

Submission:

Child & Family
Homelessness Action
Plan

Submission deadline:

6th February 2026

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**building
homes,
improving
lives.**

Introduction

Homelessness represents the most acute consequence of a housing system not meeting the needs of all members of its society. The number of people experiencing homelessness in Ireland has continued to grow reaching an unprecedented 16,734 people according to latest figures published by DHLGH¹ including, 2,478 families and 5,188 children. These figures only represent a snapshot of homelessness at a particular ‘point in time’. In reality, people are moving out of homelessness while others are becoming newly homeless. There are also those transitioning in and out of homeless services as a result of repeat episodes of homelessness, for several reasons. For example, time spent in institutional settings including hospitals, prison, residential drug treatment, transitions into housing that breaks down and movement to and from other areas or jurisdictions. This means the number of individuals, families and children who endure the trauma of being without a safe, secure home is much greater than this ‘snapshot’ figure.

Respond welcomes Government’s recently published housing plan ‘Delivering Homes, Building Communities’ and its commitment to an integrated housing and homelessness, whole-of-Government approach. We welcome the Plan’s recognition that *‘increasing the supply of good-quality, affordable and secure homes that meet individual and family needs’* is key to addressing homelessness. As an Approved Housing Body, and recognised ‘strategic delivery partner’, we are fully committed to fulfilling our role in delivering the social and affordable homes required to address the housing and homelessness crisis in Ireland. We acknowledge the reaffirmed commitment of this Government to work with the *European Platform for Combatting Homelessness* to achieve the aims of the *Lisbon Declaration* to work towards ending homelessness by 2030. We also strongly support the commitment to introduce legislation to ensure that the ‘best interests of the child’ inform accommodation decisions for households experiencing homelessness, consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We value this opportunity to share our depth of knowledge, experience and expertise to inform the development of a dedicated cross-Departmental and agency led, Child and Family Homelessness Action Plan.

Family Homeless Services

Respond is deeply committed to providing high-quality services to families and individuals experiencing homelessness. We offer 24/7 wraparound supports tailored to meet the diverse and often complex needs of the families in our emergency accommodation. We place the highest priority on the health and safety of all who use our services. Our trauma-informed approach supports mental and physical well-being and provides family and parenting supports, alongside other tailored interventions.

Our service commitment aligns with the National Quality Standards Framework (NQS), which sets the benchmark for operational excellence and our services have been audited and deemed fully compliant with all NQS standards. We also work closely with the Dublin Regional Homeless

¹ Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. (December 2025). Monthly Homelessness Report December 2025. Available at: https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/f0b63c6f/Homeless_Report_December_2025.pdf

Executive (DRHE) and other external agencies to ensure that the accommodation and supports we provide remain appropriate and responsive to need.

As a provider of family homeless services, Respond directly deal with the reality of this housing crisis and its effect on families, particularly children. Emergency accommodation should only be used as a short-term, acute intervention. However, families are increasingly spending longer periods of time in our services due to the shortage of suitable move on housing options available. We are currently supporting 84 families, including 105 adults and 150 children, across six services that are operating under increasing pressure. The average length of stay across our six Family Homeless Services is currently 14 months. This is more than double our target for move-on which is 6 months.

Homelessness impacts on the lives of adults and children who experience it. Prolonged time in emergency accommodation has significant consequences for children's development and overall wellbeing. A report by the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland² highlights how homelessness and inadequate housing can have negative implications across a range of aspects of both parents and children's lives including health, development, social, education and relationships.

Key to our model of service delivery are the supports we provide. In September 2022, Respond commissioned an independent evaluation of our services to inform future service delivery and service improvements. The evaluation found consistently high-quality services across Respond that are making a meaningful difference in the lives of the children and families. We employ a Psychotherapist who provides a much-needed counselling service for service users aged 18 and over that has demonstrated positive impacts for individuals, staff teams and the wider service delivery model. Both staff and service users have consistently requested the extension of the service to children. However, there is currently no funding available to deliver this much needed service. Just three of our six homeless services have access to a Child and Youth Development Worker, leaving many children without equal access to this critical support.

Research³ focusing on families experiencing long-term homelessness found that many of these families have complex needs requiring a multifaceted response including, clinical and therapeutic supports to exit homelessness. It recommends the development of an in-house Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) for homeless families in Ireland with a preference for an 'in-house' services approach (p32).

² Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (2019). *The Impact of Homelessness and Inadequate Housing on Children's Health*. Available at: <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/31348/1/Impact-of-Homelessness-full-position-paper-final.pdf>

³ Focus Ireland. (2023). Available at: *Multidisciplinary Team for Homelessness Families – Feasibility Study*. Available at: <https://www.focusireland.ie/knowledge-hub/research/>. (Accessed 6 August 2025).

Direct Referral Pathway from Respond Family Homeless Services to Respond Social Homes - Pilot Proposal

Respond proposes the development and pilot of a direct referral pathway enabling long-term families in our Family Homeless Services to transition into Respond social homes. The aim of this pathway is to create a clearer, trauma-informed route to sustainable housing for families. Some families accessing our homeless services present with a history of trauma and complex needs.

Over several years, they build trusting, supportive relationships with staff who understand their circumstances, strengths, and progression. A direct referral mechanism would allow this continuity of support to carry through to their long-term tenancies, significantly improving the likelihood of successful tenancy sustainment and reducing the trauma associated with repeated experiences of homelessness. It would also represent a positive outcome for the State, delivering significant cost savings for the exchequer and reducing the reliance on high-cost emergency accommodation.

We currently have the experience of families moving from Respond Family Homeless Services into Respond social housing through the traditional social housing waiting list process. While this is a great development for these families, unfortunately it follows prolonged stays in emergency accommodation while awaiting a housing allocation. These families are particularly well suited to Respond social housing: they are familiar with the organisation's ethos, policies and expectations and have successfully engaged with us over an extended period.

The homes allocated are often located within the same community where these families have lived for several years. Their children attend local schools and are well integrated into the area's supports, amenities, and social networks. Remaining in this environment prevents unnecessary disruption and promotes continuity, which is critical for family wellbeing and long-term housing stability and offers reassurance and consistency during what could be a stressful point of change.

This proposal also supports the recognition in the Housing Plan⁴ that 'local authorities allocation schemes will be central to ensuring that the increased availability of social housing is used to reduce the number of households, and the time spent, in homeless emergency accommodation.' (p61).

Social work supports for children and families living in homeless services

Respond has a close and collaborative working relationship with The Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) and the staff therein, particularly in relation to child safeguarding and protection matters. However, we along with other organisations part of Dublin Homeless Network have identified some areas in relation to children experiencing homelessness, where processes do not work so effectively including:

- Some delays in TUSLA responding to new referrals and in action being taken following out-of-hours reporting of child protection concerns.

⁴ Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. (November 2025). Delivering Homes, Building Communities 2025-2030: An Action Plan on Housing Supply and Targeting Homelessness. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/publications/delivering-homes-building-communities-2025-2030-an-action-plan-on-housing-supply-and-targeting-homelessness/>

- There could be greater clarity and consistency in regard to the thresholds for child protection interventions for new or active cases.
- Some services have observed a reduction in support once families are placed in the service, and instances where cases have been closed despite the opinion of the Homeless Service deeming there to be ongoing risks to the child.
- Homeless services have also been treated as ‘protective factors’ in care proceedings with for example, Homeless Services being asked to supervise parental access, welfare checks, or children not being placed in care as these placements are difficult to find, and because the Homeless Services have staff onsite. This is a concern as these responsibilities fall outside the remit of Homeless Services, who do not have the required staffing levels or specialist training to fulfil these requirements.

The scale of homelessness, including hidden homelessness

It is important to recognise that officially published statistics on homelessness only represent a snapshot of homelessness at a particular ‘point in time’, as official homelessness statistics in Ireland only take account of those residing in State-funded Section 10 emergency accommodation. This does not represent the true scale of the problem.

As an example, ‘hidden homelessness’ figures (a term used to describe those who are not ‘visible’, either to the public or to services) are excluded from official statistics. This includes people who are couch surfing, sleeping in cars or workplaces, squatting or sharing with friends and/or relatives due to a lack of alternative options. Hidden homelessness is counted in official statistics in some European jurisdictions e.g. Finland. A report from the Simon Communities of Ireland estimated that approximately 24,000 households in the Republic of Ireland and a further 8,500 households in Northern Ireland are experiencing a form of hidden homelessness (May 2024).⁵

Effectively reducing child and family homelessness requires coordinated action across government departments and NGO’s, a principle reflected throughout the recommendations in this submission.

Recommendations:

1. Comprehensive and coordinated homeless prevention must be resourced as part of an integrated approach to address family homelessness, with a continued focus on the urgency of increasing the supply of social and Cost Rental homes.
2. Introduce a Multi-Disciplinary Team, involving specific clinical and specialised supports to meet the mental health needs of families experiencing the trauma of homelessness. This could include a range of physical and mental health professionals, comprising a child psychologist, addiction, welfare support and translation services.
3. Introduce mainstream funding for psychotherapist roles within homeless services to provide much needed therapeutic interventions to families and children in emergency accommodation.

⁵ Cunningham, K. (2024) ‘Under the Radar: Unveiling Hidden Homelessness Across the Island of Ireland’. Available at: <https://www.simon.ie/e-publication/under-the-radar-unveiling-hidden-homelessness-across-the-island-of-ireland/> (Accessed: 13 March 2025).

4. Provide the additional financial resources needed to ensure all children, teenagers and young adults living in Family Homeless Services have equal access to the services of a Child and Youth Development Worker.
5. Introduce intensive and specialised wrap around supports to enable families at risk of homelessness to sustain their tenancies.
6. Resource 'Housing with Support for Families' to address the needs of families with more complex issues, working from a housing-led approach.
7. Review and increase current Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) rates in line with local market conditions, ensuring HAP remains a viable route out of homelessness for families.
8. Establish a direct referral pathway from our homeless services into Respond social homes to reduce the time families spend in emergency accommodation and support consistent, trauma-informed move-on options.
9. Introduce pre-admission planning meetings for families with an assigned social worker who are entering emergency accommodation, to agree a clear support plan between the parent(s), TUSLA and the homeless service supporting the family.
10. Create a sub-group of the Child and Family Support Network (CFSN) with a specific responsibility for Homeless Families and/or reinstate a dedicated TUSLA social worker for those families to ensure there is continuity of care.
11. Measures to reduce homelessness must address hidden homelessness to address the full scale of the challenge and a first step would be incorporating hidden homelessness figures into official statistics.
12. Greater alignment between housing supply and housing need is important for example reflecting Social Housing Needs Assessments and more liaison with homeless services e.g. increasing delivery of four and five-bed homes and accessible homes built to accessible and universal design standards.
13. Prioritise housing allocations for children and families living in emergency accommodation for long periods e.g. one year or longer.

Conclusion

Respond is committed to being a proactive and solutions focussed partner in addressing Ireland's housing and homelessness crisis. With our proven track record, deep expertise, and extensive experience in housing delivery and supporting sustainable communities, we welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of a Child and Family Homelessness Action Plan. We would be happy to engage further to discuss our recommendations.

About Respond

Respond, is an Approved Housing Body (AHB) and service provider and works all around Ireland. Approximately 20,000 tenants live in over 8,000 homes across the 26 counties. The provision of housing fulfils the basic need for shelter; it is a long-term investment and does not exist in isolation but is part of a community impacted by the wider socio-economic context. Some areas, estates and communities around the country are significantly affected by poverty, inequality and disadvantage not just caused by the lack of access to appropriate housing but perpetuated by lack of access to essential services including healthcare and education.

In recognition of this, Respond provides a range of services for families and individuals. These include emergency accommodation with 24/7 support for families who are homeless in six Family Homeless Services, three Day Care Services for Older People, 17 Early Learning and School Aged Care Services and Education, Family Support and Refugee Resettlement services. Our aim is to provide person centred services to support people to achieve their goals and break the cycle of inequality and poverty.