

**NOT GOOD
ENOUGH**

**END
HOMELESSNESS
NOW**

**Simon Communities of Ireland
Pre Budget Submission
Summary 2022**



SEPTEMBER 2021

INTRODUCTION

Over 8,000 people in homelessness is not good enough. Although the numbers of adults and children in emergency accommodation fell over the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, the recent lifting of the moratorium on evictions, has seen the figures begin to rise again.

Factors including the contraction of supply of new housing because of construction stoppages, the increased demand for separate accommodation growing amongst households currently in enforced sharing arrangements, and higher unemployment than pre-Covid levels are impacting people's ability to pay rent and mortgages.

The Government response to Covid-19 has demonstrated what concerted state action in the face of a crisis can achieve. Pre-pandemic, in February 2020 there were 10,148 people in emergency accommodation in Ireland. Figures for July 2021 show that the total number of people in emergency accommodation was 8,132 but worryingly this was the second month of increase in numbers. Budget 2022 must

now take advantage of the progress made and continue to support the change needed to drive these numbers down.

It must be recognised in the Budget that the progress in relation to homelessness over the course of the pandemic has been uneven. The number of families living in homeless emergency accommodation has fallen 42% from 1,610 in February 2020 to 930 by July 2021. However, there has been a rise in the number of single adults in homeless emergency accommodation over the period, from 4,292 individuals in February 2020 to 4,501 in July 2021.

This pre budget submission will lay out the recommendations of the Simon Communities of Ireland. Although progress has been made, over 8,000 people in emergency homeless accommodation is not good enough. The government must ensure that there is sufficient cross departmental funding in place to meet the ambition in Housing For All to eradicate homelessness by 2030.

PRIORITY PREVENTION MEASURES

The Simon Communities of Ireland are calling on the government to fund and support the following priority prevention measures, to end homelessness now.

Invest in and Support Homeless Prevention Measures:

We must build on the progress made in 2020 on reducing the numbers of people entering homelessness. One way this can be done is by implementing a legal underpinning for local authorities to provide homelessness prevention support to individuals. Such legislation would seek to formalise, extend, and build on work that local authorities already undertake in partnership with the community and voluntary sector.

Increase Rent Supplement and HAP rates: The upward trajectory of rents and chronic lack of supply have led the lack of efficiency of rent supplement and HAP. Nevertheless, in the short-term, until supply of housing is ramped up, increases in housing welfare rates are a crucial homelessness prevention measure. Our research indicates that there are regularly no properties available in different cities and towns across the country within HAP limits, particularly outside of Dublin, where the discretionary top-up on HAP is limited to 20%. As committed to in the PfG, Budget 2022 should ensure that Rent Supplement and HAP rates reflect the reality of market rates for private rental accommodation by conducting regular analysis.

The Simon Community of Ireland also believe that the discretionary top up should be extended to 50% for regions outside of Dublin. We must also consider prioritising raising standard HAP rates for single people and households without children across Ireland, given the particularly chronic lack of supply faced by that group, and growing homelessness amongst that cohort.

Tackle Poverty to Address Homelessness: Households experiencing poverty are at a greatly heightened risk of becoming homeless, and therefore tackling the structural causes of poverty can have a significant impact on reducing the numbers of households entering homelessness. It is therefore crucial that social welfare rates be reviewed and benchmarked against a robust anti-poverty measure. Budget 2022 must begin a process of benchmarking social welfare rates and the minimum wage to a robust calculation of liveable income, such as the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) developed by the Vincentian Partnership, following the Partnership's multiyear roadmap for increases.

Statistics demonstrate that having a disability, or being a single parent, puts a household at a greatly heightened risk of homelessness. Therefore, priority should be given to reviewing the welfare rates in relation to groups who are disproportionately impacted by the homelessness crisis. Disability welfare allowance, the one parent family payment

and the increase for a qualified dependent child payment should be prioritised for progressive increases towards a Minimum Essential Standard of Living for these groups.

Regulation of the Private Rental Market: Reforms and emergency measures for the private rental market during the pandemic, including the rent freeze and moratorium on evictions, had a significant impact on stemming the

flow of people into homelessness. Increased regulation of the private rental sector is necessary to ensure that the practice on the ground reflects the letter of the law of the Residential Tenancies Acts. The Residential Tenancies Board should be provided with increased budget to allow for greater spot-check inspections of tenancies around the country, akin to those conducted by the Health and Safety Authority of workplaces.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

In addition to the key homelessness prevention measures, the Simon Communities of Ireland are calling for enhancing supports for those experiencing homelessness, particularly in Covid-19 public health requirements, healthcare, addiction, and mental health supports.

Pandemic Period Reforms: The key recommendation of the Simon Communities of Ireland is to endorse a policy approach which moves permanently away from provision of homelessness services in congregated settings, towards own-room and own-door accommodation. The Simon Communities have found that single unit emergency accommodation is crucial to the privacy, dignity, physical and mental wellbeing of people using homeless services. Any additional funding in an emergency budget to meet the costs associated with enhanced capacity for emergency accommodation should not be found through diverting resources away from other essential homelessness measures and policies such as 'Housing First' or homelessness prevention measures.

Health, Mental Health and Addiction Services: The Simon Communities of Ireland provides a range of mental health related services and recognises the inter-related nature of mental health and homelessness. To address these needs, we require tailored, low threshold alcohol and drugs services, including treatment, detoxification, rehabilitation, and aftercare services. Budget 2022 should include specific supports including 24/7 crisis mental health services tailored to the needs of those experiencing homelessness. Enhanced funding for dedicated addiction services for the homeless population and for those amongst the homeless population who have a dual mental health and addiction diagnosis. We must also fund the PfG commitment to increase the number of beds for those stabilising, detoxing, or seeking drug-free services.

Education and Child Supports: Widespread family homelessness in Ireland has meant that many thousands of children have experienced the trauma of homelessness. Entering homelessness can be a traumatic experience for a child. To meet their needs, each child should have access to a child care worker should they require one. There have also been instances of children who have special needs entering homelessness and there should be a needs based discretionary fund to meet their requirements.

Childcare presents challenges to families in homelessness, including lack of transportation to childcare facilities and inflexible childcare hours. Financial support must be made available to ensure childcare is affordable to parents experiencing homelessness who are seeking to return to education. The Department should ensure that training and education opportunities for people on social welfare payments are fully accessible for those experiencing homelessness.

Case Worker Supports: The Simon Communities are concerned that people in private emergency accommodation (PEAs) do not have the same access to case management, support, and expertise as those in supported accommodation. On this basis, we advocate for an increase in the available key-working resources for people who are using PEAs. Support from a skilled and qualified keyworker is an invaluable tool when moving on from homelessness. We must fund to ensure that those in private emergency accommodation have access to the support and expertise of keyworkers to assist in expediting their path out of homelessness.

MOVING ON FROM HOMELESSNESS

Building Social Housing: The Simon Communities of Ireland believe that Budget 2022 should make provision to support the provision of 15,000 - 20,000 new social housing units in 2022. The budget must make provision to expand Housing First across the country, a model proven to work to end long-term homelessness for people with more complex needs. Single adults make up 52% of the households on the 2020 social housing needs assessment list, and couples with no children make up a further 8%.

The PfG must commit to assist the over 4,000 single adults homeless across the country to move on to a permanent home. We must provide adequate funding for the CAS for care leavers and CALF schemes. There must be a commitment to investment in Long Term Supported Housing with specific ring-fenced funding under Section 10 and Section 39 for building and procurement of suitable sites/properties. As committed to in the PfG, Budget 2022 must fund the development of 20,000 affordable cost rental homes nationally over the next five years.

The Department should examine the potential for the provision of bridging finance to be provided to AHBs to

secure the properties whilst the full approval and due diligence processes take place. There is a particular requirement for one- and two-bedroom units at a level that meets the yearly assessment of housing need and reduce the levels of long-term homelessness. To achieve the level of one and two-bedroom units required, Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies must be supported to transition away from 'turnkey' procurement and proactively develop one and two-bedroom homes.

Hidden Homelessness: It is well rehearsed that emergency accommodation numbers represent a narrow count of those experiencing homelessness, and does not include those who are sleeping rough, those in institutions with no place to move on to, those registered as homeless and accommodated in 'own door' homeless accommodation. The government must provide resources to the CSO to work with local authorities and other stakeholders, utilising quantitative and qualitative methodologies, to develop research tools to identify the levels of housing exclusion and hidden homelessness in Ireland, examine pathways into hidden homelessness and recommend appropriate data metrics for the monitoring of progress.

CONCLUSION

Budget 2022 marks the first budget under the new national strategy to address housing and homelessness, 'Housing for All.' The budget must reflect a step-change in the level of ambition and determination by government to finally turn the tide on the homelessness crisis.

The Government must learn the lessons from the pandemic period of bringing down the numbers of people entering emergency accommodation by funding effective homelessness prevention measures, and ensure the

conditions for those in emergency accommodation are improved by prioritising the move away from congregated settings to single room and own-door emergency accommodation.

The Simon Communities of Ireland continue to maintain the solution to homelessness is a home, and the State needs levels of investment in the building of public housing equal to the task of tackling the housing crisis and bring an end to long-term homelessness.

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