



Society of St Vincent de Paul

Child and Family Homelessness Submission

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Executive Summary

Child and family homelessness is among the most urgent and preventable social crises we face. Its rapid growth over the past decade requires a strategic response proportionate to the profound and lasting harm it causes. Between 2014 and 2025, the number of children in homelessness rose from 880 to 5,118 (an increase of about 482%), while the number of homeless families rose from 407 to 2,478 (an increase of about 509%).

The scale of the problem, coupled with the harm to children, demands a whole-of-government approach. It cannot be treated as the responsibility of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage alone. While Ireland does not publish a single definitive figure for the total number of children who experience homelessness over time, the sustained and rising monthly caseload means that the number affected over the past decade is likely to be in the tens of thousands, and this is data that should be released. Homelessness is one of the most egregious disruptions in a child's life, with serious impacts on education, development, nutrition, safety and mental health. The longer families remain in emergency accommodation, the greater the cumulative harm. A national strategy to end child and family homelessness must therefore prioritise prevention, rapid access to secure and affordable homes, and robust child centred supports that reduce harm and protect wellbeing. Anything less risks allowing an avoidable crisis to become a permanent feature of childhood in Ireland.

1. Introduction & Context

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is Ireland's largest charity focused on alleviating poverty and promoting self-sufficiency. Our members visit tens of thousands of families every week, providing direct assistance with food, energy, housing, education costs and other needs. We are increasingly concerned about the growing number of children in emergency accommodation, and our members witness the daily distress caused to parents and children. In 2025, SVP received over 260,000 calls for help from households across Ireland. We advocate systemic change to address the root causes of poverty and social exclusion. This submission contains recommendations from both our policy team and from our frontline staff and members. They are informed by: (a) national data and research; (b) SVP's policy analysis; and (c) on-the-ground insights from SVP case work and the lived experiences of families we assist.

This submission seeks to address the following:

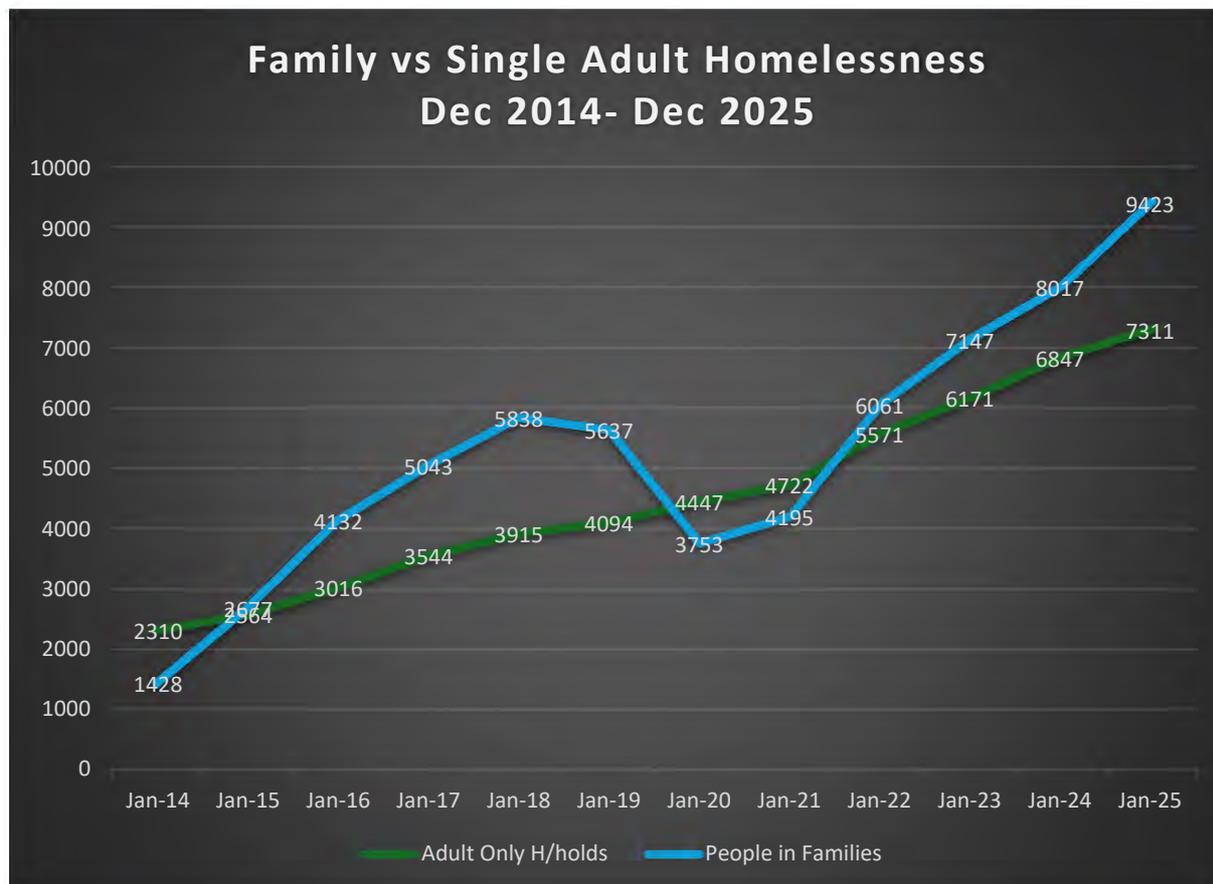
- Prevention of child and family homelessness.
- Improving standards in homelessness and mitigating risks
- Ensuring accurate measurement of the true number of children and family homelessness.

As we can see by the chart below, family homelessness has been the main driver of the increase in homelessness since 2016. There was a significant drop in family homelessness during the Covid 19 era due to emergency measures, but this was just a temporary drop. Since December 2022, there has been a much sharper increase in family homelessness, although single adult homelessness also continues to increase. The Covid era does indicate that family homelessness is sensitive to policy changes, evidenced by the sharp drop when the temporary measures were introduced and the quick return to sharp increases once they were lifted.

The most recent quarterly data shows a clear and concerning deterioration in outcomes for children and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness¹. There has been a reduction in successful preventions occurring at the same time as rising family presentations. As a result, net new family entrants into emergency accommodation surged to 517 in Q3 2025, while the number of families exiting emergency accommodation dropped to 269. This means more children and families are entering or remaining in emergency settings because prevention capacity and exit pathways are no longer sufficient to counteract rising demand. The data indicates that the family homelessness system is now under acute strain, with escalating inflows, falling preventions, and inadequate exits driving sustained growth in the number of children experiencing homelessness.

¹ Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. (2025). *Homeless quarterly progress report: Quarter 3 2025*.

https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/21f3ba0e/Homeless_Quarterly_Progress_Report_2025_Q3.pdf



Source: Homelessness Data DHLGH December 2014 – December 2025

As members of the National One Parent Family Alliance (NOPFA), we are acutely aware of the disproportionate risk of homelessness faced by one-parent families. One-parent families represent 24.8%² of families with children but typically account for 56–58% of families in homelessness. This means one-parent families are more than four times as likely as two-parent families to experience family homelessness, and this elevated risk must be explicitly recognised and addressed in the strategy.

2. Prevention

Robust prevention is key to reducing child and family homelessness. Universal and upstream prevention strategies must be utilised.

2.1 Universal prevention must include an adequate income to support the minimum essential standard of living for a household. Current social protection supports do not realise this, with inadequate support for school age children. The most recent MESL report highlights that

² Central Statistics Office. (2023). *Census of population 2022: Summary results*. CSO.
<https://www.cso.ie/en/census/>

social protection only meets 88% of the needs of a primary school aged child and 64% of the needs of a secondary aged child.³

Family homelessness has been significantly driven by the post-recession under-supply of social housing, forcing more low-income families into the private rented sector, where higher rents and insecurity increase the risk of homelessness. It is positive to see the increase in social housing new builds and acquisitions, but delivery has failed to reach the government's own targets to date.⁴ Nevertheless, it is essential that the new housing supply is optimally used to reduce child and family homelessness. Allocations need to be based not just on time spent on the housing list, but also consideration must be given to the urgent housing needs of the household. A proportion of social housing needs to be ring-fenced for families who are homeless, ensuring no child spends more than six months in emergency accommodation. The lack of social housing available

HAP rates have not increased in line with market conditions and many households who qualify for social housing now pay a top up to a landlord in addition to the social housing rent based on their income. This is leading to severe deprivation in these households. The most recent EU-SILC data shows that 57.3% of households receiving housing support, such as HAP, were at risk of poverty after housing costs.⁵ This has led to arrears for HAP tenants and a pathway into homelessness. It is essential that HAP rates reflect market reality.

The inadequacy of the HAP rates puts social housing tenants at a severe disadvantage when competing in the private rental sector, which means that a Notice of Termination (NOT) can too often lead to homelessness for HAP recipients. Homeless Hap can reduce this vulnerability; however, eligibility for the scheme should start once a valid NOT has been accepted by the local authority. The current rules mean that it is only available within three months of the eviction date. There is no rationale for reducing the period that someone who will need Homeless Hap has to secure a new tenancy in a very competitive market.

It is essential in the short term that HAP rates are adjusted as a key measure that prevents economically vulnerable households from becoming homeless and provides a pathway for families out of homelessness. In the medium term, Delivering Homes, Building Communities 2025-2030 must reach the target of 72,000 social homes by 2030.

2.2 Upstream Prevention measures must address the disproportionate risk faced by certain groups.

One Parent Families – In 2024, the rate of consistent poverty was 5% nationally, 6% for 2 parent families with children and 11% for one parent families. Higher poverty rates among

³ Vincentian MESL Research Centre. (2025). *Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) annual report 2025*. Society of St Vincent de Paul.

⁴ Focus Ireland. (n.d). *Latest figures: Social housing*. <https://www.focusireland.ie/knowledge-hub/latest-figures/?tab=Social-housing> (Accessed 2 February 2026).

⁵ Central Statistics Office. (2025, March 20). *At risk of poverty rate after rent and mortgage interest (SILC 2024)*. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/hubs/p-wbhub/well-beinginformationhub/housingandbuiltenvironment/atriskofpovertyrateafterrentandmortgageinterest/>

one parent families puts them at higher risk. Evidence from the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) cohort highlights why lone-parent families face heightened homelessness risk. ESRI analysis of the *Growing Up In Ireland Survey*⁶ shows that lone-parent households are far more reliant on social transfers than two-parent households: when children were nine months old, 59% of lone-parent households derived more than half of their income from social transfers, and 38.7% depended on transfers for 100% of income, compared with approximately 7–8% and 4.7% of two-parent households respectively. This reliance persists over time: by age nine, 42% of lone-parent households still received more than half of their income from social transfers and 21.8% remained fully dependent. Crucially, the GUI-based modelling indicates that higher dependence on social transfers is associated with a substantially greater risk of economic vulnerability and in a housing system where access to secure, affordable accommodation is increasingly constrained, this profile of high welfare reliance and elevated economic vulnerability reduces families' capacity to absorb rent increases, income shocks, or relationship breakdown, making targeted prevention and secure housing pathways for lone-parent families essential to any homelessness strategy.

It is essential that the Department of Social Protection recognises the importance of income adequacy as a tool for homeless prevention. Part-time work for lone parents should be adequately supported, as it allows for a smoother transition into full time work as the care needs of the child reduce and offers an uplift in the family income. One Parent Family Payment (OFP) and Jobseekers Transition Payment (JST) are the main income support for lone parents with children under 14 years old. The payment was introduced in 1997⁷ with an income disregard (the amount that can be earned without reducing the payment) equivalent to €146.50. Had this rate risen in line with inflation, it would be €271.62⁸ instead of the current rate of €165. In real terms, this represents a significant erosion of support, effectively penalising lone parents seeking to improve their financial stability through work.

In June 2024, the Department of Social Protection excluded child maintenance from social welfare assessment as a child poverty measure. Poor compliance of court ordered child maintenance is well documented in Ireland, with a recent ESRI report highlighting that only 36-38% of one parent families are in receipt of regular child maintenance.⁹ Many local authorities calculate child maintenance in rent assessments, and this is further pushing one parent families into poverty and greater risk of homelessness.

Domestic Abuse – Domestic abuse can be a direct pathway into homelessness. The true extent of it can often be invisible in the data: survivors may cite “relationship breakdown” rather than disclose abuse, and many only present as homeless long after leaving, because of inadequate supports for one parent families and tolerance of financial abuse through non enforcement of

⁶ Russell, H., & Maître, B. (2024). *Lone parent transitions, employment transitions and poverty outcomes* (Research Series No. 193). The Economic and Social Research Institute. <https://doi.org/10.26504/rs193>

⁷ Ireland. (1996). *Social Welfare (Consolidated Payments Provisions) (Amendment) (No. 10) (One Parent Family Payment) Regulations, 1996* (S.I. No. 426/1996). <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1996/si/426/made/en/print>

⁸ Central Statistics Office. (n.d.). *CPI inflation calculator*. <https://visual.cso.ie/?body=entity/cpicalculator> (Accessed 5 February 2026).

⁹ Russell, H., & Maître, B. (2024). *Lone parent transitions, employment transitions and poverty outcomes* (ESRI Research Series No. 193). Economic and Social Research Institute. <https://www.esri.ie/publications/lone-parent-transitions-employment-transitions-and-poverty-outcomes>

maintenance orders. When a survivor leaves an abuser with children, they typically become a one-parent household. Under current welfare and housing conditions, that sudden transition creates an immediate and disproportionate risk of poverty and housing instability.

Local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies have specific responsibilities to ensure domestic abuse victims are not placed at increased risk of homelessness. Domestic abuse incidents are often classed as anti-social behaviour, and the tenancy is placed at risk. To ensure domestic abuse survivors are not further marginalised by the housing system, the government should mandate a national "Safe at Home" protocol that legally decouples domestic violence from anti-social behaviour frameworks. This policy must prohibit Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies from issuing eviction warnings for incidents where the victim is not the aggressor, instead shifting the burden of accountability through the administrative bifurcation of tenancies to remove the perpetrator while securing the survivor's tenure. Furthermore, a statutory "Duty to Collaborate" should be established, requiring housing providers to divert potential enforcement actions into trauma-informed support pathways and ensuring that any property damage or legal costs incurred are pursued solely against the perpetrator, thereby preventing secondary victimisation and the risk of state-induced homelessness.

Local authorities must not penalise domestic abuse survivors after they leave tenancy due to abuse. Leaving an abusive situation must not be seen as a voluntary surrender and no local authority should refuse access to social housing on this ground.

Larger Families – The figures for December 2025, show that there are now over 1,000 children in emergency accommodation for over two years.¹⁰ According to the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive¹¹, over 98% of the families in homelessness for more than two years need a 3-bedroom home and over 40% need a four bedroom or more. It is welcomed that €50 million was announced¹² to acquire properties for long term homeless families,

¹⁰ Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. (2025). *Homelessness report: December 2025*. https://opendata.housing.gov.ie/en_GB/dataset/homelessness-report-december-2025

¹¹ Hayes, M. (2025, December 16). *Opening statement from the Dublin Region Homeless Executive* [Opening statement to the Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage]. Houses of the Oireachtas.

https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/34/joint_committee_on_housing_local_government_and_heritage/submissions/2025/2025-12-16_opening-statement-mary-hayes-director-dublin-region-homeless-executive_en.pdf

¹² Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. (2025). *Minister Browne announces €50m for housing acquisitions*.

Roma and Traveller Families -

Traveller and Roma families are disproportionately represented among the homeless population.¹³ Council of Europe experts have found that both Traveller and Roma communities experience inadequate, unsafe, and culturally inappropriate accommodation, contributing significantly to ongoing poverty, marginalisation, and homelessness for families with children.

Evidence from the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review shows that failures in delivery, including overcrowding, lack of culturally suitable housing, and insufficient planning, have directly contributed to severe accommodation shortages for Traveller families, many of whom have larger household sizes that require appropriately sized homes.¹⁴

Parallel research on Roma families found extreme overcrowding (with 44.8% of households lacking enough beds) and households of 8 or more people, as well as a lack of basic facilities such as cooking and sanitation, conditions that severely compromise child wellbeing and increase the risk of family homelessness.¹⁵ These findings align with the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2024–2028, which identifies improved access to culturally appropriate accommodation as a core requirement for child welfare, poverty reduction, and social inclusion.

3. Improving standards in emergency accommodation and mitigating against harm.

Improving standards in emergency accommodation is central to mitigating harm to children experiencing homelessness, with a clear evidence base linking overcrowding, instability, inadequate facilities and restrictive regimes to poorer child health, development, educational engagement and safeguarding outcomes, and to increased parental stress that undermines effective caregiving.

Rules and physical standards should therefore be designed to preserve normal family life wherever safely possible, including provision of a private, child and family room that enables a parent to maintain contact with a child who is not in their full-time custody, recognising that homelessness can fracture the parent–child relationship in ways comparable to other forms of separation. The prison service explicitly acknowledges the importance of family contact for people in custody, yet families in homelessness are often subject to blanket restrictions that unintentionally obstruct routine parenting and meaningful relationships. This should be corrected through clear, age-appropriate policies that support family life while managing risk. In practice, this means enabling older children, including teenagers, to spend time in the family’s room without a parent present where appropriate and agreed through an individual assessment, rather than imposing one-size-fits-all rules that treat a 16-year-old as though they were a toddler.

¹³ Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. (2025). *Opinion on Ireland’s implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*. Council of Europe.

¹⁴ Norris, M., Joyce, D., & Norton, C. (2019). *Traveller Accommodation Expert Review*. Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

<https://researchrepository.ucd.ie/entities/publication/8ac86d67-d69e-48a5-bc0c-bbcfe24245e5>

¹⁵ Department of Justice and Equality. (2018). *National Roma Needs Assessment: Accommodation briefing*. Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre. <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/RomAccBrief.pdf>

Standards should also ensure that parents in work are actively supported to retain employment, including for lone parents through permitting a trusted childminder or family member to access the accommodation to provide childcare while the parent is working, subject to safeguarding checks and reasonable notice.

Facilities must meet basic dignity and health requirements, including adequate cooking provision and laundry facilities suitable for families, to reduce reliance on costly takeaways, enable hygiene, and support school attendance and participation.

Where rules are breached or alleged to be breached, accommodation providers should be required to operate a fair, transparent appeals process before any eviction is pursued, with proportionate responses that prioritise child welfare and avoid creating further instability.

Finally, every family in emergency accommodation should have timely access to a child support worker who can advocate for the child's needs, help navigate schooling, health and safeguarding arrangements, and ensure that the accommodation environment and its rules are consistently applied in a way that protects children and supports parenting rather than inadvertently punishing it.

4. Ensuring accurate measurement of the true number of children and family homelessness.

A comprehensive understanding of child and family homelessness requires the State to measure not only those families placed in emergency accommodation, but also those experiencing homelessness in less visible circumstances. Under the current reporting system, monthly homelessness statistics produced through the Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS) include only households accommodated in Statefunded-funded emergency settings, which means families who are refused a homeless assessment or are diverted elsewhere are not recorded at all. This excludes children living in situations that clearly meet the substantive definition of homelessness, such as families forced to stay with relatives or friends, those living in cars or other makeshift arrangements, and those occupying severely overcrowded intergenerational housing.¹⁶

The exclusion of these children from official counts masks the scale of need and undermines the ability of national and local authorities to plan and deliver effective prevention and intervention measures. Research on Roma families demonstrates the consequences of overcrowded and substandard conditions: nearly half report insufficient beds, many live in households of eight or more people, and a significant proportion lack basic facilities such as heating, sanitation and cooking amenities. Children in these environments are at heightened risk of poor health, instability, and developmental harm. Evidence also shows that Traveller families, who remain significantly overrepresented in homelessness, frequently endure similarly inadequate and unsafe housing conditions. Yet neither Traveller nor Roma children living in these circumstances are consistently captured within official homelessness data unless their families have secured an emergency accommodation placement.-represented in

¹⁶ Central Statistics Office. (2024). *Census of Population 2022, Profile 6: Homelessness*. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp6/censusofpopulation2022profile6-homelessness/>

homelessness, frequently endure similarly inadequate and unsafe housing conditions. Yet neither Traveller nor Roma children living in these circumstances are consistently captured within official homelessness data unless their families have secured an emergency accommodation placement

Administrative barriers such as the local connection rule further exacerbate undercounting. Families who move for safety, affordability, or family support may be refused access to emergency accommodation on this basis, despite having no safe or viable alternative. The result is a cohort of children living in homelessness without recognition or support. In parallel, children residing in International Protection accommodation who have secured, or are entitled to, permission to remain in the State are not incorporated into homelessness prevention planning, despite living in conditions that parallel or replicate hidden homelessness. The Council of Europe has highlighted the ongoing inadequacy of accommodation for both Traveller and Roma communities, noting their overrepresentation among the homeless population and the risks associated with the environments in which many children reside. -counting. Families who move for safety, affordability, or family support may be refused access to emergency accommodation on this basis, despite having no safe or viable alternative. The result is a cohort of children living in homelessness without recognition or support. In -representation among the homeless population and the risks associated with the environments in which many children reside.

Accurate measurement is essential. Without capturing the full population of children lacking stable, safe accommodation, the State cannot design or deliver an effective homeless prevention strategy. Ensuring that every child, irrespective of ethnicity, legal status or administrative classification, is recognised within homelessness data is a prerequisite for meeting Ireland's child protection obligations and for preventing the longterm harms associated with homelessness.

Appendix with Full List of Recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Accelerate the delivery of social and cost-rental housing, prioritising family-sized homes.
2. Introduce a dedicated family homelessness prevention fund.
3. Increase HAP and rent supplement caps in line with market rents and ensure local authority discretion to prevent homelessness.
4. Introduce a "Safe at Home" Protocol.
5. Establish a statutory "Duty to Collaborate" framework that support domestic abuse survivors.
6. Ensure that parents in work are actively supported to retain employment, including for lone parents through permitting a trusted childminder or family member to access the accommodation to provide childcare while the parent is working, subject to safeguarding checks and reasonable notice
7. Accommodation providers should be required to operate a fair, transparent appeals process before any eviction is pursued, with proportionate responses that prioritise child welfare and avoid creating further instability.
8. Urgently implement all recommendations of the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review to address long-standing structural failures in accommodation delivery.

9. Allocate ring-fenced, multi-annual funding to ensure predictable, sustained investment in Traveller and Roma accommodation.
10. The State must provide appropriately sized housing that reflects the larger family structures common in Traveller and Roma communities, ensuring adequate space and safe living conditions.
11. Provision of a private, child and family room that enables a parent to maintain contact with a child who is not in their full-time custody, recognising that homelessness can fracture the parent–child relationship in ways comparable to other forms of separation.
12. Ensure the State counts all forms of child and family homelessness, including hidden homelessness and families not recorded in emergency accommodation, so that every child in unstable or unsafe housing can access appropriate supports.
13. Establish minimum statutory standards for family emergency accommodation, ensuring access to private space, cooking facilities, and supports for children.
14. Commit to reducing the length of stays in emergency accommodation, with a target of no child spending more than six months in unsuitable settings.
15. Ring-fence a specific share of acquisitions and new-build delivery for 3-bed and 4+-bed homes explicitly tied to family homelessness exits, with transparent local targets and timelines, so that large families can move directly from emergency accommodation into stable tenancies
16. Benchmark core social welfare rates against Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) research and index them annually.
17. Accelerate improved enforcement of child maintenance orders.
18. Reform the Jobseeker’s Transitional Payment (JST) to better support lone parents entering work or education.