

**Understanding Ireland's Hidden Homelessness Crisis:  
A New Approach to Defining and Measuring Homelessness  
and Housing Exclusion in Ireland**

**Rory Hearne & Kenneth McSweeney**

**Department of Applied Social Studies Maynooth University**



**IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL**  
An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn

**New Foundations Awards**

# Homelessness: Record high 10,568 people in emergency accommodation last month

In total, there were 7,431 adults accessing emergency accommodation in the last week of July.

Aug 26th 2022, 2:55 PM 32,862 Views 77 Comments Share 58 Tweet Email

Updated Aug 26th 2022, 8:09 PM

THE NUMBER OF homeless people in Ireland hit record figures last month, with over 10,500 people accessing emergency accommodation.

The latest figures from the Department of Housing show that there were 10,568 people accessing emergency accommodation in the last week of July, [surpassing the previous record of October 2019](#).

This is a slight increase compared to June, where 10,492 people were recorded as homeless.

July is the seventh consecutive month where the number of people accessing emergency accommodation has risen.

In total, there were 7,431 adults who accessed emergency accommodation in the last week of July. Of those, 4,771 were male and 2,660 were female.



A tent on Grafton Street in May

Image: Leah Farrell

## Research Context

Highest Figures for Homelessness on record in Ireland

Covid-19

Precarious Private Rental Sector

Lack of affordable and social houses

Monthly homelessness figures a key national focus point - public, political, civil society

European context- Rising homelessness & precarity, European Pillar of Social Rights, Lisbon Declaration

# Context: Emerging issues with Ireland's homelessness measurement

- ◆ ESPN country report on Ireland in 2019 noted “unreliable and incomplete” statistics and an absence of “clear and inclusive definitions” were hampering planning and effective policy solutions (Daly, 2019)
- ◆ The report recommended the adoption of the ETHOS classification
- ◆ Irish NGOs have also recommended the government adopts FEANTSA's ETHOS framework, noting that, “regular, reliable and transparent data on homelessness is essential both for national policy and practice” (Focus Ireland, 2019).
- ◆ The Cork & Kerry Regional Traveller Accommodation Working Group stated that “the current definition of homelessness provided by the State is not suitable and excludes a large number of those, including Travellers”. “The RTAWG recommends that this policy definition be updated in line with the ETHOS definition of homelessness to fully reflect the sustained and proliferating homelessness crisis which Ireland is experiencing (RTAWG, 2021: 7)

# Research Aims & Methodology

- Drawing on the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) and human rights frameworks, this project aims to develop a new definition, conceptualisation, and measurement, of the nature and scale of homelessness and housing exclusion (HHE) in Ireland.
- Enhance civil society, policy makers and academic knowledge and understanding of the nature and scale of Ireland's HHE crisis, contributing to the methodological approaches on how homeless statistics are compiled and HHE data, and thus contribute to evidence informed policy making, accurately measuring Ireland's progress in ending HHE and civil society knowledge and enhanced public debate.
- Explore the potential adoption of the ETHOS framework as the foundation for a new approach to measuring homelessness and housing exclusion in Ireland.
  - ◊ Project co-developed in close liaison with the civil society partner, the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice (JCFJ).
  - ◊ Methodological approach; literature review, semi-structured expert interviews with 12 key stakeholders (4 NGOs working in homelessness, legal aid, or representative of groups affected e.g. Travellers, Domestic Violence), academics and those with experience working in homelessness and data collection both statutory and non-statutory (8). Combined with policy and data analysis of HHE.

# Conceptualising homelessness -Right to Housing

Article 11.1 of the ICESR states “the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living .. including adequate food, clothing and housing” (UN, 1966).

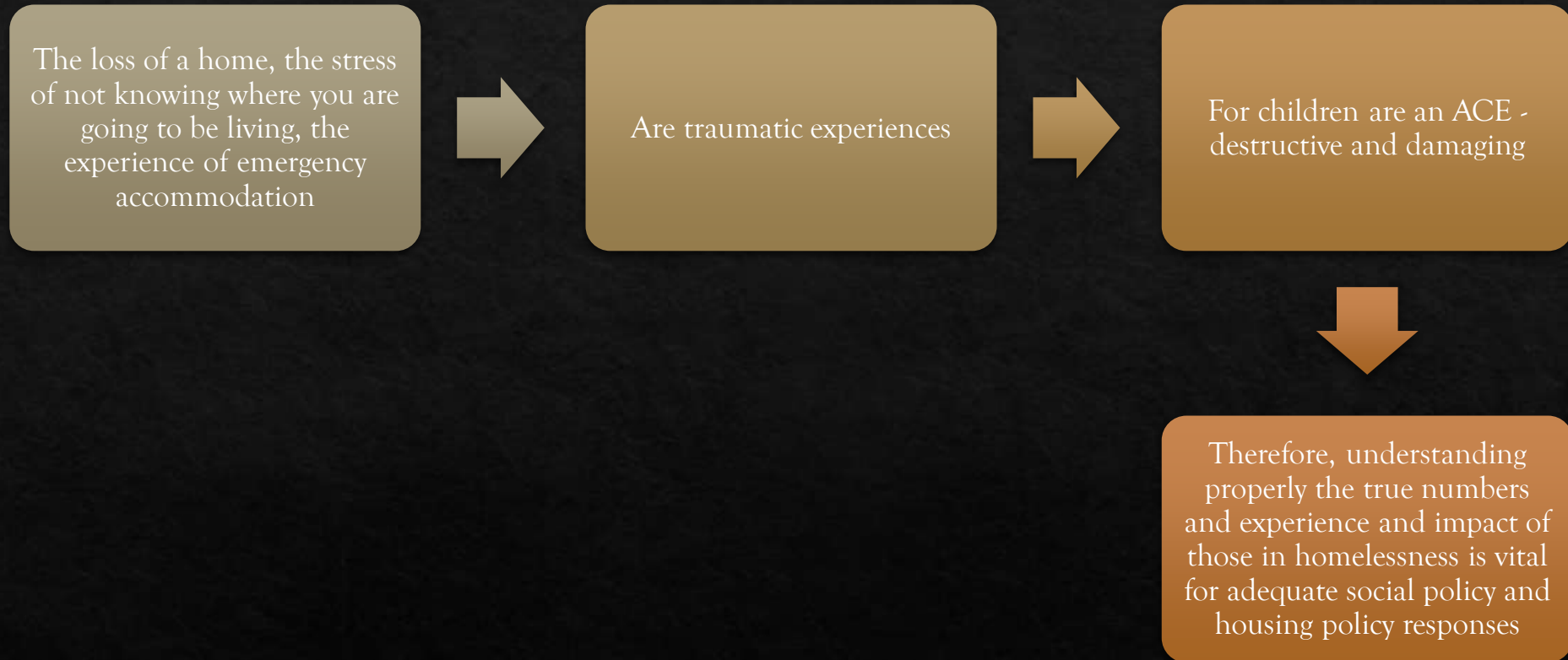
The UNCESCR General Comment No. 4. adequate housing =legal security of tenure, availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure; affordability; habitability; accessibility; location; and cultural adequacy (CESCR, 1991).

The UN describes homelessness as “*an egregious violation of human rights*” requiring decisive action on HHE, including measurement and monitoring that can enable effective policy responses, to meet UN Sustainable Development Goals (1, 3, and 11.1).

Trade Unions, NGOs, political parties and civil society groups have all advocated for a right to housing to be inserted into the Irish Constitution. (Home for Good, 2020) (Raise the Roof, 2018) (Simon Community, 2018) (Threshold, 2021).

ETHOS as a framework is adaptable and could potentially provide a mechanism through which these housing sub-rights can be measured.

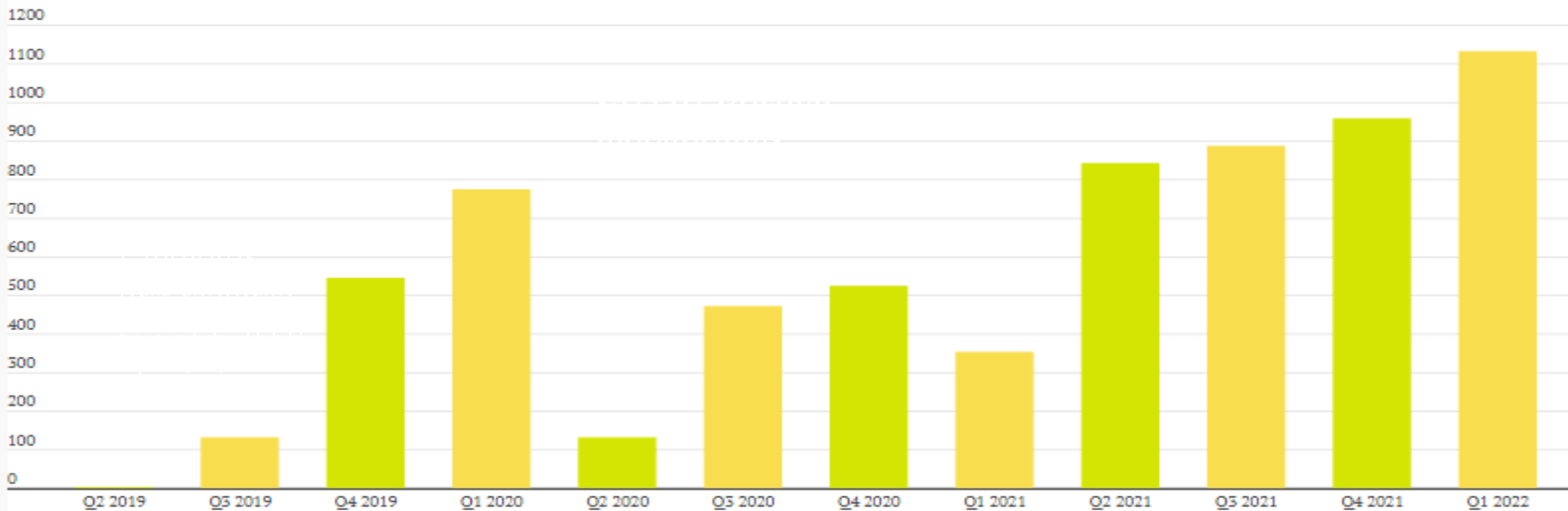
# Why is it important to measure homelessness accurately?



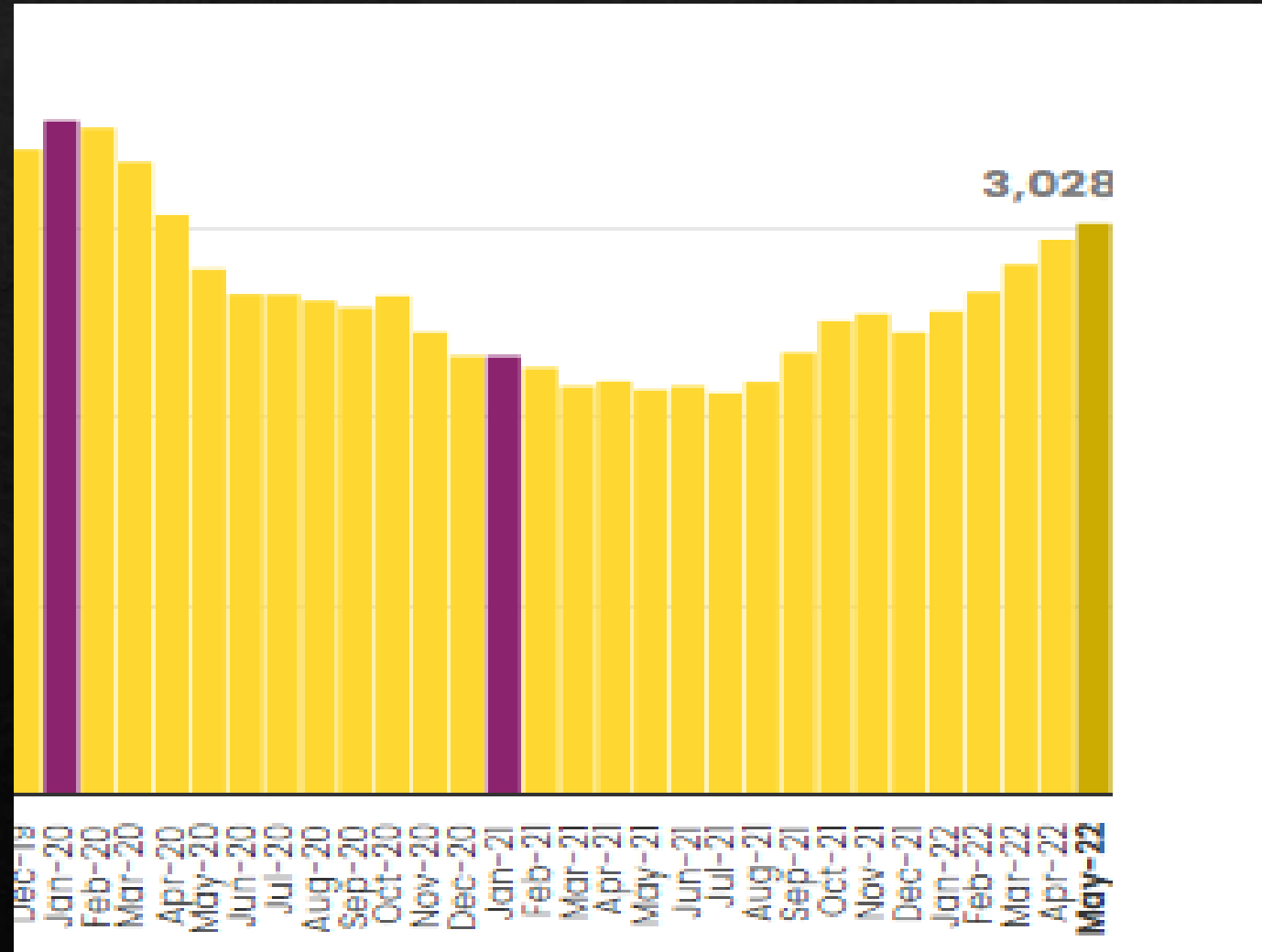
# Why accurate, regular measurement matters - how monthly figures reveal changing trends in homelessness and policy impacts e.g. COVID 19

Figure 1 : Total Notices of Termination received Q2 2019 - Q1 2022

Figure 1: RTB Summary of Notices of Termination received between Q2 2019 - Q1 2022



Number of children with their families in emergency accommodation increased by 47% since lifting of eviction ban & rent freeze in April 2021- from 925 families and 2,193 children in April 2021 to 1,366 families and 3,028 children (Focus Ireland, 2022).





# Reasons for drop and subsequent rise in homelessness figures

Covid-19 Pandemic

Effective Emergency Legislation.

Favourable interpretation of the Irish Constitution in the interests of the “common good” during the Covid-19 period.

Government introduced the *Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid 19) Act 2020*, which legislated for a moratorium on all evictions and a rent freeze from the end of March 2020

In April 2021 the rent freeze and moratorium on evictions were effectively ended (extended in duration but narrowed significantly in their application)

Previous calls for such legislative measures by TDs & NGO have been deemed “unconstitutional” and perceived as an attack on the strong property rights enshrined in the Irish Constitution (Keyes, 2019) (Reidy, 2021).

The continued and renewed importance of a Constitutional Right to Housing in the Irish Context.

OPERATIONAL CATEGORY	LIVING SITUATION	DEFINITION
1 People living rough	1 Public spaces / external spaces	Living in the streets or public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters
2 People in emergency accommodation	2 Overnight shelters	People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation
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
	4 Temporary accommodation	
	5 Transitional supported accommodation	
4 People living in institutions	6 Women's shelters or refuge accommodation	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing
	7 Health care institutions	
5 People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	8 Penal institutions	No housing available prior to release
	9 Mobile homes	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence
	10 Non-conventional buildings	
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	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence

- ◆ The ETHOS conceptual and operational definition of homelessness and housing exclusion (HHE) was designed to place discussion of homelessness in a wider context and allow comparability of data, identify gaps in existing data with the aim of tackling homelessness and housing exclusion (Edgar et al, 2003).
- ◆ “Having a home can be understood as: having a decent dwelling (or space) adequate to meet the needs of the person and his/her family (physical domain); being able to maintain privacy and enjoy social relations (social domain) and having exclusive possession, security of occupation and legal title (legal domain)” (2009: 15).
- ◆ Conceptualising HHE. Four conceptual categories, roofless, houseless, insecure and inadequate.
- ◆ Thirteen operational categories corresponding to the four conceptual categories
- ◆ ETHOS is a useful conceptual framework and almost everywhere definitions at national level, which may not be identical and differ, are still discussed in reference to the typology and it has become the standard framework in Europe when discussing homelessness.

# How Ireland Defines Homelessness

- ◇ Ireland's definition of homelessness is outlined in Section 2 of the Housing Act 1988.
- ◇ "A person shall be regarded by a housing authority as being homeless for the purposes of this Act 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 in 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 he is, in the opinion of the authority, unable to provide accommodation from his own resources (GOI: 1988)

# How Ireland measures Homelessness

- ◆ The definition of homelessness that is used for collecting data on homelessness is narrower than the definition outlined in Section 2 of the Housing Act 1988.
- ◆ The “official definition of the homeless in Ireland for the purpose of gathering statistics is narrower” than the definition outlined in the Housing Act 1988 (Daly, 2019: 5).
- ◆ This narrower definition for measuring and gathering statistics was informed by the National Homeless Consultative Committee (NHCC) in conjunction with the Department of Housing and defines homelessness for statistical purposes as those accessing emergency accommodation funded under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988
- ◆ The main data set on homelessness in Ireland comes from the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS) which is an administrative system that records the number of people within emergency accommodation.
- ◆ The Monthly Reports present homeless figures using this definition. Specifically, those in emergency accommodation funded under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988.
- ◆ The Department’s official homelessness statistics are published on a monthly basis and refer to the number of homeless persons accommodated in emergency accommodation funded and overseen by housing authorities during a specific count week, typically the last full week of the month



An Roinn Tithíochta,  
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht  
Department of Housing,  
Local Government and Heritage

**Department of Housing, Local Government and  
Heritage**  
**Monthly Homelessness Report**  
**June 2022**

Details of adults accessing local authority managed emergency accommodation during the week of 20-26 June 2022

Region	Homeless adults	Male	Female
Dublin	5,228	3,418	1,842
Mid-East	414	271	143
Midlands	110	64	58
Mid-West	373	220	153
North-East	86	65	31
North-West	73	51	28
South-East	348	179	169
South-West	556	378	179
West	288	157	131
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7,421</b>	<b>4,789 (65%)</b>	<b>2,632 (35%)</b>

Region	Ages 15-24	Ages 25-44	Ages 45-64	Ages 65+
Dublin	934	2,834	1,411	79
Mid-East	74	201	122	17
Midlands	19	65	22	4
Mid-West	45	210	107	11
North-East	11	36	23	6
North-West	6	50	21	2
South-East	41	144	57	8
South-West	85	313	184	13
West	51	142	84	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,246 (17%)</b>	<b>4,015 (54%)</b>	<b>2,011 (27%)</b>	<b>149 (2%)</b>

*Citizenship*

Region	Irish	EEA/UK	Non-EEA
Dublin	3,002	1,318	938
Mid-East	288	76	50
Midlands	92	12	6
Mid-West	305	39	29
North-East	76	13	7
North-West	65	11	3
South-East	205	26	17
South-West	421	76	58
West	236	27	25
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,690 (63%)</b>	<b>1,598 (22%)</b>	<b>1,133 (15%)</b>

Families accessing emergency accommodation during the week of 20-26 June 2022

Region	Total Families	(of which) single parent families	Total Adults	Total child dependants
Dublin	990	502	1,661	2,274
Mid-East	77	35	134	156
Midlands	29	21	37	50
Mid-West	75	59	103	140
North-East	13	6	22	30
North-West	11	8	14	19
South-East	28	20	38	51
South-West	74	49	106	145
West	88	50	129	206
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,385</b>	<b>750 (54%)</b>	<b>2,244</b>	<b>3,071</b>

# Some initial findings

- ◆ The ETHOS framework of measuring homelessness, which has a wider definition than how Ireland presents and collects data on homelessness, is considered the international best practice method for conceptualising and defining homelessness and the foundational framework for developing national based measurements of homelessness
- There is an acceptance by the Irish Government, Department of Housing, academic experts, homelessness NGOs and civil society of the centrality of accurate and timely data collection to properly measure, and respond to, homelessness
- The Irish Government has committed to as part of Lisbon to as part of European to “
- ◆ *“The accurate enumeration of homeless individuals and families is a key priority for the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. It was noted in the 2013 Homelessness Policy Statement that “the ongoing extent of homelessness in Ireland must be quantified with confidence so that realistic and practical solutions can be brought forward”.*
- ◆ Irish homelessness NGOs, civil, society and academic experts are strongly of the view that Ireland should use ETHOS as a foundational way to conceptualise and define homelessness

# Findings continued

The monthly homelessness statistics are considered by all stakeholders interviewed to provide a vitally important and regular measure of homelessness in Ireland, a way to plan service delivery, to assess effectiveness of services and policy, to hold Government to account by civil society, and should be maintained

“Current Departmental statistics give a valuable insight into the demand for services across the country, as well as revealing the cohorts most affected by homelessness, and monitoring the national response to homelessness”

# Findings continued

The monthly statistics, however, have limitations, they only measure those within emergency accommodation, and do not measure specific cohorts or aspects of HHE

Most notably they do not cover rough sleeping, hidden homelessness, those in long-term supported accommodation, families in domestic violence refuges, those in Direct Provision, or those in emergency accommodation which is not funded by the State under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988.

It also does not capture those residing in institutions, including hospitals and prisons who have no accommodation in which to reside upon discharge.



# Current measurement does not capture complete extent of homelessness

- ◆ **The current narrow measurement and definition of homelessness** “*can conceal pressures to the system*”, because if people cannot enter the emergency accommodation system, they are not counted as homeless.
- ◆ Local authorities are reported to be turning away some people who present as homeless, refusing to offer emergency accommodation to them, stating if they can sleep on a couch, or stay in the home (even if that is abusive)
- ◆ If they are not classed as homeless, they are then not counted as homeless,
- ◆ Also people do not want to go, or cannot, go into emergency accommodation, for example, because of having to move away from child or family or health supports, or worried about impacts on their children, or themselves have illness – mental health, disability, they are not counted as homeless.

# Discretion of local authorities in the 1988 Act

- ◇ Due to discretion in 1988 Act for a local authority
- ◇ “A person shall be regarded by a housing authority as being homeless for the purposes of this Act 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”
  - ◇ means that they are, as one respondent explained “*forcing people to stay in situations which might be very damaging to them or might be dangerous for them, by the definition being so narrow*”
  - ◇ “Because they haven’t crossed the actual threshold into being an immediate situation of homelessness, yet, they are not deemed as homeless and not responded to. So is there a lack of pre-emptive preventative homelessness work and planning and responses, because we do not measure within our homelessness statistics, at any level, those in such situations of housing precarity, exclusion and hidden homelessness”

# Reclassification in 2018 and 2019 harmed legitimacy of statistics

- ◆ The reclassification of homelessness figures in 2018 and 2019 harmed the legitimacy of the homelessness statistics.
- ◆ The way in which this was done by the Department of Housing reduced trust of wider civil society in the statistics.
- ◆ Some of those interviewed pointed to the ‘harm’ done to the legitimacy of the statistics resulting from the redefinition of homelessness figures in 2018 and 2019, leading to a decline in trust in the figures
- ◆ This points to the danger in changing methods of measurement of homelessness without consultation with the relevant stakeholders including NGOs and policy analysts in the field.
- ◆ The criticism presented is that the figures have become politicised – with the Department, local authorities and Government figuring ways to artificially reduce the numbers in order to reduce media and public criticism rather than to present the truthful reality of the numbers in homelessness.

# Key (initial) recommendations

- The ETHOS measurement of homeless should be implemented as an additional measurement to give a more complete measure of those homeless, providing the number of households and individuals, including children, in each category under ETHOS
- The following groups should be included in measuring Ireland's HHE: those due to leave institutions and prisons, 'couch surfers', those in Domestic Violence refuges, homeless families moved to short lease accommodation, Travellers in substandard accommodation, those in Direct Provision
- The Department should use the ETHOS framework as a key conceptual method within policy going forward, including integrating it into the Housing For All quarterly updates, analysing homelessness and policy measures
- Any further changes to methods of collection should be done with full consultation with key stakeholder groups and clear evidence based rationale provided.
- There is a need to rebuild confidence and trust in the homelessness statistics among civil society groups
- The ETHOS measurement should be applied to measure and assess social housing need – to include those and should be included on social housing waiting lists and assessment of housing need under a specific category- on HAP, waiting for social housing.

# Bibliography

- ◆ Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage (2022) *Monthly Homelessness Report March 2022*. Dublin. Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7d630-homeless-report-july-2022/> (Accessed 20 September 2022).
- ◆ Government of Ireland (2020) *Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020*. Dublin Stationary Office.
- ◆ Government of Ireland (2020) *Residential Tenancies and Valuation Act 2020*. Dublin Stationary Office.
- ◆ Keyes, F. 2019. Briefing Paper. *Property Rights and Housing Legislation*. Enquiry Number 2019/ 715. Oireachtas Library and Research Service.
- ◆ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. 1966. [online]. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx> (accessed 20th October 2019).
- ◆ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), *General Comment No. 4: The Right to Adequate Housing (Art. 11 (1) of the Covenant)*, 13 December 1991, E/1992/23, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/47a7079a1.html> [accessed 23 June 2022]
- ◆ Daly, M. (2019) *ESPN Thematic Report on National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion: Ireland*. Brussels. European Commission.
- ◆ Home for Good (2020) *For the Common Good: The Housing Crisis and a Proposal to Amend the Irish Constitution*. Dublin. Home for Good.

# Bibliography

- ◆ Regional Traveller Accommodation Working Group of Cork & Kerry (2021) *A report investigating the causes and impact of Traveller Homelessness and Hidden Homelessness in the Region*. Cork. RTAWG.
- ◆ O’Sullivan, E. Reidy, A. Allen, M. (2021). *Focus on Homelessness: Significant Developments in Homelessness 2014 – 2021*. Dublin. Focus Ireland.
- ◆ O’Sullivan, Eoin. (2018) *Measuring Homelessness in Ireland*. Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government. Available at: [https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_housing\\_planning\\_and\\_local\\_government/submissions/2018/2018-11-08\\_opening-statement-professor-eoin-o-sullivan-school-of-social-work-and-social-policy-tcd\\_en.pdf](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_housing_planning_and_local_government/submissions/2018/2018-11-08_opening-statement-professor-eoin-o-sullivan-school-of-social-work-and-social-policy-tcd_en.pdf) (Accessed 29th September 2021)
- ◆ Raise the Roof (2018) Housing Crisis Requires Radical Solutions. *The Irish Times*. 26 September 2018. Available at: <https://www.ictu.ie/publications/housing-experts-support-raise-roof>
- ◆ Reidy, A. (2021) *Homeless Figures and the Impact of Covid 19*. Dublin. Focus Ireland. Available at: <https://www.focusireland.ie/focus-blog/homeless-figures-and-the-impact-of-covid-19>
- ◆ Social Justice Ireland (2022) *Budget Choices: Pre-Budget Submission 2022*. Dublin. Social justice Ireland.
- ◆ Stanley, W. (2021) *Not Good Enough, End Homelessness Now: Simon Communities of Ireland Pre Budget Submission Summary 2022*. Dublin. Simon Communities of Ireland.