

Homelessness in Ireland

Introduction

Homelessness is not just a housing or an accommodation issue. Social, economic, and individual factors also play a big role. It is generally a combination of factors that lead to a person becoming homeless. It can be helpful to describe homelessness as a 'process' – characterised by housing instability rather than a situation.

We know that there are recognised 'pathways into homelessness' - very often poverty plays a big part. But these pathways into homelessness can also include a crisis in a person's life, such as relationship breakdown, job loss, problems with drug or alcohol use or physical/mental health issues. We also know that there are 'pathways out of homelessness', which will be discussed later in the pack.

What do we mean by Homelessness?

Often when people talk about homelessness they are talking about people they see sleeping on the streets (rough sleepers).

In fact there are many more people who are less visible, but are also homeless - for example those living in insecure or inadequate housing who are also in need of support.

The European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) classifies homelessness as:

- People who are *roofless* – people without shelter of any kind, who are sleeping rough, or who are staying in totally unacceptable conditions such as a car, a tent or a derelict building (squat).
- People who are *houseless* – people who have a place to sleep, but only on a temporary basis in institutions such as hospital or prison or an emergency shelter/hostel.
- People living in *insecure housing* – people who have insecure tenancies, who are at threat of eviction, who experience or are at threat of domestic violence.
- People living in *inadequate housing* – people living in unfit housing or living in extreme overcrowding.



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How many people in Ireland are homeless?

It is very difficult to count the exact number of people who are homeless in Ireland. Currently there is no one agreed way to do this and the Irish Government has acknowledged this in the Homeless Strategy – *The Way Home (2008)*.

In addition, people can move in and out of homelessness experiencing a number of 'homeless episodes' during their lifetime. There are many people who live with the ongoing risk of homelessness – not knowing from month-to-month or week-to-week what their fate may be.

For example, think of a person who was previously homeless and moves into a rented flat but due to job loss cannot pay their rent. Many other people experience homelessness but may not be in contact with homeless services so are not included in any records or homeless figures.

Simon

Did you know?

Did you know that in Ireland the local authorities are required to identify (count) the number of people who are homeless in their area every three years?

What does this mean:

- There is a count of the number of people who are homeless in all local authority areas every three years.
- There is no one agreed way of doing this so figures are inaccurate, but do give some idea of the extent of the problem.
- These counts happened in 2002, 2005 and 2008. The countrywide 2008 figures have yet to be released and even when released will be out of date.
- Unfortunately, we can only use 2005 figures to give an idea of the extent of the problem across Ireland.
- Local authorities count households rather than individuals. Each household consists of one or more individual.

In 2005, according to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government:

- 2,399 households were homeless in Ireland.
- There were a further 9,212 households living in unfit accommodation, overcrowded accommodation or involuntarily sharing accommodation.

Conclusion

We now know that there are many risk factors that can lead to homelessness. However, it tends to be those on the margins, with fewer resources in the first place that are more likely to become homeless. People who may have experienced homelessness in the past, those on low incomes, and those with little job or housing security can quickly run out of options. Read on to find out more about the causes and effects of homelessness and some of the solutions.

Sources

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For more on the ETHOS typology see www.feantsa.org

Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2005) Local Authority Assessment of Social Housing Needs - March 2005. Government Stationery Office.

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