

Homeless Prevention: Submission to the National Homeless Action Committee

Contents

Introduction	2
Introduction to Homelessness Prevention in Ireland	2
Benefits of Homeless Prevention.....	3
SCI Supporting Homeless Prevention	4
The Potential for Further Prevention Work in SCI	5
Proposed further policy actions beyond SCI: Recommendations for Prevention Measures	5
Standardised Definitions and Practices	5
A legislative underpinning and a ring-fenced budget for homelessness prevention work in Local Authorities	6
Increase Funding for Prevention Policies.....	6
Targeted Social Housing and flexibility in Social Housing Need	6
Rent Supplement and HAP Reform and Reassessment.....	7
Increase HAP rates for single people and the Number of One-Bedroom Affordable Properties...	8
Develop Targeted Homeless Prevention Policies	9
Protect Renters: Enact the Residential tenancies (Amendment) (Extension of Notice Periods) Bill 2021	10
Tackle Poverty to Address Homelessness.....	11
Develop a Data Analytic Subgroup within the National Homeless Action Committee	12
Summary of Recommendations.....	12

Introduction

The Simon Communities of Ireland welcome the opportunity to present measures to prevent homelessness as a member of the National Homeless Action Committee. . This submission has been compiled as a review of the areas that we believe a comprehensive prevention strategy should consider. It then moves to more directly respond to the three questions outlined in the Scoping Paper:

- Actions currently within your own organisations that are supporting homeless prevention;
- The potential for further actions to be taken by your organisation;
- Proposed further policy actions beyond your own organisation that can be taken in respect of specific areas of interest or activities.

The final question is answered with a list of recommendations many of which will be familiar to members of the NHAC. We acknowledge that the list of recommendation is extensive but not exhaustive and that some are in full or in part under active consideration but we believe they warrant highlighting in this initial scoping submission.

However for the purposes of our short verbal input to the group there are areas that might usefully be prioritised for consideration by NHAC.

1. Establishment of the Data analysis subgroup.
2. Consideration of targeted prevention strategies.
3. The impact of increased HAP rates and greater discretion to Local Authorities
4. The implementation of the provisions of the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) (Extension of Notice Periods) Bill.

Introduction to Homelessness Prevention in Ireland

The Simon Communities of Ireland have been working intensively with people experiencing – and at risk of homelessness – for over five decades. While there is a vital role for emergency accommodation and crisis supports, we need to stop homelessness from occurring in the first place. Shifting our understanding of where homelessness starts, looking to rectify structural causes, and working to develop informed policy is the best way to eradicate homelessness in this country.

Homelessness prevention measures are policies designed to stop homelessness from occurring by either assisting a household to remain in their home, or assist a household to find a new home. Primary homeless prevention measures would include a range of social protection measures including income support, key worker support and much more to help people make ends meet and avoid falling into rent arrears or housing difficulty.

There is a clear and welcome political will to resolve the housing and homeless crisis that has plagued our country for too long. As outlined in the Programme for Government, ‘reducing and preventing homelessness is a major priority for the Government’. This commitment is reiterated in *Housing for All* with a pledge to work towards eradicating homelessness by 2030. Budget 2022 saw an allocation of €194 million to homeless services and increased resources for emergency homeless accommodation. Supports – such as those introduced in the Budget – are welcome to support those who have entered homelessness. Strong preventative measures are needed in tandem to stop homelessness at its source and end long-term homelessness in Ireland.

In recent years we have seen an increase in policies focussed on preventing homelessness at its source:

2014: Preventative measures were central to the 2014 ‘Implementation Plan on the State’s Response to Homelessness’ and ‘Action Plan to Address Homelessness.’ In response to the high and increasing rate of households entering homelessness from the private rental market, the government introduced the Tenancy Protection Service, provided by Threshold, funded under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988. This service is particularly dedicated to assisting people to sustain their tenancies.

2016: The ‘Rebuilding Ireland- Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness’ government policy included homelessness prevention policies around services for women at risk of domestic violence, young people leaving State care, and increasing rent supplement and Housing Assistance Payment for those at risk of homelessness.

2020: The fall in numbers in emergency accommodation over the course of the pandemic has demonstrated that, following six consecutive years of increases in homelessness in Ireland, powerful preventative measures can drastically alter the trajectory of homelessness in Ireland.

During the first public health lockdown, enhanced homelessness prevention measures worked in tandem with increased housing supply to successfully reduce the number of people in emergency accommodation. The first public health lockdown during the pandemic saw an increased threat of homelessness for thousands as unemployment soared practically overnight. New homelessness prevention measures were introduced quickly and effectively resulting in a freeze on people becoming homeless in the first place, including;

- Moratorium on rent increases
- Moratorium on evictions
- Greater flexibility in relation to housing related social welfare payments
- Enhanced outreach by local authority teams to prevent families becoming homeless by securing alternative accommodation

Increased supply of units to support exits from homelessness services was achieved through capturing properties which came onto the private rental market from the short-term rental market.

Without these preventative measures introduced throughout the years, homelessness figures would be significantly higher than they are now. The Simon Communities of Ireland want to support the strength and scope of homeless prevention policies in a bid to provide a long-term solution to homelessness in Ireland.

Benefits of Homeless Prevention

To the person: Homelessness – even for a short period of time – can have a hugely damaging effect on a person. It is well established that homelessness can have adverse effects on physical health, mental health, and overall wellbeing. For children, homelessness can negatively affect development, cognitive functioning, participant in education, and opportunities later in life.¹ Robust preventative policies safeguard against the damaging long-term effects of homelessness.

To the State: Robust homeless prevention policies are a long-term investment for the State. Homelessness is a costly social issue. Homeless funding from the Department of Housing increased from €45 million in 2013 to €218 million in 2021. The community and voluntary sector continue to contribute significant additional funding to meet the costs of homelessness. Cost effective

¹ <https://www.oco.ie/app/uploads/2019/04/No-Place-Like-Home.pdf>

prevention measures, such as enhanced social protection, tenancy protections or increased funding for local authority and NGO outreach teams, can have the effect of preserving State resources. Benefits to tackling homelessness at its source include lower public expenditure on shelters and crisis support services, lower public expenditure on healthcare, increased employment, higher tax revenues, lower judicial system costs, and greater social cohesion.²

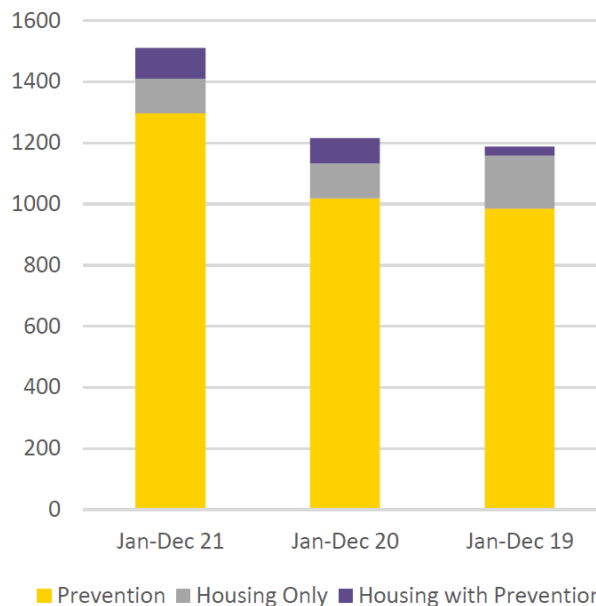
SCI Supporting Homeless Prevention

Homeless prevention has been a key focus within the Simon Community of Ireland. Below are some statistics provided by regional branches of the Simon Community:

Galway Simon, January to December 2021:

- 641 unique households were supported to prevent them from becoming homeless. This includes 235 families with 529 children.
- 173 households were accommodated, 61 of which were also provided with a prevention service. This includes 11 families with 34 children.
- Prevention services in Galway Simon include Community Support Service, BRC & County Support, Youth Service Prevention, Women and Family Prevention, Rapid Prevention Service, and My Home Prevention.
- Housing and Prevention services include Independent Living (Housing with supports) and Housing First tenancies
- The number of households supported by Galway Simon’s prevention services increased during

Number of Individuals across Service Type



North West Simon Early Intervention and Homeless Prevention Service

In the first seven months of 2020, North West Simon Community provided Early Intervention and Homeless Prevention Support to 135 Households comprised of 151 Adults and 105 Children in counties Donegal, Sligo, and Leitrim. The objective of an early intervention and homeless

² <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=23791&langId=en>

preventative services to intervene at the earliest possible opportunity in situations with potential to evolve into a housing crisis requiring a household to seek emergency homeless accommodation from the local authority. An effective early intervention service will also identify those situations where entry to emergency accommodation is an urgent and desirable response to the housing needs of particular households. Early Intervention statistics for Donegal presented in the accompanying table refer to Resettlement and Tenancy Sustainment and the Homeless Prevention and Place Finder services funded by Donegal County Council.

The make-up of the households supported is as follows:

- 49 Single males
- 39 Single adult households with children
- 29 Single females
- 13 Couple with children
- 4 Couples with no children

The Potential for Further Prevention Work in SCI

As set out above there is enormous value in homeless prevention work. The extensive reach of the Simon Communities in Ireland would if properly resourced allow us to expand in a coordinated way homeless prevention across the country.

Additional resources would allow the Simon Communities to better engage with individuals and families at risk of homelessness and living in insecure housing.

Early intervention in such cases will prevent the need of emergency accommodation and reduce homelessness in Ireland.

Prevention measures outlined below, if implemented, will drive down the need for emergency accommodation support and ensure homelessness is tackled at its source.

Proposed further policy actions beyond SCI: Recommendations for Prevention Measures

Standardised Definitions and Practices

In order for any homeless prevention policy to be successful across Local Authorities and to ensure standardised practice, we need to create a universal understanding of who is at risk of homelessness and should have access to any homeless prevention support. SCI recommends that the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS)³ – which is international best practice – would be the best starting place for defining groups at risk of homelessness and in need of homeless prevention supports. Defining these groups needs to be conducted in tandem with stakeholders who have a greater understanding of vulnerable groups, particularly those with complex needs. SCI recommend a standardisation of homeless prevention policy across Local Authorities to ensure best practice is available nationwide.

Recommendation:

- Utilise ETHOS and work with Stakeholders to clearly define different groups who are in need of homeless prevention support.
- Standardise homeless prevention strategies across Local Authorities

³ <https://www.feantsa.org/en/toolkit/2005/04/01/ethos-typology-on-homelessness-and-housing-exclusion>

A legislative underpinning and a ring-fenced budget for homelessness prevention work in Local Authorities

A legal underpinning for local authorities to provide homelessness prevention support to individuals is a homeless prevention model that has been proven to be successful. The Housing (Wales) Act 2014⁴ ensured that access to prevention services was a universal right, with Local Authorities central to this. The legislation puts a duty on local authorities to prevent homelessness where possible.

SCI believe that such legislation would be successful in Ireland by formalising, extending, and building on the sound prevention work that Local Authorities already undertake in partnership with the community and voluntary sector, such as the additional 50% homeless HAP uplift in Dublin. This is a prevention measure that Dublin local authorities can implement where they deem a person to be at risk of homelessness. Data from the Department of Housing show that of the 395 families who presented in the Dublin region in Q3 2021, 47% were prevented from having to enter emergency accommodation by way of tenancy created.⁵ Without the assistance of their local authority, those families would likely have been forced to enter emergency homeless accommodation.

A legal underpinning of measures such as this would serve to build on the work already conducted by the Local Authority and extend its success in preventing homelessness.

Recommendation: Establish homelessness prevention measures in legislation and dedicate funding to implementation.

Increase Funding for Prevention Policies

According to recent figures from the Department of Housing⁶, €12.1million – or 6% - of the €212.1million spent in 2020 by Local Authorities on Homeless Service Provision was spent under homeless prevention supports. While spending for emergency accommodation continues to grow considerably, the same is not the case for prevention supports. SCI appreciates and sees the value in supporting emergency funding, a matching increase in prevention funding is needed. Homeless prevention will, in time, reduce the instance of homelessness at its source and reduce such an overwhelming need for emergency accommodation support.

Recommendation: Increase funding available for homelessness prevention supports.

Targeted Social Housing and flexibility in Social Housing Need

Capital expenditure to build affordable, social and cost rental homes must be protected as it represents the best long-term solution to the current homelessness crisis. Housing for All commits to delivering 90,000 social homes by 2030; this includes the commitment of 47,500 new-build social homes by 2026. Considering there are currently nearly 62,000 people on waiting lists, with over a quarter (27%)⁷ of qualified households waiting for social housing for over 7 years, there is a widespread hope that this need is met in Government social housing plans.

Direct advocacy forms a large part of SCI's work on the ground whereby people who are homeless and accessing SCI services need additional support in order to secure their place on social housing lists and to access homeless supports from Local Authorities. SCI would like to see vulnerability more

⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/7/contents/enacted>

⁵ <https://assets.gov.ie/203015/8effd191-2c01-4428-8a54-f581751934b0.pdf>

⁶ Social Impact Assessment Series Homeless Services, Nov 2021. <https://assets.gov.ie/205497/82c74d9c-33f1-4349-98d6-95b2147e3d72.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/970ea-summary-of-social-housing-assessments-2020-key-findings/>

of a priority in social housing allocation with greater flexibility in individual cases to ensure those who are most in need do not fall through the cracks.

More is needed to ensure vulnerable people are securely housed in Ireland. To end the risk of homelessness, affordable and social housing provision must be reiterated as a high priority for Government as a long-term solution and preventative measure against homelessness.

Recommendation: Re-assess social housing lists to ensure those who are most vulnerable have the opportunity to access housing.

Rent Supplement and HAP Reform and Reassessment

HAP and RS, while intended as a temporary support, have acted as a vital preventative homeless measure. As demonstrated by the latest Homeless Quarterly Progress report, HAP tenancies through the private rental market accounted for over 70% of exits from homelessness in 2021⁸. As mentioned, the 50% addition 'homeless HAP' available in Dublin is an excellent preventative measure that reflects the increasing cost of housing and living in the Capital County.

SCI sees potential in HAP and RS to become a more powerful interim homelessness prevention measure while the State's social housing stock is developed. However, RS and HAP needs reform and reassessment in light of the ongoing upward trajectory of rents in the private rental market, and the continued chronic lack of supply.

The need for reform has been reflected within Government in policy. Housing for All has acknowledged the need 'to amend the level of discretion available to Local Authorities under' HAP. Along with this, the Programme for Government commits to ensuring RS and HAP 'levels are adequate to support vulnerable households, while we increase the supply of social housing.'

SCI recommend the following changes to RS and HAP to increase their success as a homeless prevention policy:

Increase rates to reflect real cost of housing and living, and expand the 50% discretionary rate to the entire country: In order to act as a sufficient preventative measure, HAP and RS must reflect the cost of living and be adaptable to changes in the market. SCI's *Locked Out* quarterly research series analyses the availability of affordable properties throughout the country. Our research indicates that there are regularly no properties available in different cities and towns across the country within local standard or discretionary HAP limits for various household types including single people, couples, and families with children.

SCI's latest *Locked Out of the Market*⁹ snapshot study in December 2021 saw the majority of properties available within HAP limits predominantly located in Dublin, with 80% (118) of all HAP properties (148) across the 16 study areas located in the three Dublin areas (Dublin City Centre, Dublin City North, and Dublin City South). In 5 of the 16 study areas, there were no properties available to rent in any household category within standard or discretionary Rent Supplement/Housing Assistance Payment HAP limits. Those areas were Athlone, Galway City Suburbs, Limerick City Centre, Sligo Town, and Portlaoise.

⁸ <https://assets.gov.ie/203015/8effd191-2c01-4428-8a54-f581751934b0.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.simon.ie/e-publication/locked-out-of-the-market-december-2021/>

Properties affordable under HAP are particularly scarce outside of Dublin, where the discretionary top-up on HAP where an applicant is at risk of homelessness is limited to 20%, rather than the 50% increase permissible in Dublin.

Lack of affordable rental accommodation for people in sudden need of finding new accommodation has been a key driver of homelessness. The current HAP rates, including the discretionary top-up of 20%, does not adequately meet the levels of cost associated with private rental accommodation across most of the country. A 50% homeless HAP top-up for areas outside of Dublin would be a welcome reform to increase the options available to vulnerable households at risk of homelessness.

Improved flexibility for those moving between HAP tenancies: The lack of suitable, affordable accommodation options leaves vulnerable people at an increased risk of homelessness. The Simon Communities consistently meet clients who are paying unsustainable large rent top-ups on their HAP payments in order to avoid homelessness. SCI also are aware of a trend whereby clients often accept inappropriate or inadequate tenancies that are not suited to their needs using Homeless HAP. When their tenancy becomes untenable, clients must source a new property on the decreased budget of mainstream HAP, as it is not possible to move from one Homeless HAP tenancy to another. Greater flexibility is required given the chronic lack of supply and rising costs.

Widen eligibility and spread awareness: The amendments to and flexibility in the rules to qualify for rent supplement made during the Covid-19 crisis need to be retained on a permanent basis. Those in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment and eligible for rent supplement during the Covid-19 crisis, but who were unaware of their eligibility, should be notified of their eligibility, and enabled to retrospectively claim rent supplement, particularly given the risk of rent arrears accruing during the pandemic period. Those in arrears who have returned to employment (and therefore no longer eligible for rent supplement) should be facilitated to apply for and receive an emergency needs payment in respect of arrears.

Improved support for those who fall into arrears: SCI's *Locked Out* quarterly report continuously highlights a chronic shortage of properties available under standard or discretionary HAP rates. For many, this leaves no option but to accept a lease on a tenancy that requires a monthly top-up on the rent. In cases where this becomes unsustainable and HAP tenants fall into arrears, tenants are at high risk of falling back into homelessness. This is a clear group where homelessness can be prevented. SCI call for additional supports – both financial and social – to be put in place for people who fall into HAP arrears to prevent them from requiring emergency accommodation supports

Recommendations:

- Increase HAP rates to reflect real cost of housing and expand the 50% discretionary rate to the entire country
- Improved flexibility for people moving between HAP tenancies due to affordability issues
- Widen eligibility and spread awareness for RS and HAP
- Improved support for those who fall into rent arrears while accessing HAP to sustain the tenancy or find one more suitable

Increase HAP rates for single people and the Number of One-Bedroom Affordable Properties
The welcome fall in homelessness seen at the beginning of 2021 was primarily due to a reduction of family homelessness. Single adult homelessness, however, continued to increase throughout the year despite the moratoria on evictions and rent increases, and with some increased supply in the private rental market. The number of single people waiting for social housing appears to remain largely static while the number waiting within other household types has reduced. The number of

single adults waiting on social housing reduced by an insignificant 1.2% between 2019 and 2020 while there was an average of 21.2% reduction for all other household types.¹⁰ More than half (52%) of all households on the social housing list are single people, accounting for 32,204 individuals. These trends are indicative that current policies aimed at preventing single person homelessness – or lifting single people out of homelessness – are not effective

SCI's most recent *Locked Out of the Market* research report finds the number of properties affordable with HAP are overwhelmingly low throughout the country for all household types, but single people are of notable risk. Our data consistently demonstrates that single people are face with the most difficult conditions on the private rental market in terms of supply. Of the 148 properties available across the 16 areas during the study period, only four locations (Dublin City North, Dublin City South, Dundalk, and Waterford City Centre) had properties (one-bedroom units) within standard HAP limits for single people. Two of these properties were available within the standard HAP limit, and an additional six properties were available under discretionary HAP limits for single people. This is concerning considering single adults represent 53% of all those homeless in Ireland.

The reality is, current HAP rates – even with the discretionary limit considered – is not enough to help single people at risk of homelessness. Current HAP rates mean that cohabiting is the only option for many hoping to afford a place to live. HAP allowances need to be reassessed for single people, taking account of the rising cost of living and the real cost of rent.

Recommendation:

- Raise 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.
- Increase the supply of affordable one-bedroom properties

Develop Targeted Homeless Prevention Policies

The complexity of homelessness means that a 'one size fits all' prevention policy approach will not be successful. Different groups in society each have their own vulnerabilities that can place them at a heightened risk of homelessness. With targeted supports – developed in conjunction with relevant stakeholders – homelessness can be strategically prevented at the source.

Take, for example, people leaving institutionalised care. Those leaving the care system, the mental health system or prison system have a clear, identifiable risk of homelessness. In their most recent advocacy report, *Empowering People in Care* (EPIC) showed that finding suitable accommodation to meet their needs was one of the greatest difficulties for young people with a care background, with one in ten advocacy cases managed by EPIC involving a homeless child or young person.¹¹

The increased risk of homelessness for this group is recognised in the Programme for Government which commits to "ensure that aftercare and transition plans and protocols are developed for vulnerable homeless people or those at risk of homelessness leaving hospital, state care, foster care, prison, or other state settings." But homelessness should not be a continued risk for people leaving institutionalised care. Targeted prevention would mean we can identify those at high risk of homelessness *before* they become homeless as supports move upstream. This would require the intervention and 'whole of government' support from agencies such as the probation service, the prison service, Tusla, local authorities, the Department of Justice, the Department of Education, the

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/970ea-summary-of-social-housing-assessments-2020-key-findings/>

¹¹ https://www.epiconline.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/EPIC-advocacy-report-2019-2020_ME_FINAL-WEB.pdf

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. All should have specific roles to play in identifying those at risk and preventing homelessness for those leaving institutional settings.

Countless other vulnerable groups are at a continuously heightened risk of homelessness such as migrants, single mothers, and victims of domestic abuse, with those with complex needs, and those experiencing multiple exclusion homelessness¹² are of particular concern. In order to prevent homelessness, we must first understand these unique vulnerabilities. Effective homeless prevention requires cross departmental support to ensure a variety of vulnerable groups are protected.

Recommendations:

- Ensure the development of cross-departmental homeless prevention strategies, policies and legislation to eradicate the risk of homelessness for vulnerable groups.
- Homeless prevention policies need to be developed with a variety of needs and backgrounds of vulnerable groups considered.

Protect Renters: Enact the Residential tenancies (Amendment) (Extension of Notice Periods) Bill 2021

Evictions are a key driver of homelessness. The termination of tenancies can leave people without a secure, feasible housing option, increasing the need for emergency accommodation; sometimes for extended periods. We need greater supports for renters, including prevention measures against eviction that are proven to stop people entering homelessness as seen during the periods when the moratorium on evictions was implemented throughout the country (see appendix).

Protective measures for renters implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic had a clear impact in reducing family homelessness. The moratorium on evictions in 2020 saw family homelessness fall by a significant 38% in the Dublin region in November 2020 when compared to November 2019. Figures from the Department of Housing show that exits from homelessness in the first 9 months of 2020 were up 0.3% on same period in 2019, signifying that the driver of the momentous fall in family homelessness has been the prevention measures which avoided new families entering homelessness in 2020 to replace those exiting. State interventions and prevention strategies work.

SCI Ireland were pleased to see the Simon Bill (Residential tenancies (Amendment) (Extension of Notice Periods) Bill 2021) pass second stage in Dáil Éireann¹³ and we urge the Government to safeguard its legal enactment in 2022.

The Simon Bill, when enacted, will provide increased protection for those facing eviction and deemed to be at risk of homelessness. Homeless services and local authorities are regularly contacted by people who are coming to the end of a tenancy notice period, and are imminently at risk of homelessness, having been unable to source alternative accommodation. In such a case if a local authority determines a person or family to be 'at risk of homelessness' the amendment will trigger an extension in the notice period for that household to prevent homelessness. This

¹² People have experienced multiple exclusion homelessness (MEH) if they have been 'homeless' (including experience of temporary/unsuitable accommodation as well as sleeping rough) and have also experienced one or more of the following other 'domains' of deep social exclusion: 'institutional care' (prison, local authority care, mental health hospitals or wards); 'substance misuse' (drug, alcohol, solvent or gas misuse); or participation in 'street culture activities' (begging, street drinking, 'survival' shoplifting or sex work).

https://pure.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/7456915/US_Pathways.pdf

13

<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2021/159/?highlight%5B0%5D=residential&highlight%5B1%5D=tenancies&highlight%5B2%5D=amendment&highlight%5B3%5D=extension&highlight%5B4%5D=notice&highlight%5B5%5D=periods&highlight%5B6%5D=bill&highlight%5B7%5D=2021>

determination and extension should be accompanied by a commitment to ensure that the individual or family effected will be given all available supports to take advantage of the extension and secure alternative accommodation as soon as possible rather than ending up in emergency accommodation.

Recommendation: Ensure the enactment of the Simon Bill: Residential tenancies (Amendment) (Extension of Notice Periods) Bill 2021

Tackle Poverty to Address Homelessness

Households experiencing poverty are at a greatly heightened risk of becoming homeless. Tackling the structural causes of poverty can have a significant impact on reducing the numbers of households entering homelessness.

The most recent Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC)¹⁴ shows that in 2020, the ‘at risk of poverty’ rate was 13.2%. If all social transfers were excluded from income, the at risk of poverty rate would have been 37.9%. The publication highlights the inequalities in housing costs and their impact on poverty; if rent and mortgage interest payments were deducted from income, the at risk of poverty rate would have been 19.0%, almost 44% higher than without the deduction.

It is welcome that the Government has committed to reducing the rate of consistent poverty in Ireland to below 2% by 2025 under the Roadmap for Social Inclusion,¹⁵ as this will reduce the number of households who are vulnerable to homelessness.

For this to be achieved, it is crucial that social welfare rates be reviewed and benchmarked against a robust anti-poverty measure, such as the Vincentian Partnership’s Minimum Essential Standard of Living.¹⁶ Organising our welfare system to ensure people have access to a minimum essential standard of living is a key anti-poverty measure, and can provide a floor of support to prevent households becoming homeless. Priority should be given to ensuring that those groups at heightened risk of homelessness are protected by the social welfare system, in particular, the unemployed, people with disabilities and lone parents.

The link between poverty and housing insecurity or homelessness is heightened in the context of housing now accounting for an average of 55% of a single persons minimum living costs in Dublin, and over a third outside of Dublin.¹⁷

Rents are rising year-on-year and continue to grow to levels that far exceed affordability for average incomes, let alone those earning the minimum wage. Given increasing cost of living, welfare rates must be reviewed and a roadmap set out to meet the Minimum Essential Standard of Living as a key homelessness prevention measure.

Recommendation: Benchmark social welfare rates and the minimum wage to a robust calculation of liveable income, such as the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL). Priority should be given to reviewing the welfare rates in relation to groups who are disproportionately impacted by the homelessness crisis, for example, people with disabilities and lone parent families.

¹⁴ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2020/>

¹⁵ <https://assets.gov.ie/46557/bf7011904ede4562b925f98b15c4f1b5.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.livingwage.ie/>

¹⁷ https://www.livingwage.ie/download/pdf/living_wage_annual_paper_2021-22.pdf

Develop a Data Analytic Subgroup within the National Homeless Action Committee

Vital data is being collected across the county on housing and homelessness that has great potential to contribute to preventing homelessness. Monthly and quarterly homelessness data from the Department, HAP information from Local Authorities, NGO frontline experience, and other stakeholder research and insights has the potential to identify trends and shifts in homelessness. The considered analysis of this information can meaningfully inform the work of NHAC on homeless prevention and other issues in a timely fashion.

SCI propose that a data analysis sub-group of NHAC is established to report of the group quarterly.

Recommendation: Establish a data analysis subgroup of the National Homeless Action Committee

Summary of Recommendations

- Increase funding available for homelessness prevention supports.
- Review social housing allocations to ensure a targeting of those experiencing and most at risk of homelessness.
- Increase HAP rates to reflect real cost of renting and expand the 50% discretionary rate to the entire country.
- Improved flexibility for people moving between HAP tenancies due to affordability issues
- Widen eligibility and spread awareness for RS and HAP
- Improved support for those who fall into rent arrears while accessing HAP to sustain the tenancy or find one more suitable
- Increase the supply of affordable one-bedroom properties
- Ensure the development of homeless prevention strategies, policies and legislation to reduce the risk of homelessness for vulnerable groups.
- Ensure the enactment of the Simon Bill: Residential tenancies (Amendment) (Extension of Notice Periods) Bill 2021
- Benchmark social welfare rates and the minimum wage to a robust calculation of liveable income, such as the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL). Priority should be given to reviewing the welfare rates in relation to groups who are disproportionately impacted by the homelessness crisis, for example, people with disabilities and lone parent families.
- Establish a data analysis subgroup of the Nation Homeless Action Committee