

Submission to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

National Housing Plan 2025-2030

May 2025



Introduction

One Family welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage for the National Housing Plan 2025-2030 Consultation. The challenges that families are facing when it comes to accessing adequate housing cannot be overstated. There are very few lives that have not been impacted by the ongoing housing and homelessness crises. This submission has been informed by our direct work with one-parent families and our role representing these families at a local and national level over the last 50 years.

About One Family

One Family is Ireland's organisation for people parenting alone, sharing parenting, and separating. We have been working directly with one-parent families for over 50 years and provide a national helpline as well as specialist parenting, therapeutic and family support services around Ireland. We campaign against child and family poverty, for reform of the family justice system and for the State to recognise and cherish all families equally, regardless of their marital status. More information on One Family can be found at www.onefamily.ie.

One Family is also a founding member of The National One Parent Family Alliance (NOPFA) which comprises of members including Focus Ireland, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Children's Rights Alliance, Barnardos and the Family Resource Centre National Forum. One of the main issues NOPFA have been collectively raising in recent years is the increasing level of homelessness experienced by families headed by a lone parent.

This submission will primarily address the issue of family homelessness, which we identify as an area requiring the most immediate and robust national policy response. We would welcome the opportunity to provide a more comprehensive submission addressing the broader spectrum of housing challenges faced by one-parent families, which are intrinsically linked to and often compounded by homelessness.

About One-Parent Families

There are almost 220,000 one-parent families living in Ireland and make up almost one in four families with children living in Ireland.¹ One-parent families have consistently been and remain disproportionately represented across indicators of; poverty, deprivation, homelessness, fuel poverty and substandard living conditions, faring worse than nearly all other measured cohorts. Almost 50% of all one-parent families experience enforced deprivation and one in four lone parents and their children are living at risk of poverty. While the national consistent poverty rate has increased to 5%, it is more than twice that for one-parent families, at just over 14%.²

Why housing matters

Access to secure and affordable housing is a crucial foundation that every individual and every family must have in place before everything else. Without it, participating in education, employment and community is difficult, if not impossible. The ability to plan and build a better future is greatly diminished. Housing is safety and privacy, dignity and hope. It is an essential right and a need that we all share.

Research demonstrates a very strong correlation between housing precarity and homelessness with significantly poorer mental and physical health outcomes for adults and especially so for children and young people.³ It is a trauma to lose your home, your safe place. Living in emergency accommodation can be frightening and invoke feelings of shame and dread. Emotional distress and severe behaviour issues in children who are homeless are commonplace making it more difficult to learn and to socialise. Children who experience homelessness will go on to have a much greater chance of experiencing poverty and homelessness themselves as adults.⁴ The cost of family homelessness is one that no society can afford.

Family Homelessness

Family homelessness did not exist much before 2013.⁵ However, since then the number of families experiencing homelessness has increased dramatically. As of March 2025, a record 2,185 families were living in homelessness accommodation, including 4,653 children. Notably, 58% of these families were headed by a lone parent. This represents a significant rise from June 2014, when just over 300 families needed to stay in

¹ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp3/censusofpopulation2022profile3-households-families-and-childcare/families/>

² <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionsilc2024/>

³ <https://www.esri.ie/publications/monitoring-adequate-housing-in-ireland>

⁴ <https://researchrepository.ucd.ie/entities/publication/64f1d1e3-2111-42de-b3cd-c16f5252c288>

⁵ <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Research-Briefing-No-1-Interactive.pdf>

emergency accommodation.⁶ The Dublin Region Homelessness Executive (DRHE) regularly reports that over 90% of lone parents in emergency accommodation are women, which tells us this is not solely an issue of income, but also a deeply gendered phenomenon.⁷

Structural Issues

The increase in family homelessness is largely a result of structural issues that requires an urgent and comprehensive national policy response. Our current housing system is failing to meet the housing needs of a wide array of different cohorts and especially so for those on low incomes and parenting alone. The biggest structural issues are:

- Lack of long-term social housing.
- Long waiting lists for long-term social housing
- Lack of rental properties and record high rents.
- Lack of affordable housing to rent or purchase.
- Housing support payments not keeping up with market rents.
- No fault evictions are still legal.
- Barriers to education and good quality jobs are still in place.
- Access to and cost of early years education and school age care.

A perfect storm has been allowed to develop and increasing numbers of families and individuals are falling between the cracks. It is well established that many lone parents will have difficulty meeting current housing costs.⁸ Lone parents also face greater levels of discrimination when trying to access housing.⁹ One-parent families housing quality is also poorer.¹⁰

The next national housing plan must consider the following points:

- Acknowledge the disproportionate level of housing inequality experienced by lone parents and their children.
- Address the structural issues driving family homelessness and invest in prevention strategies to keep families in their homes to avoid the trauma and

⁶ <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/publications/homeless-report-march-2025/>

⁷ Maphosa, P. (2024) New families entering emergency accommodation in the Dublin region, 2020–2023. Dublin Region Homelessness Executive

⁸ <https://www.esri.ie/publications/monitoring-adequate-housing-in-ireland>

⁹ <https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2022/08/Discrimination-and-Inequality-in-Housing-in-Ireland.pdf>

¹⁰ https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS183_1.pdf

long-term damage homelessness causes.

- Future housing delivery forecasts must recognise and incorporate the full spectrum of hidden homelessness, including one-parent families who are living in overcrowded homes, couch-surfing or staying in domestic violence refuges. These cohorts must be explicitly included in the next national housing strategy to ensure a more accurate and inclusive response to housing need.
- Increase funding streams towards tenancy sustainment and resettlement support to reduce the number of one-parent families entering emergency accommodation.
- Emergency accommodation should be just that and should never last longer than six months. Families often spend a year or more in homeless accommodation.¹¹
- Homelessness places a significant financial burden on families. Families living in emergency accommodation often face higher costs for everyday essentials - such as take-away food and laundry services - as they have minimal or no access to a kitchen or washing machine. A special payment should be provided weekly to cover such costs.
- Almost 60,000 households are on waiting lists for social housing. One Parent Families make up the second largest cohort with 12,701 lone parent headed households (21.2%) waiting to be provided with social housing. That doesn't include those on HAP or other transfer lists.
- Approximately 75% of lone parents do not own their own homes. Renting or social housing are their only options.¹² The next strategy must take account of this and plan accordingly.
- Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) rent limits must keep up with rental market prices to enable those in receipt of housing support payments to be able to compete.

¹¹ <https://www.independent.ie/regionals/dublin/dublin-news/over-370-families-living-in-emergency-accommodation-for-more-than-two-years-in-dublin/a518361310.html>

¹² <https://www.esri.ie/publications/monitoring-adequate-housing-in-ireland>

- While Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) protections could be improved, without them, rent prices would be even more out of control and many more households on lower incomes at risk of homelessness. It is important that RPZs are maintained and/or enhanced and improved.
- Reform the system of differential rents to ensure tenants pay an equivalent amount of rent regardless of their location. These reforms must ensure that family related payments such as child maintenance, the Working Family Payment, Carers Allowance and Domiciliary Care Allowance are excluded as means for lone parent headed households.
- Ensure that every child and young person living in homeless accommodation has a child and family support worker to help them to navigate the challenges they face in this situation.

Conclusion

It is vital that the next strategy makes it a core priority to eliminate the entrenched housing inequalities disproportionately affecting marginalised groups, including one-parent families. For many, the root cause of income, housing inequality and family homelessness are structural in nature. This demands a rights-based, urgent response from the State; one that is grounded in long-term policy reform with targeted measures identified and implemented in the next housing strategy.

We thank you for the opportunity to feed into this important consultation. We would be more than willing to send on or meet with you if you require any further information or to answer any questions you may have.