



FIXING



HOUSING

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

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What is the true level of homelessness?

Executive Summary

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLgH) produce a monthly homeless report detailing the number of adults and children accessing local authority funded emergency and transitional accommodation.

DHLgH's latest published homeless figures for September 2023 indicate that 8,923 adults, 3,904 children 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.

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, through the International Protection Accommodation Service, funds Direct Provision for adults and children.

This includes people 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.

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.

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Table 1: Number of People in Emergency and Transitional Homeless Accommodation

	DHLGH funded emergency & transitional accommodation	Tusla funded domestic violence accommodation	IPAS funded former asylum seekers in Direct Provision	DRHE Rough Sleeper Count	Hostels without government funding	Total
Adults	8,923	NA	4,070	83	NA	13,076
Children	3,904	NA	1,580	NA	NA	5,484
	12,827	599	5,650	83	105	19,264

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 19,264

At least 50% 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 Coeli, 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 periodic 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 Spring 2023 was 83.¹

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.

1 Spring-2023-Count-of-Rough-Sleepers.pdf (homelessdublin.ie)

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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.

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 or night-by-night basis.

In 2018, Tusla 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.

Parliamentary questions have been submitted seeking updated figures for, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022 however none were available.

Domestic violence support service funding has, albeit incrementally, increased since 2018. Reports of domestic violence have also increased in recent years.

It is therefore reasonable to assume that the 2018 figure of bed spaces in domestic violence refuges is an under estimation. It is also reasonable that these bed spaces are full on most nights.

3. Former asylum seekers in Direct Provision

According to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth as of August 31st 2023 there were 4,070 adults and 1580n children who have been granted status, residing in direct provision centres.²

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 in an increase of 811% in 5 years.

These individuals can access Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and are on the social housing list and have access to Homeless 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.

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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