds available on a given night in 2021.

61672 21

Dear Deputy,

Tusla has a statutory remit for care and protection of victims of domestic, sexual and gender based violence and in that regard commissions and supports the provision of services from 60 specialist services around the country, including 44 services providing support to victims of domestic violence, 21 of whom provide safe accommodation in refuges. In 2021, funding of just under €30m was allocated by Tusla to services. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have prioritised Domestic Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Services as one of our top three priority service areas, with a particular focus on domestic violence refuge services.

Tusla data on refuge use has not yet been completed for 2021, however we hope that this information will be available by Q2 2022.

Covid-19 restrictions have resulted in a change in how a number of refuge units are maintained as operational due to social distancing requirements, particularly in refuges that have shared facilities. There has been a degree of flux in the availability of safe accommodation over the Covid-19 period, with additional accommodation units being sourced off-site from refuges (e.g. hotels; Airbnb; new pathways to accommodation through County Councils); additional Safe Home units coming on stream and more recently, some

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reconfiguration of space to enable refuge units to be reopened. Additionally, a number of services that had previously not operated accommodation-based support services have had access to Safe Home accommodation.

Currently operating as of 06/01/2022::

Number accommodation units in refuge	137
Safe Home units (independent units of safe emergency accommodation) currently operational	18
Total number of units of safe emergency accommodation currently operational (including refuge units; units acquired to supplement refuge units and Safe Home units)	149
Number of domestic violence services with routine access to Airbnb and Hotels in addition to core provision	7

Tuesday, 14 December 2021

Questions (466)

Eoin Ó Broin

Question:

466. Deputy Eoin Ó Broin asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth 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. [61671/21]

Written answers (Question to Children)

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

I can inform the Deputy that the number of adults and children remaining in direct provision centres after their leave to remain has been granted is 1,640 persons as of the end of November.

Tuesday, 15 December 2020

Questions (395)

Eoin Ó Broin

Question:

395. Deputy Eoin Ó Broin asked the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth 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. [42922/20]

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

As of the end of November 2020, there were 727 adults and 300 children who have been granted status, residing in accommodation centres provided by my Department.

Considerable work is being undertaken to support these residents to move out of accommodation centres and into secure accommodation in the community. My Department has a specific team 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 to collectively support residents with status or permission to remain to access housing options. A total of 1,051 persons with status moved into the community so far this year, of whom 749 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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December 6th 2018

Eoin O'Broin TD
Dáil Éireann, Dublin 2

To ask the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of beds provided in the 155 units of Tusla funded domestic violence refuge and step down accommodation. 51040 18 Tusla provides funding to 59 organisations nationally which deliver specialist services to victims of domestic sexual and gender based violence. Of the 59 organisations 43 deliver services to victims of domestic violence and of these 22 include the provision of specialist emergency domestic violence accommodation in their service provision. Currently those organisations provide a total of 155 units of emergency accommodation of which 145 are in refuges and 10 are in specialist emergency safe homes. Some of the organisations funded by Tusla also provide transitional housing. Tusla funds the general services provided by those organisations but does not commission or fund this accommodation. The size of units of emergency accommodation varies with the largest being able to accommodate up to 8 individuals (beds) and the smallest accommodating just one individual (one bed). The average unit size has a capacity for 4 beds with 34 units having this capacity. However figures for total number of beds are not an exact reflection of unit capacity. Some units may also have a sofa bed or be able to accommodate an additional temporary bed depending on configuration of families who access accommodation. Services may reconfigure room arrangements to suit the number, age and gender of families who present. At the last count, the number of beds in total reported by organisations providing specialist emergency domestic violence accommodation was 599.

Written answers
Tuesday, 6 November 2018

Department of Justice and Equality
Direct Provision Data 437.

To ask the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of adults and children with leave to remain at the end of October 2018 that are still living in direct provision. [45602/18] The total number of persons living in RIA accommodation with leave to remain at the end of October 2018 was 620. A more detailed breakdown of this figure between different age groups is not readily available. Considerable work has been done and continues to support residents with status to move out of accommodation centres and to secure permanent accommodation. I have been in contact with my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government with regard to the accommodation issues faced by persons who have been granted a permission to remain in Ireland. Those discussions are on-going. My Department also provides funding to NGOs and approved housing bodies to support persons who have been granted permission to remain with their move to permanent accommodation.



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