Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Housing for All

Youth Homelessness Strategy

2023-2025

A 3-year strategy working towards ending homelessness for young people aged 18-24 through prevention and exits; and improving the experience of young people accessing emergency accommodation

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Contents

Minister's Foreword

Addressing youth homelessness is one of the key aims set out in *Housing for All*, our national housing policy. The rise in numbers of young people experiencing homelessness is very concerning and it is recognised that supporting young people at risk of becoming homeless through strategic interventions can help avoid a cycle of longer-term homelessness.

Last year, with the support of Government, I signed the Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness. The Declaration commits all signatories, including Ireland, to working towards the ending of homelessness by 2030. This is now an important national strategic goal. The Declaration acknowledges that addressing homelessness requires an understanding of how different groups in communities, including youth, are impacted. The publication of this Strategy, the first dedicated Youth Homelessness Strategy in over 20 years, is a timely and significant milestone in the Government's efforts to eradicate homelessness.

While the impact of the housing crisis is felt by every household in Ireland, young people are acutely affected as they transition from childhood to adulthood and independence. The Strategy acknowledges the importance both of appropriate accommodation for all young people and the provision of necessary supports, as required.

It is an unfortunate reality that the number of young people experiencing homelessness has increased in recent years. The aim of this Strategy is to help people who are aged 18-24 and who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It is recognised that the causes of youth homelessness, as well as the experiences of young people in the emergency accommodation system, are distinct from those of the rest of the homeless population. Measures contained in this Strategy include the development of information and awareness campaigns on housing rights and available supports specifically targeted at young people; an exploration of the potential for using social housing as shared accommodation; and the establishment of a housing-led supported intervention for young people experiencing homelessness.

This Strategy also identifies a number of cohorts within the age group who are particularly at risk of becoming homeless, and who are disproportionately represented in the young homeless population, such as those leaving formal care settings and members of the Traveller community. The Strategy includes specific actions to help each of these vulnerable cohorts.

An extensive consultation process, held over the first half of 2022, brought together insights from key stakeholders, including local authorities, service providers, advocacy groups and members of the public and I would like to thank each and every one of them for their input. All of these views are valued and have informed this Strategy. In particular, the views of the young people who participated in a direct consultation have been considered and acted upon and it is important that the Strategy reflects that direct input.

Youth is a time of exploration and growth, and it is essential that our young people have a stable environment in which to transition to adulthood. Having a place to call home and learning to live independently outside the childhood environment is an essential part of the supports required to ensure that our young people can become mature adults and achieve their potential.

The scale of this Strategy is ambitious but, through collaboration with all stakeholders, the objectives will become a reality. Similar to our overarching housing plan, Housing for All, achieving the aims of this Strategy can only happen with a cross-departmental approach, delivered in partnership and collaboration with other Government departments, State bodies and service providers. There will be a strong focus on the implementation of this Strategy, overseen by a Steering Group established under the auspices of the National Homeless Action Committee (NHAC). All actions will be monitored on an ongoing basis. I look forward to working with our partners in the implementation of this Strategy to achieve the best possible outcomes for our young people and their future.

Darragh O'Brien TD
Minister for Housing,
Local Government
and Heritage

Executive Summary

The number of young adults experiencing homelessness in Ireland has been increasing in recent years. The latest Monthly Homelessness Report published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) showed that 17% of people accessing emergency accommodation were aged between 18 and 24. Homelessness among this age group has grown by 57% in the last five years.

The *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future* (2020) contains a commitment to developing a Youth Homelessness Strategy and this is articulated in *Housing for All: A New Housing Plan for Ireland* (Government of Ireland, 2021), the Government's Housing Plan to 2030.

The aim of this Strategy is to help people who are aged 18-24 and who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. With the publication of this Strategy, the Government recognises young adults as a distinct cohort of individuals and that:

- There are multiple causes of youth homelessness;

- The experiences of young people in the emergency accommodation system are distinct from those of the rest of the homeless population; and

- Supporting young people at risk of becoming homeless can help to prevent a cycle of longer-term homelessness

This Strategy was developed with the understanding that young people should be valued in their own right, and that they are key drivers in achieving their own cognitive, emotional, social and economic development.

It is clear that any Youth Homelessness Strategy requires an integrated, whole-of-Government approach, with a multitude of key stakeholders playing a vital role in addressing the fundamental issues arising in addressing youth homelessness. It was also important that a wide range of views would form part of the process of developing the Strategy. A number of important consultations took place to inform the Strategy, including a direct consultation with young people experiencing homelessness.

This Strategy has been developed with three main strategic aims:

    i. To prevent young people from entering homelessness;

    ii. To improve the experiences of young people in accessing emergency accommodation; and

    iii. To assist young people in exiting homelessness.

This Strategy is structured into two distinct parts. The first part of the Strategy examines the background and context to youth homelessness in Ireland. Building upon this, part two sets out the strategic aims that inform this document, the actions that will deliver these aims and how these actions will be implemented.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to this Strategy, explaining why it is necessary and establishes the background to its development.

Chapter 2 sets forth the policy context for this Strategy, explaining how the Strategy functions in relation to broader housing policy, and other ongoing Government strategies.

Chapter 3 seeks to understand the realities of youth homelessness. It draws upon evidence-backed research, both from Ireland and internationally, to illuminate the factors driving youth homelessness. The chapter weaves together the very words spoken by young people with lived experience of homelessness with best-practice research to examine the realities of homelessness for young adults today. It further examines the pathways into, and the barriers to exiting homeless services. The Strategy identifies six specific cohorts of vulnerable young people, and proposes targeted actions to mitigate their vulnerabilities. It includes discussion of a headline action, the development of Supported Housing for Youth, a housing-led intervention targeted specifically at young people.

Part two of the Strategy builds upon this evidence base, setting forth the document's strategic aims, actions and implementation thereof.

Chapter 4 sets out in detail the three strategic aims that guide this document, and draws upon the evidence base established in chapter 3 to determine the 27 actions that will deliver these objectives.

Chapter 5 sets out the agencies responsible for each action, and attaches a clear timeline to each.

Chapter 6 lays out the framework for implementation over the course of the next 3 years.

The Strategy sets out 27 specific actions that will deliver on these aims. These actions are evidence based and informed by international best practice on combatting youth homelessness. The Strategy acknowledges the importance of providing both appropriate accommodation and necessary supports for young people.

The Strategy commits to a variety of measures to help prevent young people from becoming homeless, including the development of information and awareness campaigns on housing rights and available supports specifically targeted at young people.

Consideration must be given to improving the experiences of young people currently accessing homeless services. The Strategy sets out a number of actions to further support this cohort, such as increasing the number of emergency accommodation facilities specifically for young people.

Through the consultation process, young people advised that standard emergency accommodation can feel unsafe and unsuitable in some cases, largely due to sharing a space with people of different ages, who may be long-term users of homeless services and who may have complex mental health or addiction issues. The Strategy, therefore, supports the establishment of dedicated homeless accommodation for young people that has sufficient and appropriate designated spaces to allow for visits from family members of residents, and that can facilitate the holding of workshops and information sessions tailored specifically to young people.

Finally, the Strategy sets out measures to help those exiting homelessness to move towards independent living, maintain tenancies and fulfil their potential. This includes the establishment of Supported Housing for Youth (SHY), a flexible housing-led intervention for young people.

A Steering Group will be established under the auspices of the National Homeless Action Committee (NHAC) to drive the delivery of actions set out in this Strategy and to monitor progress. This Group will be required to provide an update on progression of actions at each quarterly NHAC meeting.

Part One

Background, Context
and Understanding
Youth Homelessness

Part One – Background, Context and Understanding Youth Homelessness

1. Introduction

The number of young adults experiencing homelessness in Ireland has been increasing over the past number of years. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) publishes data on a monthly basis regarding the number of people accessing all forms of emergency accommodation funded and overseen by housing authorities. As of August 2022, 1,274 people aged 18-24 were accessing emergency accommodation. This accounted for 17% of all adults accessing this service. As those aged 18-24 make up about 11% of the general population[1], it is clear that young people are overrepresented in the homeless population.

The *Programme for Government* sets out the Government's mission to tackle the housing crisis. It contains a commitment to develop a Youth Homelessness Strategy. This commitment is articulated in *Housing for All*, the Government's Housing Plan to 2030. *Housing for All* also commits to the establishment of a National Homeless Action Committee (NHAC). In line with this commitment, NHAC was established in December 2021. Members of NHAC include representatives from key Government Departments, state bodies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The purpose of NHAC is to ensure that a renewed emphasis is brought to cross-Governmental collaboration to implement actions in *Housing for All*, along with better coherence and coordination of homeless-related services in delivering policy measures and actions to address homelessness. NHAC is chaired by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage. At its inaugural meeting, it was agreed that one of the initial priorities of NHAC would be the development of the Youth Homelessness Strategy.

DHLGH steered the development of this Strategy, closely supported by NHAC. The Strategy was shaped and informed by feedback on the drafts from members of NHAC; responses received via consultations and research carried out within DHLGH.

This Strategy focuses on young people aged 18-24 who are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, homelessness. At the same time, it acknowledges that the causes of homelessness often begin years before the person turns 18, as well as examining causes and making recommendations in that context. It is recognised that the causes of youth homelessness, as well as the experiences of young people in the emergency accommodation system, are distinct from those of the rest of the homeless population. It is also recognised that supporting young people at risk of becoming homeless through strategic interventions can help prevent a cycle of longer-term homelessness.

All young people are vulnerable to

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1   https://data.cso.ie/

varying degrees as they move into adulthood. International evidence indicates that cognitive development continues up until at least the mid-twenties. The Strategy recognises that certain cohorts of young people are particularly at risk of homelessness and are disproportionately represented in the young homeless population.

Through extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including service providers and young people experiencing homelessness, this Strategy examines the causes and experiences of homelessness among young people and puts strategic interventions in place to prevent entry into homelessness, as well as establishing services and supports tailored towards improving the experience of young people in emergency accommodation and assisting them to successfully exit homelessness.

Informing the entire approach to this Strategy is a recognition of the criticality of interagency supports that are required to address the complex combination of the social, health and economic needs of young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness.

2. Policy Context

2.1 Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness

On 21 June 2021, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, with the support of the Government, signed the Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness. The Declaration commits all signatories, Ireland included, to working towards the ending of homelessness by 2030. In signing the Declaration, Ireland has agreed to promote the prevention of homelessness, access to permanent housing, and the provision of enabling support services to those who are homeless.

Ireland is participating in the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness and collaborates with other EU Member States and European institutions, as well as international organisations that support homeless people, in working towards a shared goal of eradicating homelessness.

2.2 Housing for All

Housing for All is the Government's Housing Plan to 2030. It is a multi-annual, multi-billion euro plan that will improve Ireland's housing system and deliver more homes of all types for people with different housing needs.

The Government's overall objective is that every citizen in the State should have access to good-quality homes to purchase or rent at an affordable price, built to a high standard and in the right place, offering a high quality of life.

The Government's vision for the housing system over the longer term is to achieve a steady supply of housing in the right locations with economic, social and environmental sustainability built into the system. It is estimated that Ireland will need an average of 33,000 new homes to be provided each year from 2021 to 2030.

The policy has four pathways to achieving *Housing for All:*

- Supporting homeownership and increasing affordability;

- Eradicating homelessness, increasing social housing delivery, and supporting social inclusion;

- Increasing new housing supply; and

- Addressing vacancy and efficient use of existing stock.

The pathways contain actions to be taken by Government Departments, local authorities, State agencies and others. The pathways are supported by actions to enable a sustainable housing system.

Housing for All contains concrete actions that will deliver a range of housing options for individuals, couples and families. Eighteen of these actions relate to homelessness, one of which is the development of this Youth Homelessness Strategy. As noted above, this commitment is also included in the *Programme for Government*. Previous policy responses by Government are set out at Appendix 1.

2.3 Other Current and Key Strategies and Policy Frameworks

A number of other key Strategies and policy frameworks are currently in place and targeted towards supporting young people.

These include the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY's) *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* and the *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020. LGBTI+ Young People: Visible, Valued and Included*; the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS's) *National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028*, which aims for equity of access, participation and success in higher education; and the Department of Health (DoH's) *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery: A Health-led Response to Drug and Alcohol Use in Ireland 2017-2025*, which aims to promote healthier lifestyles within society and encourage people to make healthier choices around drug and alcohol use.

Further details on current and key Strategies and policy frameworks are set out in Appendix 2.

3. Understanding Youth Homelessness

3.1 Defining Youth Homelessness

In Ireland, under the Housing Act 1988, local authorities are empowered to respond to homelessness in a number of ways: by directly housing people who are homeless or by funding voluntary and co-operative bodies to house them; by providing advice and information; and by providing financial assistance for them to access private rented accommodation. Section 2 of the 1988 Housing Act provides that:

"A person shall be regarded by a housing authority as being homeless for the purposes of this Act if —

a) there is no accommodation available which, in the opinion of the authority, he, together with any other person who normally resides with him or who might reasonably be expected to reside with him, can reasonably occupy or remain in occupation of, or

b) he is living in a hospital, county home, night shelter or other such institution, and is so living because he has no accommodation of the kind referred to in paragraph (a),

and he is, in the opinion of the authority, unable to provide accommodation from his own resources."

This allows housing authorities to undertake an assessment of need for those who present to housing authority homeless services. Section 10 of the 1988 Act also sets out the basis for the provision of accommodation and related services by the local authorities to households assessed as homeless. All households are assessed, and provided with homeless services, in accordance with the provisions of the legislation.

In developing this Strategy, consideration was given to the various ways in which youth is defined. A Youth Homelessness literature review (Kennedy, 2012) notes that the term 'youth' typically refers to the transitional period between childhood and adulthood and within the literature typically uses a subset of the 12-24 age range. The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines 'youth', as those people between the ages of 15 and 24 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2022). The Central Statistics Office (CSO) categorises young adults as 19-24 years, while *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*, the National Policy Framework for Children & Young people, defines a young person as any person under 25 years of age.

The 2001 *Youth Homelessness Strategy*, while committing to *"reduce and if possible eliminate youth homelessness"*, did not include an operational definition of 'youth'. *Every Child a Home: A Review of the Implementation of the Youth Homelessness Strategy* (2013) by the then Department of Children and Youth Affairs found that while the Strategy made a significant contribution to addressing the problem of youth homelessness, its effectiveness was constrained by a poor definition of youth homelessness. This has also been raised in subsequent research into youth homelessness in Ireland (Mayock & Corr, 2013), and was noted in consultations in preparation for the new Strategy.

Under legislation, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has different specific responsibilities for individuals under and over the age of 18. As a result, **for the purpose of this Strategy, young people are defined as being aged 18-24.** This Strategy focuses on young people aged 18-24 who are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness. At the same time, it recognises that the causes of homelessness often begin years before the person turns 18, and will therefore examine causes and make recommendations in that context.

3.2 Data and Statistics

18-24 Year Olds Accessing Emergency Accomodation
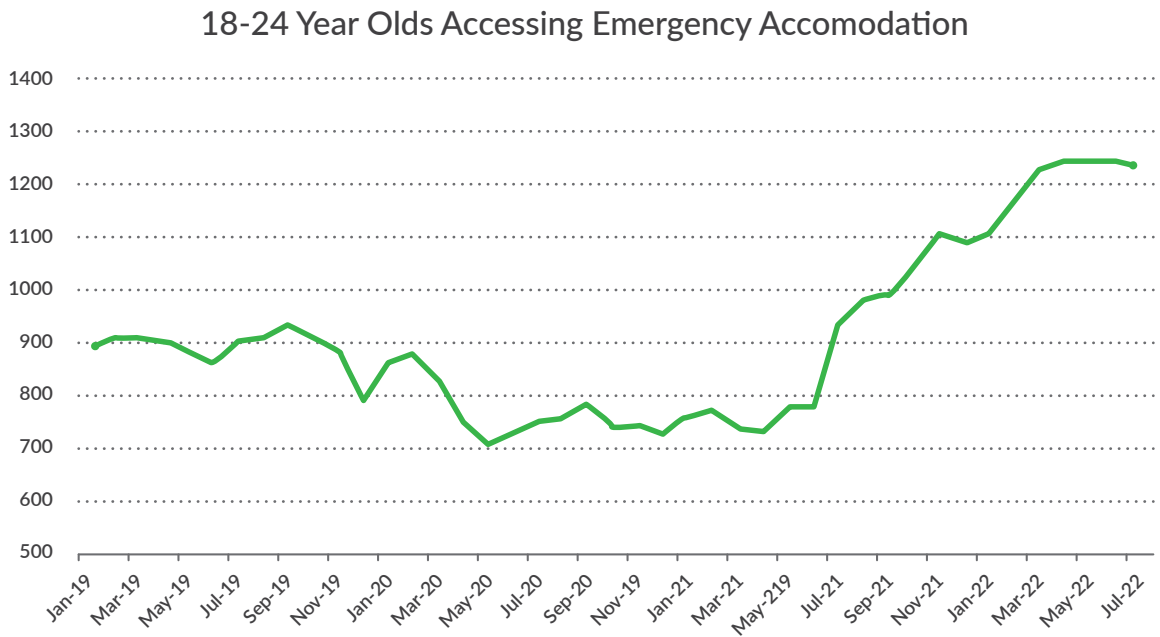
The number of young adults accessing emergency accommodation has been increasing disproportionately. From December 2020 (the Covid-era low) to July 2022, there was a 70% growth in 18-24-year-olds accessing emergency accommodation. The total number of adults (including 18-24-year-olds) only grew by 26.5% during this timeframe.

Growth in Youth Homelessness				
Month	18-24-year-olds	Total Homelessness	%	Absolute Growth (%)
Dec. 2017	818	8,587	9.5	
Dec. 2018	869	9,753	8.9	6.2
Dec. 2019	782	9,731	8	-10
Dec. 2020	728	8,200	8.9	-6.9
Dec. 2021	1,090	8,917	12.2	49.7

Young people are disproportionately represented in the homeless population. In July 2022, they accounted for about 16.7% of all adults accessing emergency accommodation. However, data from the 2016 census indicates that they only account for about 11% of adults nationally.

Age Profiles of Emergency Accomodation Users and General Population

Age Profile of General Population

Age Profile of Emergency Accommodation Users

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ 18-24 ■ 25-44 ■ 45-64 ■ 65+
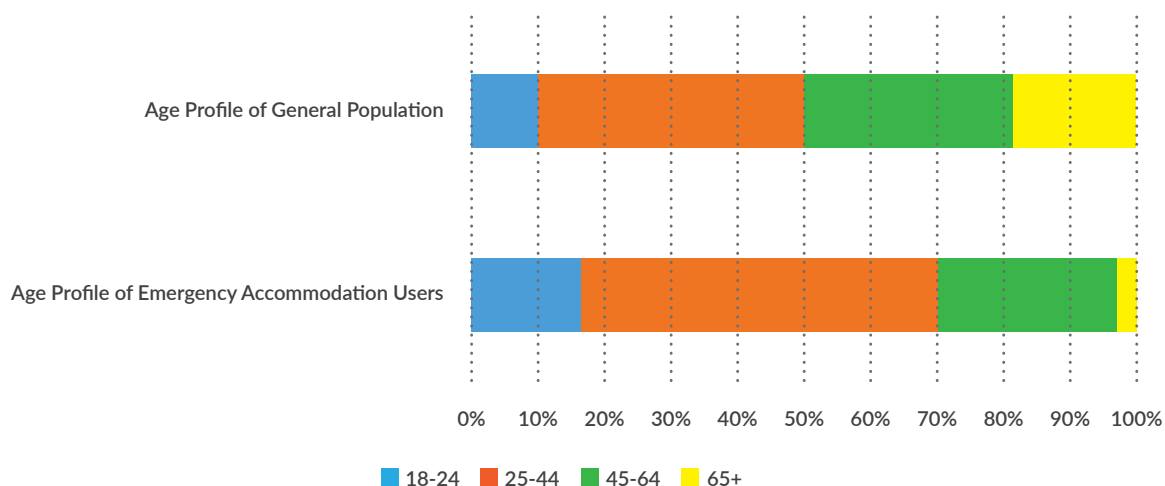
Enhanced Dublin Region Homeless Executive Data

Some enhanced data was supplied by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive. In December 2021, this accounted for approximately 72% of all individuals and all 18-24-year-olds accessing emergency accommodation. Data was provided in respect of 2021. However, recognising the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the dynamics of homeless presentations and shelter usage, as well as how these dynamics shifted throughout that year, data was also provided in respect of December 2021 specifically, in order to act as a 'snapshot month'.

Dublin December 2021 Adult Emergency Accommodation Usage			
		Single	As Part of a Family
Total Number		3,134	1,356
Of whom 18-24		**394**	**390****
Of Whom Lone Parents			**67*****
Gender	**Male**	256	137
	female	138	253
Client Recently Left a State Care Setting*		18	7

*Question administered as part of initial presentation assessment

**390 individuals part of 285 distinct families

***Does not include lone parents who may have accessed emergency accommodation with another family member

In December 2021, 18-24-year-olds accounted for about 17% of all adults accessing emergency accommodation in Dublin. They represented about 13% of single adults and 23% of adults in families. There is a pronounced gender split when disaggregated by household type: 65% of singles are male, while 65% of those in families are female.

Dublin December 2021 Adult New Presentations			
		Single	As Part of a Family
Total Number		126	53
Of whom 18-24		**34**	**10**
Of Whom Lone Parents			**6***
Gender	Male	18	1
	Female	16	9
Reasons for presentation	Private Rental	5	0
	Family Circumstance/ Relationship Breakdown	13	7
	Overcrowding	9	1
	None	2	1
	Other	4	1

* Does not include lone parents who may have accessed emergency accommodation with another family member

18-24-year-olds accounted for 25% of those adults who newly presented and were assessed as homeless within Dublin in December 2021. They accounted for 27% of singles and 19% of those in families. Of note, a majority (60%) of those within families were lone parents, all of whom were female.

Though single adults accessing emergency accommodation in December in Dublin were predominantly male, gender is more evenly split between single adults presenting as homeless for the first time (53% male, 47% female). Reasons for presentation differ by household type: while family circumstance or relationship breakdown was the most common category for both (70% of adults within families and 38% of single adults), overcrowding and notices of termination in the private rental market were also common.

For comparative purposes, see all presentations throughout 2021*:

All New 2021 Presenations			
	Single		As Part of a Family
Total Number		1,829	1,102
Of whom 18-24		**427**	**325**
Of Whom Lone Parents			**115^^**
Gender	Male	258	85
	Female	169	240
Reasons for presentation	Private Rental	31	21
	Family Circumstance/ Relationship Breakdown	214	155
	Overcrowding	43	26
	None	133	84
	Other	6	39

The dynamics of emergency accommodation access throughout 2021 was heavily affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

^^113 female, 2 male.

The data clearly evidences that 18-24-year-olds are overrepresented, both in the general homeless population accessing emergency accommodation and in terms of new presentations to local authorities. There were more single presentations across the 18-24-year-old cohort than any other five-year age range in the Dublin region in 2021. Furthermore, in keeping with the large body of relevant literature accessed during the development of this Strategy, family dysfunction clearly emerges as the main driver of 18-24-year-olds into homelessness.

One analysis (Bairéad & Norris, 2020) of PASS[2] data in the Dublin region from the years 2016-2018 found that those within the 18-24-year-old cohort are most likely to:

- Be male, Irish and single;

- Have entered emergency accommodation from the family home due to family circumstances;

- Have used emergency accommodation episodically; and

- Have exited homelessness less than a year after they first accessed emergency accommodation.

Additionally, the analysis highlighted that there were no seasonal patterns of new presentations to emergency accommodation for young people. Whereas for both families and single adults in general, service providers can predict (though not assume) that certain months will have higher new presentations than others, those who provide accommodation and support for young adults cannot make predictions with the same confidence.

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2   PASS is the Pathway Accommodation & Support System through which housing authorities capture the details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements.

3.3 Diversity in Young People

Young people are not a homogenous group. They come from different backgrounds and have varied needs. They may have lived in the same home for their entire childhood; they may have moved frequently; or they may have experienced homelessness when growing up. They could be workers, unemployed or students. They could be parents, members of the Travelling community, members of the LGBTI+ community – or they might not fit into any of these categories. In so far as is practicable, the direct consultation process with young people with experience of homelessness sought to reflect this diversity.

Young people may be at vastly different stages in their lives. It must be acknowledged that they need a variety of housing options; and whether that is own-door, shared or supported accommodation, they also all require security, stability and affordability.

Reflecting this diversity, six specific cohorts have been identified as being of heightened vulnerability:

- Care leavers;

- People with disabilities;

- Young parents, especially those parenting alone;

- Members of the Traveller community

- Members of the LGBTI+ community;

- Individuals leaving prison services.

The Strategy includes specific actions to help each of these vulnerable cohorts. In line with the strategic aims of this document, these actions are tailored to prevent these vulnerable young people from presenting as homeless, improve their experiences while accessing homeless services, and assist in timely exits from homelessness.

3.4 Consultation Process

An extensive consultation process was undertaken to capture as many views as possible to inform the Strategy. Consultations were held with the following groups:

- NHAC;

- Members of the public;

- Local authorities;

- Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness;

- Tusla and DCEDIY; and

- Young people with experience of homelessness.

Further details on these Consultations are set out in Appendix 3.

3.5 Understanding the Causes of Youth Homelessness

It has long been established that young people have distinct experiences with homelessness that differ in important ways from older adult experiences (FEANTSA, 2010). Young people who experience homelessness encounter unique barriers and challenges to stabilising their housing, engaging with school and education, meeting their daily needs, and remaining safe because of their age and developmental stage in the life course (Day & Paul, 2007; Vitopoulos et al., 2017). The causes of youth homelessness involve a complex set of interrelated factors that arise across a young person's lifetime. The entry of young people into homelessness may both be caused by, and further exacerbate, the loss of family support or structure, disengagement from education, increasing drug and alcohol dependency, and adverse mental health experiences. Furthermore, young people in Ireland are disproportionately affected by the lack of affordable rental accommodation and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) properties (homes available to rent for those who access the Housing Assistance Payment).

The underlying causes of homelessness have been traditionally divided into structural and individual reasons. However, in recent years, research on homelessness has moved beyond this simple dichotomy. Ross-Brown and Leavey (2021, p. 81) observed that *"Homelessness for... young adults has been the result of a complex interaction between the individual and structural level factors at play with the conditions of their existence."*

The relative importance of these factors varies according to each young person's circumstances, and different factors will be of varying relevance to each young person. As a result, some causes of homelessness weigh more heavily towards certain factors for particular cohorts than others.

Following a three-level sociological model proposed by Gaetz and Dej (2017), factors causing youth homelessness are divided into three categories: individual and interpersonal factors; structural factors; and organisational disjunctures. However, this strategy recognises that these factors interact with one another and that the causes of youth homelessness should not be viewed in isolation.

i.   Individual and Interpersonal Factors

Individual factors refer to *"the personal circumstances that place people at risk of homelessness"* (Gaetz & Dej, 2017, p. 21). These include:

- Breakdown in the family home;

- Substance misuse;

- Poor mental health; and

- Disengagement from social systems such as education.

These factors do not function discretely, nor are the processes (e.g., family breakdown) monolithic. In some instances, behavioural factors should be recognised as symptoms or manifestations of difficult early life experiences or trauma. Young people have been identified (Watts, Johnsen, & Sosenko, 2015) as being at greater risk of homelessness if they have endured experiences of:

- Abuse and neglect;

- Domestic abuse/violence within the family home; and

- Mental health issues and/or substance abuse within the family home.

One study in Wales (Llamau, 2015) concluded that homeless young people were seven times more likely to have experienced emotional abuse and three times more likely to have experienced neglect than young people in general. Participants in the direct consultation for the Strategy identified poor family relationships and the lack of family support, or poor parenting, as key triggers for their homelessness. Conversely, participants noted the capacity for familial support to help transitions out of homelessness:

"Support is huge. If you have support from family/friends, they can help you find a place, financially, shopping, move in together"
– Participant in direct consultation[3].

Researchers have drawn attention to the lasting psychological impact of early childhood trauma, and the ways in which it not only increases the risk of homelessness but limits young peoples' capacity to contend with their circumstances:

"Feelings of fear, anxiety, and mistrust within [young people] were often exacerbated by the isolation their contextual conditions induced. These feelings, typically, were transferred into other fields in the lives of participants. Lacking the resources and skills needed to make friends, increased isolation, and the bullying which many [young people] reported in school, reinforced their mistrust in others in addition to heightening anxiety and mental health difficulties"
(Ross-Brown & Leavey, 2021, p. 81).

Not only are young people often contending with difficult life experiences of abuse or neglect, but they must also learn to navigate the systems of homeless services while severed from stable housing. As Gaetz (2014, p. 9) describes:

"at a time when these young people are experiencing loss and potentially trauma, they are simultaneously charged with managing a diverse and complex set of tasks, including obtaining shelter, income and food, making good decisions and developing healthy relationships. Typically, young people who remain homeless for extended periods of time are also exposed to early sexual activity, exploitation, addictions and safety issues [...] in a compressed time frame".

This intimidating nature of homelessness services was similarly noted by a participant in the direct consultation process:

"There should be a lot more support for people and kids that register homeless because it's hard, scary, frightening and to be honest it's all traumatising for kids"
– Participant in direct consultation.

In interviews with 40 young Irish people experiencing homelessness (Mayock, Parker, & Murphy, 2014), the experiences of inter-generational homelessness (i.e. parental homelessness) and intra-generational homelessness (i.e. sibling homelessness) emerged as critically important in shaping trajectories into homelessness:

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3   Quotes attributed to participants in direct consultation refers to young people with lived experience of homelessness interviewed expressly for the Youth Homelessness Strategy. For further details see Appendix III.

25% of participants reported periods of family homelessness, ranging from weeks to years, and 30% of participants reported intra-generational homelessness.

The majority of these young people (93%) experimented with an illegal drug at some point in their lives, and many first used a drug during their early-to-mid-teenage years. Drug abuse often served as a means to self-medicate for mental health issues. Additionally, the follow-up wave of research (Mayock & Parker, 2017) found that the representation of young parents had increased from 15% in Wave 1 to 41% in Wave 2, illuminating the cyclical nature of inter-generational homelessness.

Many reported complex and overlapping support needs, often related to long-standing mental health problems and/or problematic substance use. These young people's homeless and housing pathways were characterised by (Mayock & Parker, 2017, p. 6) as:

- *"Ongoing patterns of movement between emergency accommodation and insecure housing;*

- *Repeat stays in institutional settings, including acute or psychiatric hospitals, residential alcohol/drug treatment facilities and prison; and*

- *Heightened levels of substance use and/or deteriorating mental health that frequently coincided with periods spent sleeping rough and/or living (back) in emergency provision".*

Unmet mental health needs were reported by many participants in the direct consultation, including those of the general homeless population at large. The inter-relationship between mental health needs and addiction issues was also noted by the participants:

"People I'm around and have been with while homeless have addiction and/ or mental health issues. More support should be there. Just because you have an addiction, doesn't mean you should be pushed away. An addiction could be because of mental health issues, but they look at you differently. You can have everything, but with addiction, you can lose everything. You can be functioning, but suddenly it catches up with you. Mental health and addiction are interlinked and both can lead to homelessness"
    – Participant in direct consultation.

"The mental health/addiction services need to get on top of helping people with these issues. Stress of a lack of money, being out of pocket, that you end up back with your addiction as it helps you to forget your issues. There are so many sides to it. A strategy for the mental health and addiction services needs to be [made]. You can then help [by] separating them out"
– Participant in direct consultation.

"People don't see themselves coming out of it [mental health issues]. The outside world doesn't give you enough space to get out of this"
– Participant in direct consultation.

ii. Structural Factors

Structural factors have been described as *"broad systemic, economic, and societal issues that occur at a societal level that affect opportunities, social environments, and outcomes for individuals"* (Gaetz & Dej, 2017, p. 18), including a lack of affordable housing, childhood poverty, and discrimination. In a British context, large-scale survey data indicates that young people are three times more likely to have experienced homelessness in the last five years than older members of the general UK population. Watts, Johnsen & Sosenko (2015) explain this link between young age and homelessness by the disproportionate experience of poverty among young people, rather than their youth. However, poverty is not the sole cause of youth homelessness.

Kennedy (2012) links contemporaneous levels of rising youth homelessness to factors that disrupt the transition from youth to adulthood: a lack of affordable housing for young people; a decline in traditional forms of employment for working class youth; and a highly competitive rental market have contributed to expanding the duration of 'youth'. The problems young people face within the rental market have been well highlighted, including:

• The poor standard of affordable rental properties;

• Restrictive rent supplement payments;

• Protracted waiting periods for social housing;

• Delays in accessing rent allowance or other social welfare support; and

• Discrimination on the part of landlords against those in receipt of rent subsidy.

Poor experiences in education, such as truancy, exclusion or suspension, have also been linked to a higher risk of homelessness (Watts, Johnsen, & Sosenko, 2015). Additionally, these adverse experiences in education have also been found to be critical early warning signs that a young person may experience homelessness and other forms of deprivation in later life. While this relationship is not necessarily causal, it does highlight the potential of schools as a site for early intervention.

Beyond these societal-level factors, the unstable nature of interactions between young people and external systems has been noted: *"the theme of instability in the lives of respondents was a recurring one and featured in many aspects of their lives: housing, relationships, education, and the support systems they were in contact with, both formal and informal"* (Ross-Brown & Leavey, 2021, p. 82). Disengagement from educational and employment opportunities negatively impacts a young person's sense of self-worth and reinforces feelings of marginalisation, both socially and economically. Young homeless people who have self-distanced from broader society have reported feeling constrained by the lack of structure and routine in their lives (Mayock & Parker, 2017). Research from Northern Ireland highlights the risk of young people *"being viewed as 'failed life projects' and thus believing this themselves... [it becomes] a self-fulfilling prophecy"* (Ross-Brown & Leavey, 2021, p. 75).

Research into the trajectories of families experiencing homelessness in Ireland draws attention to individuals' interdependencies with the wider environment of emergency accommodation.

Parents with greater competencies in navigating the administrative systems of homeless service provision and public and private housing systems demonstrated less-chaotic stays in homeless services (Parker, 2021). Stunted interpersonal communication skills could therefore gravely impact the abilities of young people to permanently exit homeless services. There is a concern that those who fail to quickly exit homelessness will become dependent upon homeless services. One participant in the direct consultation described being 'institutionalised' within services. Young people who stay longer in homelessness are more socially isolated, have fewer protective resources, and may also face additional housing and social challenges relating to substance misuse and or criminal activity (Mayock & Corr, 2013). For those who become 'institutionalised', there is a considerable risk that interactions with services will be reactive and crisis-driven, focusing on shelter, food and clothing, rather than exiting homelessness.

iii. Organisational Disjunctures

Systemic issues have been identified as a further contributory factor to youth homelessness. In a Canadian context, Schwan et al. (2018) describe these issues as *"inadequate policy and service delivery within and between systems [that] contribute to the likelihood that someone will become homeless".* These include barriers to accessing public systems, failed transitions from publicly funded institutions and systems, and silos and gaps both within and without Government-funded departments and systems, as well as within non-profit sectors. Further Canadian research empahasised that the frustration of these systems, are not necessarily service delivery failures, but rather *"organisational disjunctures"* (Nichols & Doberstein, 2016) that contribute to young people's exclusion and ongoing marginality, including, but not limited to, experiences of homelessness and housing insecurity.

State care and the criminal justice sector have been identified as two sectors in which young people suffering from organisational disjunctures may have made disproportionate presentations to homeless services among their cohorts. In Mayock and Corr's (2013) six-year qualitative research into homelessness among young people in Ireland, the transition from state care to adult services emerged as a key point of entry into adult homeless services. In one North American study of adolescents leaving foster care (Fowler, Toro, & Miles, 2009), more than 40% of adolescents experienced enduring housing problems within two years of exiting foster care. The steep 'cliff edge' faced by young people turning 18 in State Care was raised in direct consultation with young people experiencing homelessness:

> *"There's a lack of support, especially in fostering. When you turn 18, you're assigned an aftercare worker. They give you a list of phone numbers, but no other help. There's not much support once you turn 18"*
> – Participant in direct consultation.

> *"Once you are 18, you have no voice and are not heard"*
> – Participant in direct consultation.

Circular 46/2014 Protocol on Young People Leaving State Care provides that *"in the development of Homelessness Action Plans, Housing Authorities will address issues relating to children leaving the care of the Agency [Tusla] so as to prevent such young people becoming homeless,"* (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2014, p. 4). It also sets forth that there is no legal impediment for a housing authority assessing a person less than 18 years of age for social housing support, should such support be required. Nevertheless, in adulthood, young Irish people

described this transition from state care as a 'turning point' that brought their lives and housing situations into crisis: *"Disillusionment and despair were the emotions most frequently articulated by those young people who 'graduated' from under-18s to adult hostel settings. On entering the adult system of intervention, young people's situations generally deteriorated as daily life became even more unpredictable and they perceived their housing options as progressively narrowing"*
(Mayock & Corr, 2013, p. 59).

Families of young people experiencing homelessness have identified particular gaps in service provision, especially in relation to early intervention and the support services available to the families of young people who are living 'out of home'. Those family members highlighted the need for information, advice and supports for the families of at-risk young people, especially those with mental health problems or engaging in risky behaviour such as substance use or criminal activity (Mayock, Parker, & Murphy, 2014). Proposed supports include the development of safe spaces within supported temporary accommodation facilities that would permit parents of young homeless people to visit.

The most efficient way of addressing institutional disjunctures that do not effectively reduce homelessness is to retool systems responses, reorienting emergency responses to support prevention-based models of early intervention and other strategies that will help move young people into housing with the most appropriate supports (Gaetz, 2014). Key strategies for systems prevention include:

- Amending policy and procedural barriers to facilitate program access and support;

- Enhancing access to public systems, services, and appropriate supports;

- Establishing reintegration supports to facilitate effective transitions from public institutions or systems; and

- Establishing system coordination and integration.

These key strategies were carefully considered in developing relevant actions for this Strategy.

Risk Factors v Pathways

When describing causes of homelessness, it is necessary to distinguish between factors that demonstrate a statistical association with an increased risk of homelessness and established trajectories that act as pathways into homelessness. There is clear evidence (Watts, Johnsen, & Sosenko, 2015; Nichols & Doberstein, 2016) that a number of factors are associated with a higher risk of homelessness, including:

- Experiencing abuse or neglect as a child;

- Experiencing domestic violence, mental health, or substance issues within the family home;

- Running away as a child;

- Truanting or being excluded from school;

- Leaving school with no qualifications;

- Having learning disabilities; and

- Being a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender young person.

Research (Gaetz, O'Grady, Kidd, & Schwan, 2016) also indicates those who leave home at an early age are also more likely to:

- Experience chronic homelessness;

- Be tested for ADHD;

- Experience bullying;

- Be victims of crime once homeless;

- Experience poorer quality of life; and

- Attempt suicide.

However, while these associations may underscore the propriety of responsive, client-focused services, they do little to illustrate the underlying channels into homelessness. Research findings (Mayock & Corr, 2013) indicate that 40% of homeless youths sampled in Ireland had experienced the childcare system – these childhoods were characterised by short or prolonged periods of separation from family, as well as multiple care placements, leading to high levels of instability and disruption. Additionally, young people recounted family tensions, with almost half

the sample reporting parental drug or alcohol use and physical assault by an adult during childhood. In most cases, the process of becoming homeless could be traced to early childhood, when disruptions of various types began to impact negatively on their lives. For many, the events precipitating homelessness were interrelated with other situations, while for others the move out of home was the final stage in a sequence of chaotic events. Later research in Dublin (Mayock, Parker, & Murphy, 2014) identified four broad pathways into homelessness:

- Histories of being in residential or foster care for extended periods, including experiences of placement breakdown or disruption during this time and poor preparation for leaving care, coupled with insufficient aftercare support;

- Household disruption and family instability, which for some young people precipitated disruption to schooling and negative coping strategies such as drug abuse, thus further undermining already fragile family relationships;

- Family conflict and family violence, including experiences of childhood neglect, abuse, parental substance misuse, and/or domestic violence; and

- Problem behaviour and neighbourhood stressors, including substance use and the influence of negative peer associations.

Experiences of childhood neglect, abuse, parental substance misuse, and/or domestic violence can push young people into premature home-leaving. As a result, young people typically first enter adult hostels at a point of extreme vulnerability. Some participants in the aforementioned study witnessed violence and/or experienced neglect as children, and these patterns often persisted into adolescence. Some were often excluded from the family home, while others left voluntarily, in order to escape increasingly volatile situations. Indeed, many young people first access adult services while experiencing a personal crisis (Mayock, Parker, & Murphy, 2014). This is especially common among young parents, who often leave the family home out of concern for their child's wellbeing (Lambert, O'Callaghan, & Jump, 2018).

3.6 Understanding Young People's Experience of Homelessness

Participants in the direct consultations described a wide range of negative effects stemming from their experiences of homelessness. From these descriptions, four overarching themes were identified: the emergency accommodation context, experiences with service staff, practical concerns and risks, and finally the stigma and loneliness of the homeless experience.

In some cases, participants described emergency accommodation that failed to fulfil their needs, with frequent overcrowding, the lack of security of a bed each night, the lack of lockers, the need to leave every morning, and the strict rules and regulations that limited social contacts being the most pressing issues. The transient nature of this accommodation was highlighted, with participants noting the lack of security in securing a bed each night and being unable to remain in the accommodation during the day. The rigidity of the rules in emergency accommodation was also described as limiting social contact, which in turn contributed to feelings of isolation. The profile of other service users was also mentioned as a concern, which reflects the need for young people experiencing homelessness to be placed in appropriate accommodation.

"Being in a homeless service was like a prison, sign in and out, back by 10"
- Participant in direct consultation.

Concerns regarding interactions with staff in the context of emergency accommodation primarily focused on the need for improved training in the needs of particular cohorts. Participants from the Traveller community expressed a need for Traveller-specific portion of homeless services, ideally staffed by members of the Traveller community with an understanding of their cultural and support needs. Participants also emphasised the importance of LGBTI+ services and domestic violence services, with staff trained in these areas. Overall, participants highlighted the importance of having understanding, empathetic and knowledgeable staff.

Practical concerns outlined by participants included the absence of options for safe storage of possessions, laundry facilities, and access to hygiene facilities and products. The lack of a permanent address was also noted as a challenge in accessing welfare, education and health services. Furthermore, members of the Traveller community highlighted the need for supports for individuals who may struggle with literacy, to ensure that they have full access to services.

Graver concerns in this respect include the increased risk of homeless young people of experiencing abuse, violence and trafficking. Several participants recounted being robbed, with one participant describing living "always on edge". There was also discussion of engaging in risky behaviour out of necessity to secure money or a place to stay.

> *"Undesirables in society prey on people with less support and backing, i.e. homeless people"*
> - Participant in direct consultation.

Many participants spoke of experiencing stigma and loneliness while homeless. Many described the feelings of shame and the impact on mental health associated with their time in homelessness. Experiences of discrimination and isolation were also common, as well as feeling susceptible to being taken advantage of. The example of couch-surfing was given, where individuals do a disproportionate amount of housework out of obligation to their host. This suggests a shift in relationship dynamics between individuals experiencing homelessness and those close to them.

The Kuhn and Culhane (1998) typology of homelessness based on emergency accommodation usage is well established in homelessness literature and has been replicated with PASS data (Parker, 2021). On the basis of cluster analysis of administrative datasets, Kuhn and Culhane identify three dominant types of homeless experiences: transitional (short-term), chronic (long-term) and episodic. These categories are determined as follows:

- *Short-term homelessness* – individuals who access emergency accommodation for one month or less or who have experienced homelessness for more than one month and up to six months but used emergency accommodation for 95% of this period.

- *Long-term homelessness* – individuals who have experienced homelessness for more than six months and occupied an emergency bed for 95% of their time in homelessness.

- *Episodic homelessness* – individuals who have been homeless for more than one month and have experienced one or more episodes of emergency accommodation use over a 12-month period. An episode is defined as using an emergency bed for one or more nights. Those who have used emergency accommodation for less than 95% of their time in homelessness are considered episodic users of emergency accommodation.

According to Bairéad and Norris (2020), young people are less likely to experience long-term homelessness and more likely to experience episodic homelessness than the rest of the single adult homeless population. In total, 63% of the cohort examined in their study could be classified as episodically homeless, though young men had a higher rate of episodic homelessness (67%) than young women (55%). These figures also showed that almost a third of young people (28%) ceased using emergency accommodation within six months or less, while fewer than 10% were categorised as long-term users. Bairéad and Norris also reported that most exits by 18-24-year-olds are to HAP Scheme tenancies, which reflects broader trends: 69% of overall exits in 2021 were to the private rental sector, the vast majority of these being supported by the HAP Scheme.

Mayock and Parker (2017) proposed that young people's movement through homelessness and subsequent exits can be understood by three distinct patterns:

1. Linear trajectories, characterised by relative stability, relatively positive relationships with family as well as service professionals, and generally lower level of needs;

2. Non-linear trajectories, characterised by relatively higher levels of residential mobility and a lack of predictability, fewer positive or supportive relationships with family and service professionals, and adverse experiences of domestic violence, periods of depression, drug-related relapse, and increased substance use; and

3. Chaotic trajectories or continuous homelessness, characterised by very high residential mobility, as well as insecurity and transience. Where present, relationships with family and service professionals are strained and engagement with services is typically low. High-level support needs are typical, and can relate to mental health challenges, substance misuse, and interaction with the criminal justice system.

Gaetz (2014) notes that young people experiencing homelessness, while facing adverse experiences, and potentially bearing trauma, are also tasked with managing a complex range of processes related to moving through homelessness and associated services. This can increase the risk of addiction, exploitation, and safety issues, potentially in a very compressed timeframe, for those who spend an extended period in homelessness.

Following on from this, those who are unable to exit homelessness for a prolonged period can become institutionalised, which in turn increases social isolation,

reduces the protective resources available to individuals, and is likely to result in additional housing and social difficulties (Mayock & Corr, 2013). Concerns over institutionalisation were also raised by young people during the direct consultation.

3.7 Existing Services for Young People Experiencing Homelessness

Throughout the country, there are already a number of accommodation facilities specifically targeting young people. Some facilities offer additional supports such as dedicated outreach aftercare services, tenancy sustainment services, and family mediation services. St Catherine's Foyer in Dublin is an example of dedicated supported temporary emergency accommodation for young people. Run by the Peter McVerry Trust, it includes 48 bedrooms and follows the well-established 'foyer model' of integrated living commonly found across Europe. Services beyond accommodation targeted at young people include the Extension Youth Service, run by Focus Ireland, a drop-in centre providing food, advice & information services and support in finding stable housing for young people. Focus Ireland also run a dedicated tenancy sustainment service to provide resettlement supports and divert 18-25 years olds from emergency accommodation.

Other youth services across the country provide counselling and mental health supports, life skills training, drug and alcohol treatment and LGBTI+ supports. A detailed list of existing services for young people experiencing homelessness is set out at Appendix 4.

3.8 Understanding Barriers to Young People Exiting Homelessness

As part of the direct consultation conducted, a range of barriers to exiting homelessness was identified by individuals with experience of homelessness. Among them were highlighted a lack of life skills, the difficulties of young parenthood, unemployment, and challenges sourcing accommodation.

A lack of life skills, including money management, was noted as a significant challenge as these skills were seen as a necessity to maintain a tenancy, which echoes the literature on this topic. Additional and more intensive services and supports in this realm were highlighted as essential to improving an individual's ability to exit homelessness and avoid re-entry. In this vein, the need for further supports to pursue education was emphasised, which could, in time, provide greater financial security for young people and divert them from a more precarious existence with the risk of homelessness.

"More courses for further education to get up the ladder"
- Participant in direct consultation.

Young parents consulted discussed the need for greater supports to facilitate their children's education. One noted that while children must attend school, *"there's thousands and thousands in costs for books, uniforms, etc. If you have 2 or 3 children, you're stuck"*. The importance of education continuity and maintenance of family schedule is well recognised in the literature, so as to minimise the impact on child development of time spent in homelessness.

Gaining employment as a challenge was a recurring theme in the direct consultation. Individuals mentioned the need for greater opportunities for those who may have little work experience or time spent in education. One participant commented that there was a need for *"more shops/businesses taking on the homeless. Give them jobs."*

Participants emphasised the high cost of renting and a shortage of available properties as serious barriers to exiting homelessness. While these are challenges for anyone experiencing homelessness, young people are likely to find this barrier more significant due to a lack of experience in tenancies and potential discrimination on the basis of their age. Members of the Traveller community in particular noted discrimination from landlords as a serious issue. One proposed intervention was increased financial supports to leave homelessness, such as grants to move into new accommodation (for rental deposits, supplies, etc.).[4]

Ross-Brown and Leavey (2021), in considering the Northern Irish context, found that certain factors aided young people significantly in exiting homelessness. These included disassociation from homeless peers, the support of family members, and engagement with drug treatment services. Additionally, Mayock and Corr (2013) note that the speed of a young person's exit from homelessness plays a central role in their successful pathways out of homelessness. However, young people who have experienced homelessness may also have complex needs and require additional support to sustain their tenancies.

Mayock and Parker (2017) argue that disengagement from (or indeed lack of access to) employment and education opportunities can adversely impact the self-worth of young people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness, which in turn reinforces their marginalisation in both social and economic aspects. Furthermore, the absence of meaningful structure and routine in their lives can leave young people feeling constrained.

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4   Such grants however are available via additional needs payments. This may illustrate the need for improved signposting of resources. Further information available at: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/social_welfare/social_welfare_payments/supplementary_welfare_schemes/additional_needs_payment.html

During the direct consultation, young people flagged a wide range of structural barriers and systemic dysfunctions that created obstacles to leaving emergency accommodation. Issues raised included:

- Difficulty in proving homeless status and **getting on a social housing waiting list**. Participants also identified their low priority on waiting lists as impeding their exits from homelessness and suggested that youth should act as a priority criterion for the list;

- **A lack of available properties**, especially for those who are not in employment;

- **Financial challenges** in affording rent. One individual aged 24 was asked for letters and statements from their parents when applying for social benefits, despite moving out of home at 16;

- **A lack of supports** or lack of awareness of supports and how to access them; and

- Travellers in particular flagged **prejudice and discrimination** among housing agents and landlords who are unwilling to accept them as tenants.

In discussing ways to help exit homelessness, participants suggested:

- **Additional tailored supports**, including assistance for young people with children and greater mental health support. The importance of local authority staff interacting with sympathy and understanding was also raised;

- Greater **financial support** to cover rent and help securing mortgages;

- **A wider variety of accessible accommodation**, including more affordable housing, social housing, and Traveller-specific accommodation in close proximity to the Traveller community;

- A better **focus on addressing their housing needs.** Suggestions included having more houses available to young people by having age as one of the criteria to get on the council list and having options for people to share accommodation on HAP. Other suggestions included having different types of accommodation, for example, more one-bedroom apartments, dedicated housing for young people, mixed gender accommodation, and more supported accommodation;

- More **support services.** Young people suggested offering a greater range of specialised supports amongst administrative services, for example in housing departments and social work. Other specific supports identified included life-skills training and grants to cover the cost of setting up a home; and

- Greater opportunities for **work and education** and improved wages. In addition to addressing the housing situation, some of the young people identified the need to support young people in improving their life options by accessing further education and/or to earn more to pay for accommodation. Suggestions included improving wages and providing more opportunities to secure employment by encouraging businesses to offering opportunities to less-experienced people.

3.9 Identified Vulnerable Cohorts

It is recognised that there are certain cohorts of young people who face additional challenges as a result of their background and/or day-to-day lives. These cohorts are particularly at risk of becoming homeless and are disproportionately represented in the young homeless population. Informed by research and recommendations received via the various consultations, this Strategy has identified six vulnerable cohorts and includes specific actions to help each cohort.

1. Care Leavers

Care leavers have long been identified as a group that is at a heightened risk of homelessness. This is largely due to factors including the lack of a family support network, a requirement to transition to independence earlier than many other young people, and adverse childhood experiences and trauma resulting in very complex needs. *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery,* the national strategy in response to drug and alcohol abuse, identified that – compared to the general population – care leavers are more at risk of not just homelessness but also mental health issues, addiction problems and isolation.

It must be acknowledged that, while some young people with care experience may be ready to progress to independent or semi-independent living at the age of 18, others will require a more supportive living environment. The provision of an appropriate continuum of accommodation for care leavers must be addressed.

Aftercare services are support services provided to young people who have been in care for more than 12 months between the ages of 13-18. Tusla has primary responsibility for the delivery of aftercare services to young people up to the age of 21 (or 23 if the eligible care leaver is attending an accredited education course, third-level course or training programme outlined in the young adult's aftercare plan).

The Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015 does not place a statutory responsibility on Tusla to provide accommodation for care leavers, but it does place a legal duty on the Agency to provide each young person eligible for an aftercare service with an assessment of need and an aftercare plan. The *National Aftercare Policy for Alternative Care* (2017) and the aftercare planning requirements introduced by the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015 reflect the need to meet the complexity and variety of these young adults' needs, with individually tailored aftercare planning and supports that are responsive and relevant. This includes identifying and supporting young people in accessing suitable accommodation, as well as further education, employment or training, and family support. These core requirements are prioritised in the provision of aftercare services.

While there are many existing supports for care leavers, including access to an Aftercare Grant to cover the initial costs associated with sourcing independent accommodation and access to Aftercare Drop-in Centres, it has been highlighted through the consultations that improved supports are urgently required. Key issues raised across various consultations included waiting lists for aftercare supports; high caseloads for aftercare workers; lack of appropriate transitional and long-term housing solutions for care leavers; and the transition from child to adult services. Tusla is currently developing a Strategic Plan for Aftercare Services (2023-2025).

The provision of appropriate accommodation is as important as the provision of supports. Focus Ireland's (Dixon, Ward, & Stein, 2018) research paper 'Brighter Futures for Care Leavers', which involved a consultation to gather views of those with care experience (individuals in or leaving care as well as aftercare workers), found that accommodation was identified as a considerable concern for young people transitioning from care. Aftercare workers referred to a lack of aftercare accommodation, a general shortage of specific move-on accommodation for care leavers, and barriers to accessing independent tenancies.

In recognition of the risk of homelessness for care leavers with complex needs, a separate category was introduced under DHLGH's Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) in 2017, which allows funding to be provided for accommodation for such individuals. The aim is that the secure tenancy and social landlord support available through CAS, and the aftercare support from Tusla and other relevant agencies, will alleviate the lack of suitable accommodation for care leavers with complex needs and help to prevent a potential cycle of homelessness. *Housing for All* commits to the continued provision of capital funding to support the further development of such accommodation.

This Strategy commits to supporting care leavers with the following actions specifically for this cohort:

i. Tusla to finalise its Strategic Plan for Aftercare 2023-2025, which will align with this Strategy, as well as containing a commitment to an integrated approach to implementing key recommendations on the provision of an appropriate continuum of accommodation for young people with care experience; and

i. Review and update Housing Circular 46/2014 on the Protocol on Young People Leaving State Care.

2. Disabled People

The 2016 census recorded 1,817 homeless people with some form of disability in Ireland. The overall prevalence of disabled people among those who were homeless on Census Night in 2016 was 27%. This represents a steep decline as compared to 2011, when the figure stood at 41%.[5] However, this is still a higher rate of homelessness than in the general population, with 0.29% of disabled people classified as homeless compared to 0.14% of the general population.

Pathway Two of *Housing for All* – 'Eradicating Homelessness, Increasing Social Housing Delivery and Supporting Social Inclusion', is concerned with improving equality of opportunity, individual choice and independent living for disabled people. *Housing for All* describes how *"delivering an appropriate range of housing types and related support services, in an integrated support services, in an integrated and sustainable manner, is critically important in order to promote equality of opportunity, individual choice and independent living for people with a disability"* (Government of Ireland, 2021, p. 67).

Some of the issues raised via the various consultations included challenges associated with finding suitable housing for young disabled people, those young people who may require but may not meet the criteria for Health Service Executive (HSE) support services, and a lack of supports for those with mental health issues to maintain existing accommodation.

The housing needs of young disabled people must be considered in tandem with the *National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027*. The overarching vision for this Strategy is to facilitate disabled people to live independently. The Implementation Plan that will be prepared by the Housing Agency and published in 2022 will contain details of how the Strategy's outcomes can be achieved, and progress monitored.

5   https://nda.ie/resources/factsheets/nda-factsheet-5-housing/

The provision of mental health services is critically important in any effort to address homelessness, as there is a long-established association between mental ill health and homelessness (Watts, Johnsen, & Sosenko, 2015). It is acknowledged that people with psychosocial disabilities or mental health difficulties require access to good-quality, secure and appropriate housing to facilitate and sustain their recovery. *Sharing the Vision*, Ireland's Mental Health Policy prepared by the DoH, recommends that DHLGH, in collaboration with DoH, and in consultation with relevant stakeholders, should develop a joint protocol to guide the effective transition of individuals from HSE-supported accommodation to community living. A working group that includes representation from DoH, HSE and DHLGH has now been established and will implement this action.

This Strategy commits to supporting disabled people with the following actions specifically for this cohort:

i. Design and deliver training sessions for homeless service providers, to ensure that they have the knowledge base to provide support and relevant information to disabled people; and

ii. Review the availability of mental health supports for young people in emergency accommodation and implement any recommendations.

3. Young Parents, in Particular Those Parenting Alone

In the Dublin region in 2021, 427 young people entered emergency accommodation for the first time. 325 of these 427 (76%) were part of a family and 115 (27%) were lone parents. Of those 115 lone parents, 113 were female and 2 were male.

The Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP) works with young people who become parents, offering support in all areas including parenting, health and housing. Each year since 2016, the TPSP has conducted a 'census' of all its service users with a serious housing need. This includes not just homeless parents but also parents in insecure or inadequate accommodation. They have reported that, from 2016 to 2021, these figures increased by 35% despite the early intervention and advocacy from TPSP.

Research by Lambert, O'Callaghan and Jump (2018) found that many young people left their family home after becoming parents, either due to fraying familial relationships or due to concern for their child's wellbeing. Other reasons included parental ill health, parental substance misuse, and experiences of adversity and

trauma during childhood. It has been noted that early parenthood had a particular impact on these young people's ability to engage with training or education, which in turn negatively impacted the financial resources available to them to navigate the housing market.

Prior research findings (Mayock, Parker, & Murphy, 2014) further highlight a need for specialised support for young mothers to be provided by mainstream services following their move to independent living situations, particularly in relation to parenting, post-natal depression and domestic violence, in some cases.

Some of the issues raised via the various consultations included overcrowding in the family home, the additional pressures faced by young parents to balance the responsibilities of adulthood while raising a family and supports available for pregnant women and parents accessing emergency accommodation.

Supporting Parents: A National Model of Parenting Support Services was launched in April 2022 and takes a whole-of-Government approach to improving supports for parenting and helping parents to feel more confident, informed and able. Four goals have been identified as central elements to achieving the model's vision: (1) greater awareness of parenting support services; (2) greater access to parenting support services; (3) more inclusive parenting support services; and (4) needs-led and evidence-informed parenting support services. The Model recognises that different groups experience different challenges in their parenting role, and in accessing services.

This Strategy commits to supporting young parents with the following actions specifically for this cohort:

i. Review existing supports and identify any additional supports that could be made available to young pregnant women in homelessness from an early stage that follows through with postnatal care; and

ii. Review different types of parenting support services that are currently available for young parents experiencing or exiting homelessness and seek to identify gaps in the national and local provision of services for young parents who are experiencing or exiting homelessness. Following the completion of the review/s, an agreed approach should be developed to facilitate a more consistent provision of these services.

4. Members of the Traveller Community

In recognition of the need for a structure to advise the Minister on matters concerning accommodation for Travellers, the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (NTACC) was established, on a statutory basis, under the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998. Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees (LTACCs) operate at a local level to provide a liaison between Travellers and the local authority, and to advise in the preparation and implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs).

The 2016 census showed that Irish Travellers are much younger than the general population, with almost 60% of Travellers aged under 25, compared with just 33.4% of the general population. The 2016 census also found that almost a quarter of Travellers aged between 15 and 24 were married (23%), compared with 1.2% of the general population. Statistically, Travellers are more likely to have started a family within this age range than the general population. As Traveller households were more likely to be multiple family (4% compared with 1% of the general population), overcrowding in the family home is a significant issue for many Traveller households.

As well as being overrepresented in the general homeless population (Harvey, 2021), the relative youth of the Traveller population leads them to be disproportionately susceptible to the same factors that drive youth homelessness more generally. Additionally, research indicates that Travellers experience extremely high levels of discrimination within the private rental sector, already one of the main drivers into homelessness for the general population. One study (Grotti et al., 2018) estimated that Travellers are almost 10 times more likely to report discrimination in access to housing than the non-Traveller population, even after education and labour market status are held constant.

In a direct consultation with young Travellers for this Strategy, one individual commented:

> *"Landlords won't take you on once they realise you're a Traveller, when they hear your accent or see your second name. You can be accepted for HAP, but once the landlord realises you're a Traveller, they'll turn you down."*

Some issues raised, via the other various consultations held, included the need for young Travellers to live close to family, as this is a well-established part of Traveller culture; the need for more supports provided by fellow members of the Traveller community who have a better understanding of their cultural needs; and difficulties

accessing the housing list where young Travellers are deemed to be accommodated with their parents and therefore ineligible for social housing supports.

Consultations with young Travellers for the *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021* (then Department of Justice and Equality) highlighted the pressures felt by young Travellers *"to integrate, become like the settled population and deny one's identity"* (p. 14).

This Strategy commits to supporting young Travellers with the following actions specifically for this cohort:

i. Local authorities will work with the LTACCs to consider and put in place any additional supports that are required at a local level to assist young Travellers who are at risk of experiencing homelessness; and

ii. Include specific actions in future Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs), to address youth homelessness.

5. Members of the LGBTI+ Community[6]

An evaluation (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2013) of the 2001 *Youth Homelessness Strategy* noted that the specific needs of minority groups, including young LGBTQ+ people, were neither clearly identified, nor well understood/catered for by Irish homeless services. More recent research (Quilty & Norris, 2020) further highlighted the deficit of data on the prevalence of young LGBTQI+ people in Irish homeless services. Particular challenges arise in relation to quantifying homeless LGBTQ+ young people: as well as the anxieties surrounding the disclosure of sexual and gender identities, which is inherently sensitive personal data, there is the methodological challenge involved in defining who should be classified as LGBTI+, which can be a challenge for young people themselves.

In a qualitative study of homeless LGBTQI+ youth in Ireland, Quilty and Norris (2020, p.81) found that their experiences of homeless services are often unsatisfactory, with individuals sometimes disguising their LGBTQI+ identities due to *"fears for their own personal safety given their frequent encounters with stigma, homophobia and transphobia, and a desire to 'fit in' so as to secure safe accommodation".*

6　　Please note that the variations of this acronym used within the following section reflect the acronyms used by the authors of the various studies referenced.

Concerns were articulated surrounding *"personal safety in shared accommodation settings, the sex-segregated nature of [emergency accommodation] and the exposure to drug and other abuse..."* Furthermore, homeless services were associated with a *"lack of understanding or blatant homophobic and transphobic attitudes among both other service users and staff, the potential for misgendering and fear of further isolation"* (p. 113).

Positive, engaging relationships with frontline homelessness staff have been identified elsewhere (Mayock and Parker, 2017) as a critical factor in stabilising the housing trajectories of homeless youth and helping them to regain a sense of self-worth. The *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020* outlined a goal of creating a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTI+ young people. This included implementing evidence-based LGBTI+ training, continuing professional development (CPD) initiatives and guidelines targeted at professional service providers and youth services, including homeless service providers.

LGBTI+ young people are vulnerable not only to those triggers experienced among young people at large, but also factors relating exclusively to their sexuality and gender identities that may increase their risk of experiencing homelessness. Research has consistently identified familial rejection as the main trigger for LGBTI+ homelessness (Watts, Johnsen and Sosenko, 2015; Quilty and Norris, 2020). In the direct consultation process, members of the Travelling community in particular noted the stigma and disownment that can accompany an LGBTI+ identity.

Transgender youth notably are a particularly vulnerable cohort, as the risk of parental rejection may be higher when young people are subjected to extreme familial pressure to conform to the gender assigned at their birth (Durso & Gates, 2012).

Research has also found that LGBTI+ youth experiencing homelessness are more vulnerable to violence and discrimination, substance abuse and mental health problems, sexual exploitation and risky sexual behaviour (Watts, Johnsen and Sosenko, 2015). The mental health of young LGBTI+ people was aggravated by a variety of situational and environmental factors: physical health challenges; the stress of being 'on alert' and concerned for their safety; the practice of 'night walking' to avoid having to enter emergency accommodation or sleep rough; and the stress and guilt associated with couch-surfing and housing instability. In addition to experiencing the same issues with housing supply and affordability as other young people, LGBTI+ young people are faced with the challenge of finding suitable people with whom to share accommodation.

Research has reinforced the role of friendship and community to LGBTI+ homeless youth as important avenues of support and encouragement. This takes on a particularly strong resonance given the prevalence of estrangement from 'natural families', and it is acknowledged that best practice when managing youth homelessness is to allow young people to define their families (Gaetz & Dej, 2017).

This Strategy commits to supporting members of the LGBTI+ community with the following actions specifically for this cohort:

i. Offer LGBTI+ Youth Homelessness Training Workshops for service providers to ensure a better understanding of LGBTI+ issues and the various forms of discrimination; and

ii. Develop privacy and safety strategies for young LGBTI+ people using emergency accommodation, informed directly by LGBTI+ youth, which could be implemented by the homeless service providers.

6. Individuals Leaving Prison Services

The *Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027* was published in April 2021 as a whole-of-Government approach to address the factors that underlie offending behaviour by children and young people. It was conceived as a developmental framework, encompassing a broad range of issues that may contribute to offending behaviour by children and young people, as well as measures for diversion away from offending, necessary criminal justice processes, detention (as a final resort), and post-detention supports. The *Youth Justice Strategy* recognises that multiple disadvantages often trigger the involvement of children and young people with the Criminal Justice System.

Previous research commissioned by the Irish Probation Service demonstrated a strong association between interactions with the criminal justice system and experiences with homelessness, especially among young people (Seymour & Costello, 2005). In a sample of Irish prisoners, 54% had experienced homelessness at least once prior to imprisonment, with many experiencing lengthy periods of homelessness. A total of 64% of these had first experienced homelessness before the age of 19. A quarter of prisoners were homeless on committal to prison. Approximately half of all homeless offenders progressing through the criminal justice system, and almost three quarters (73%) of all homeless individuals referred to the Probation Service were under 30 years of age. Homeless offenders rated highly

on a range of indicators of disadvantage, including poor education, employment, accommodation, lack of family and other supports, drug and alcohol misuse, and mental health issues.

Evidently, homelessness is not only a predictor of, but a catalyst for higher levels of criminality among society's most materially deprived youths. Homelessness is an issue for many offenders in Ireland, but disproportionately so for young people. Early intervention is critical to halt the self-perpetuating cycle of incarceration to homelessness. Researchers in the UK have noted that 69% of offenders with an accommodation need reoffend within two years, compared to 40% who were in suitable accommodation (Howard, 2006), with young offenders in particular being linked to higher rates of recidivism (Watts, Johnsen and Sosenko, 2015).

Mayock, Parker and Murphy's (2014) work with young people experiencing homelessness in Ireland highlighted a notable gender gap in patterns and types of offending behaviour. Of the 40 young people surveyed (25 male/15 female), all young men reported contact with the Gardaí at some point in their lives and 10 had spent time in prison. Two thirds of young women reported contact with the Gardaí, although none had received a custodial sentence. They describe how *"first contact with the Gardaí was often linked to substance use and typically occurred in the young people's home neighbourhoods during their early to mid-teenage years. For most of them, involvement in criminal activity increased following their entry into the 'official' network of homeless youth"* (p. 9).

Housing for All recognises that prisoners and other people convicted before the courts frequently present as homeless with high and complex support needs and that homelessness poses a significant risk for many post release. A Subgroup has been established under the auspices of NHAC to consider the evidence regarding homelessness following exits from residential settings, including prisons, and potential measures to mitigate the risk.

This Strategy commits to support young individuals leaving prison with the following action:

i. Consider measures to be implemented as recommended by NHAC Subgroup B in the context of young people leaving prison.

3.10 Housing-led Interventions for Youth

Just as the causes and conditions of homelessness for youth are distinct, so too do young people require their own distinct housing solutions. Many have advocated for a housing-led intervention to play an important role in addressing youth homelessness, including in the consultation phase for the Strategy. This Strategy commits to developing a pilot model for such an intervention under the name Supported Housing for Youth (SHY). As well as being a housing-centered solution, SHY emphasises the need to provide young people with a flexible level of supports. SHY will operate under the core principles of:

- Access to housing with reasonable conditions;
- Youth choice, youth voice and self-determination;
- Positive youth development and wellness orientation;
- Individualised, client-driven supports;
- Social inclusion and community integration;
- Separation of housing and supports; and
- Assertive engagement without coercion.

Supported Housing for Youth (SHY) – International Approach

Similar programmes are run in several countries under the banner of Housing First for Youth (HF4Y), a youth-oriented adaptation of the well-known Housing First model. HF4Y shares with mainstream Housing First the underlying philosophy that individuals who have experienced homelessness will do better and recover more effectively if they are first provided with housing. However, it has been noted that the international evidence base on HF4Y is not as well developed as for mainstream Housing First for adults (Mayock & Parker, 2017). Internationally, programmes operating under the banner of HF4Y do so with varying degrees of fidelity to the core principles of Housing First. Models of accommodation for youth that fall under the Housing First umbrella take different forms and include transitional housing models in some jurisdictions, including Ireland. A consistent conceptual model of HF4Y was not outlined until the publication of a Housing First for Youth *Program Model Guide* (Gaetz, 2017) by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.

As with Housing First, in HF4Y individuals are not required to first demonstrate that they are 'ready' for housing. Housing is not conditional on sobriety or abstinence, and housing and treatment are distinct. Clients are actively involved in decision-

making, and they jointly determine the nature of the supports they receive over the course of the programme.

Where HF4Y differs from mainstream Housing First is in the flexibility and adaptable nature of the supports provided. HF4Y recognises that each young person has a unique level of need and therefore requires a unique level of support. As a result, support times are flexible, and supports are designed around client needs. Time is invested in building a trusting relationship with clients and focus is placed on positive life changes. Furthermore, there are two key conditions of the programme: young people must agree to a weekly visit or contact with a caseworker; and if they have an income source, they are expected to contribute up to 30% to the cost of the rent.

There is a significant focus on interpersonal development and life-skills acquisition within the programme. Operationally, HF4Y accounts for not only adolescent social and mental development, but also the fact that many young people within homeless services have undergone significant traumatic experiences. The HF4Y model endorses a *"positive youth development"* orientation, a strengths-based approach that focuses not just on risk and vulnerability but also a young person's assets. A positive youth-development approach identifies these strengths to foster self-esteem and improve problem-solving skills. It is important that young people engage in personal goal-setting and that youth support officers work to enhance the natural supports of their environment.

Beyond accommodation, they should be offered health and wellbeing supports; access to education and employment; social inclusion supports (to help individuals integrate socially into the community); and complementary supports (for example life skills, advocacy, and legal supports).

An evaluation of an early HF4Y programme in Alberta, Canada (Scott & Harrison, 2013) found that it had an 85-90% housing retention rate, broadly similar with international evidence on mainstream Housing First approaches. That approach adhered closely to a traditional conception of Housing First, with clients housed via a scattered site approach and without preconditions. Of those over the age of 18 in the programme for six months or more, 63% had a stable income either through employment, alternative funding, or education or employment programmes. A total of 94% of those over the age of 18 in the programme for more than six months reported that it had supported them in accessing community resources. Other research into Housing First for young people with mental illness (Kozloff, et al., 2016), also in Canada, indicated that the programme improved days spent in stable housing compared to treatment as usual.

Supported Housing for Youth (SHY) in an Irish Context – Limerick Youth Housing

In December 2012, Focus Ireland, Limerick City and County Council and Tusla established a Working Group to identify the needs and issues facing young people who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in the Midwest region. The Working Group recommended a model loosely based on Housing First, which in turn led to the establishment of Limerick Youth Housing (LYH). LYH housed its first client in May 2013.

Although similar to Housing First, in that it takes an accommodation-before-treatment approach, LYH has developed organically in response to local needs and constraints. For example, some young people share accommodation, whereas in mainstream Housing First clients receive their own designated tenancy. Decisions around sharing accommodation are based on the desire of the young people themselves and also considerations of their routines (e.g., their engagement with employment or training). This information is captured at assessment and fed back to wider-allocation group meetings for discussion. Unlike mainstream Housing First, where the objective is to permanently retain accommodation for clients, in LYH accommodation is conceptualised as transitional but open ended. Focus Ireland occupies the role of a 'sympathetic landlord' (Lawlor & Bowen, 2017) to address the lack of secure housing options for young people. LYH also provides outreach to young people living in private rental accommodation and offers tenancy sustainment for those who have exited the project.

In Limerick, the project operates as a partnership between Tusla and Focus Ireland, with support from agencies such as Limerick City and County Council

and funding from DHLGH. Tusla gives referrals to the project, chair and staff the accommodations meetings, as well as providing staff to offer follow-on support to clients once they are housed. Focus Ireland then manages the housing, as well as providing key worker support or outreach to each client. Allocations meetings have expanded to include other relevant stakeholders where appropriate (e.g., other NGOs operating in the homelessness sector). As with aftercare, accommodation is offered at age 18, with the intention that it is ended at 21. However, this may be extended to 23, where clients are in education. The service aims to identify potential clients prior to their 18th birthday.

An evaluation of LYH (Lawlor & Bowen, 2017) found that service-users self-reported significant improvements in physical health, life satisfaction and managing interpersonal relations. The evaluation report highlighted the inter-agency partnership approach driving LYH as a key factor in its success. This has resulted in young people receiving greater levels of support, and the cooperation of different stakeholders has rendered the possibility of more creative solutions. The LYH evaluation highlighted several strengths resulting from the partnership approach:

- The prioritisation of cases, which has assisted in early identification of need;

- The strong relationships with local government and statutory agencies, which has improved accountability for outcomes and decisions;

- Service quality; and

- Overall retention.

Truly exiting homelessness will be an incremental process for many. Mayock and Corr (2013) note that among young people who have successfully exited homelessness in Ireland, the transition to stable housing was facilitated by a number of developments (including return to education and reconciliation with family), all of which accompanied, rather than preceded, the move to stable housing. It may be that only certain individuals will respond receptively to HF4Y (Mayock & Parker, 2017; Forchuk, et al., 2013; Munson et al., 2017). However, models of housing with a strongly supported dimension, including congregate sites with shared living spaces, may be more appropriate for other young people, particularly those with high support needs.

Supported Housing for Youth (SHY) – Pilot

It is envisioned that SHY should be developed to be as adaptable and flexible as possible by incorporating the following elements:

- A range of accommodation options, including shared accommodation and one-bed units;

- Supports to build on the clients' strengths, skills, and relationships to enable them to fully integrate in their community and engage with education and the labour market;

- Interpersonal development and life-skills acquisition; access to education and employment; social inclusion supports (to help individuals to integrate socially into the community); and complementary supports (for example life skills, advocacy and legal supports);

- Youth workers to enhance the natural supports of their environment (i.e., family reunification program and family mediation programme);

- A variation in the level of supports provided: clients should be assessed on a case-by-case basis to determine the level of supports required; and

- Time-limited participation in this programme, with the end goal being that the client is in a position to live independently. Entry should be conditional on the development of a multi-year goal setting plan (i.e., educational, employment and personal development goals) tied to the life cycle of the programme. Progress towards these goals should correspond with the gradual tapering of supports. The goal-setting plan should also set out a client's realistic pathway into stable accommodation, whether through the private rental sector or with social housing supports such as HAP.

Part Two

Strategic Aims,
Actions and
Implementation.

Part Two – Strategic Aims, Actions and Implementation

4. Strategic Aims and Actions

This Strategy has been underpinned by an extensive consultation process, which ran over the first half of 2022. Existing research on youth homelessness, both in Ireland and internationally, has further informed the Strategy. As a result, this Strategy has formulated three strategic aims:

i. To prevent young people from entering homelessness;

ii. To improve the experiences of young people in accessing emergency accommodation;

iii. To assist young people in exiting homelessness.

4.1 Strategic Aim 1: To Prevent Young People from Entering Homelessness

It is an absolute priority to prevent young people from entering homelessness in the first instance. As established, young people present as homeless for a wide variety of reasons and any prevention-based approach to homelessness therefore requires inter-agency collaboration across a wide range of stakeholders. The prevention measures set out in this Strategy recognise that the pathways into homelessness can begin before a young person reaches 18, and they have therefore been developed in such a way as to also assist younger people.

This Strategy recognises that the right supports at the right time can be crucial to ensuring the wellbeing and successful development of a young person. While there are many policies already in place to support young people, it is vital to ensure that they remain relevant and effective.

The Strategy sets out the following actions to prevent young people from entering homelessness:

1. **Develop information and awareness campaigns on housing rights and available supports specifically targeting young people**

Given current conditions in the housing market, it is more important than ever to ensure that young people understand their rights and entitlements when it comes to housing. In the consultations, it became apparent that young people can be uncertain about their rights, so there is a need to develop further information and awareness campaigns on this subject, specifically targeting young people. Such campaigns should address the need for all young people at risk of homelessness to engage with their local housing authority, and include clear information on waiting times for social housing, accessing HAP and the private rental market. Such

campaigns should also focus on providing information in plain English to ensure that they are accessible to as many people as possible, including those with literacy difficulties and/or poor English proficiency.

2. Develop and implement homelessness prevention programmes for young people

A structured and comprehensive approach is needed to stem the rising levels of young people presenting as homeless. Local authorities should work with DCEDIY and Tusla to develop clear processes to identify young people at risk of homelessness and consideration should also be given to the possible strategic pathways that could guide young people away from presenting as homeless.

3. Strengthen support structures for young people and families who are experiencing domestic conflict and breakdown

It is recognised that some young people, on turning 18, may lose the support of parents or guardians, who consider them to suddenly be an adult and entirely responsible for their own well-being. These young people may become pressured to leave the family home. Specific support should be provided to young people aged both under and over 18 and their families to assist, insofar as possible, in resolving differences that may result in the young person becoming at risk of homelessness.

4. Enhance connectivity between local authorities and Tusla, to ensure that appropriate supports can be provided

Tusla's family support services focus on early intervention aiming to promote and protect the health, wellbeing and rights of all children, young people and their families. If a young person is at risk of becoming homeless due to family reasons, enhancing connections between local authorities and Tusla, where appropriate, will help to ensure that those aged both under and over 18, and their families, receive the appropriate support at the earliest possible stage.

5. Consider and implement, as appropriate, the recommendations by NHAC Subgroup C on enhancing family support and prevention and early intervention services for children and their families, particularly those recommendations relating to teenage children

There is significant evidence pointing to the capacity for the family to act as a stabilising force within the lives of young people experiencing disruption. Housing for All includes the action "Enhance family support and prevention and early intervention services for children and their families through a multiagency and coordinated approach, and disseminate innovative practice. For those families and children in emergency accommodation it is critical that appropriate supports are provided in order to secure pathways out of homelessness."

Within this context, a Subgroup of NHAC has been established to examine additional measures and possible improvements to early intervention services for children and families. The subgroup, whose membership includes Tusla, the HSE and bodies from the NGO sector, are due to present their final recommendations at the Q4 2022 meeting of NHAC. These actions will be considered and implemented as appropriate.

6. Tusla to finalise its Strategic Plan for Aftercare 2023-2025, which should align with this Strategy, as well as including a commitment to an integrated approach to implementing key recommendations on providing an appropriate continuum of accommodation for young people with care experience

Tusla is currently working on its Strategic Plan for Aftercare 2023-2025 which, when completed, will provide a blueprint for improvements to the service. Addressing the crises faced by care leavers requires an interdisciplinary, whole-of-Government approach. DHLGH commits to ensuring the availability of sufficient capital funding for accommodation options for care leavers.

7. Review and update Housing Circular 46/2014 on the Protocol on Young People Leaving State Care

It is essential that a robust screening mechanism is in place for care leavers, so that high-risk cases with complex needs can be referred from aftercare services to senior management in housing authorities. The updated Circular will provide that the provision of units to care leavers should be monitored through Housing Delivery Action Plans and will also align with Tusla's forthcoming Strategic Plan for Aftercare.

8. Work with the LTACCs to consider and put in place any additional supports that are required at a local level to assist young Travellers who are at risk of experiencing homelessness.

This Strategy acknowledges that Travellers are not only at a heightened risk of homelessness but are deeply susceptible to the structural factors that drive individuals into this situation. DHLGH is committed to working collaboratively with LTACCs to prevent young Travellers from presenting as homeless.

9. Consider measures to be implemented as recommended by NHAC Subgroup B in the context of young people leaving prison.

A significant body of research points to the high rates of homelessness amongst the general prison population. Additionally, recently released prisoners with an accommodation need demonstrate higher rates of recrimination.

Within this context, a subgroup of NHAC has been established to examine additional measures and possible improvements to transitions from institutional settings. This subgroup will consider the evidence regarding homelessness following exits from such services or centres and existing and potential measures to mitigate the risk with reference to the points set out below. The subgroup, whose membership includes the Irish Prison Service, the DRHE and bodies from the NGO sector, are due to present their final recommendations at the Q4 2022 meeting of NHAC. These actions will be considered and implemented as appropriate.

4.2 Strategic Aim 2: To Improve the Experiences of Young People in Accessing Emergency Accommodation

This Strategy recognises that emergency accommodation is not a substitute for a proper home and that a young person's stay in emergency accommodation should be as brief as possible. However, consideration must be given to improving the experiences of young people currently accessing homeless services. Young adulthood is a particularly challenging time to experience homelessness, and as illustrated earlier, young people are likely to be presenting as homeless with complex needs and personal histories of trauma and abuse. Services for young people should be developed around this reality. The Strategy recognises that those on the frontline have an invaluable role in providing support to vulnerable young people. The importance of knowledgeable and empathetic service providers cannot be underestimated.

10. Examine the establishment of a framework for specific assessments for young people presenting to services in order to identify supports required

Vulnerable young people, having endured life experiences unique to their age cohort, require distinct initial assessments on presenting to homeless services. By taking a holistic approach to young peoples' needs, including accommodation, health and wellbeing, staff and support services have the opportunity to tailor a more comprehensive support package for young people. Such assessments should consider the needs of the young person, particularly their health needs, and establish what supports are required for ensuring the wellbeing of the young person while accessing emergency accommodation, in order to safeguard their safe exit from homelessness. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth will liaise with Tusla and the local authority sector to examine the establishment of a framework for specific assessments for young people presenting to services in order to identify supports required

11. Establish further dedicated emergency accommodation for young people that promotes an inclusive ethos, including for LGBTI+ and Traveller communities, and which has designated spaces allowing for visits from family members of residents

It is acknowledged that many young people feel that standard emergency accommodation is unsafe and unsuitable, largely due to sharing a space with people of different ages who may be long-term users of homeless services and who may have complex mental health or addiction issues. The Strategy therefore commits to establishing further dedicated emergency accommodation specifically for young people. Local authorities should consider the establishment of emergency accommodation similar to the Foyer model of emergency accommodation. The Foyer model offers an integrated living model where young people are securely housed, and are offered living skills and are either enrolled in education or training, or are employed. Such accommodation should promote an inclusive ethos, including for members of the LGBTI+ and Traveller communities. It should have designated spaces that allow for visits from family members of residents and that facilitates the holding of workshops and information sessions. In recognition of the reality of period poverty, such accommodation should also provide free sanitary products for those who need them. Drug-free accommodation should be established for those young people who are not substance users. The *Programme for Government* includes a commitment to increase funding for drug-free hostels. Local authorities should use this funding stream to develop emergency accommodation options that give young people the chance to transition out of homelessness into as safe an environment as possible.

12. **Ensure that service providers are trained in developmentally informed approaches, including trauma-informed care.**

Homeless young people may have experienced significant trauma. Staff need to have a well-developed understanding of the traumatic experiences suffered by young people, and how this has shaped their behaviour.

13. **Review the availability of mental health supports for young people in emergency accommodation and implement any recommendations**

Young adulthood is a particularly challenging time to experience homelessness, young people are likely to present as homeless with complex needs and personal histories of trauma and abuse. Services for young people should be developed around this reality, rather than expecting all young people to demonstrate unreasonable levels of maturity. Mental health services need to be well equipped to support young people who encounter such difficulties.

14. **Provide adult guidance services to identify suitable Further Education and Training (FET) courses for people experiencing homelessness**

There are a number of courses available in the FET sector to improve the living skills of people who are experiencing homelessness or are potentially at risk of homelessness. By offering prospective students an opportunity to develop their skills and secure a job, FET courses can not only provide structure and routine but can potentially be a route out of homelessness. The Education and Training Boards (ETBS) can help to determine, in partnership with individuals, the most appropriate FET opportunities for each individual, based on their particular set of circumstances.

15. **Ensure the specific inclusion of young people in regional Homelessness Action Plans, with particular consideration given to those who have been identified in the Strategy as vulnerable cohorts**

The administration of homeless services is organised on a regional basis with a lead authority in place for each region. Under Chapter 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, regional lead authorities are charged with adopting homelessness action plans specifying the measures they propose to be undertake to address homelessness in their administrative area. This Strategy, as provided for under article 37 (4) of the Act, requests authorities to ensure the specific inclusion of young people in Regional Homelessness Action Plans, with consideration given to those who have been identified in the Strategy as vulnerable cohorts.

16. Design and deliver training sessions for homeless service providers, to ensure that they have the knowledge base to provide support and relevant information to disabled people

As has been noted, disabilities are highly prevalent amongst the homeless community. Accessing emergency accommodation with a disability can prove to be extremely challenging. Staff should be equipped with the full and proper knowledge to support those with disabilities.

17. Review existing supports and identify any additional supports that could be made available to young pregnant women in homelessness from an early stage that follows through with postnatal care

Young pregnant women can face particular challenges when accessing homeless services. They may require a wide range of supports – not only housing assistance, but health, social and economic supports. It is important that these interventions are made as early as possible, so as to avoid inflicting the trauma of homelessness on a new generation.

18. Review different types of parenting support services that are currently available for young parents experiencing or exiting homelessness and seek to identify gaps in national and local provision of services. Following the completion of the review/s, an agreed approach should be developed to facilitate a more consistent provision of these services

While supports for young parents in emergency accommodation exist, results from the consultation process indicate that there may be gaps in the provision of services nationally. The Strategy commits DCEDIY and Tusla to undertake a review of the available parenting support services and to develop a consistent approach to the provision of these services.

19. Offer LGBTI+ Youth Homelessness Training Workshops for service providers, to ensure that they have a better understanding of LGBTI+ issues and the various forms of discrimination faced by members of this community

As has been noted, individuals with LGBTI+ identities may be disinclined to engage with homeless services out of fear that their identities will not be understood or respected. Specific training workshops can help service providers to gain a better understanding of LGBTI+ issues and the various forms of discrimination involved.

20. Develop privacy and safety strategies for young LGBTI+ people using emergency accommodation, informed directly by LGBTI+ youth, to be implemented by the homeless service providers

Several submissions from the consultation process highlighted the particular needs of the LGBTI+ community while in emergency accommodation. Developing privacy and safety strategies for young LGBTI+ people can render emergency accommodation as a safe, inclusive environment for all, respecting the needs of clients.

21. Include specific actions in future Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs), to address youth homelessness

Consultations in preparation for the Strategy highlighted the specific needs and challenges faced by young Travellers experiencing homelessness. Recognising the issue of youth homelessness within the Traveller community, this Strategy commits to ensuring that all future TAPs reflect this and sets out actions to address the issues.

4.3 Strategic Aim 3: To Assist Young People in Exiting Homelessness

The rapidity of the response to homelessness is critical. Therefore, in order to minimise entrenched long-term homelessness and the 'institutionalisation' of individuals within homeless services, it is essential for young people to exit into sustainable housing solutions to mitigate, as far as possible, the risk of re-entry into homelessness. Where appropriate, these measures could also be applied to prevent the entry of young people into homelessness in the first instance.

22. Develop a pilot model of a housing-led intervention for young people: Supported Housing for Youth (SHY)

Where prevention has failed, responses to homelessness must be first and foremost housing based. This Strategy commits to developing a national model for SHY, which will be a youth housing-led intervention for young people with complex needs, who have experienced homelessness. Those who have been identified as a vulnerable cohort within this Strategy, and who may be at risk of homelessness, may also be eligible to participate. The model for SHY takes inspiration from existing models of HF4Y. SHY will be developed to provide housing with reasonable conditions, offer individualised, client-driven supports separated from housing, encourage positive youth development and community integration, and offer assertive engagement

without coercion. The conditions of SHY will be finalised by the Steering Group in consultation with key stakeholders. It is intended that a range of accommodation options will be available, including shared accommodation and one-bed units. It is envisioned that the programme will provide that young people must agree to regular contact with a youth support worker; that if they have an income source, they make a partial contribution to the rent; and that on entering the programme, clients engage in personal goal-setting, the progression of which should correspond with the gradual tapering of supports as they become unnecessary, with the ultimate aim of graduation from the programme and into their own housing.

23. Establish Youth Tenancy Support Programmes

For those young people who exit homelessness and are not participants on SHY, tenancy support programmes should be established, to ensure that they have the best possible chance of sustaining that tenancy.

24. Pilot the use of social housing as shared accommodation for young people

Young people stand to benefit from a flexible approach to the provision of accommodation. Local authorities will assess the feasibility of using social housing as shared accommodation for single young people on the social housing waiting list, to meet their immediate housing needs. A shared housing configuration has various similarities with the housing options available to young people within the private rental market. It is a common living arrangement for many young people and can help with social and emotional development. This may be most appropriate in instances where clients have a history of living out of home in a shared housing situation, and/or where they have demonstrable maturity and a structured routine (e.g., higher education/permanent employment). However, ultimately it will be for the local authority to decide. In recognition of the fact that the needs of young people will change as they get older, and that they may eventually require unshared accommodation, consideration should be given to placing these young people on a separate transfer list, which would take into account time spent on the social housing waiting list.

While it must be acknowledged that there are currently constraints with housing availability, Housing for All provides for an increased supply of housing, including 90,000 social homes between now and the end of 2030. Local authorities are encouraged to be as proactive as possible in the return of vacant properties, through the use of the Voids funding programme and through their own resources, as well as the Buy & Renew and Repair & Lease Schemes. Local authorities have also been asked to ensure that homeless households are afforded the priority their allocation

scheme affords them when allocating tenancies. To safeguard the successful delivery of this action, participation of Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) will also be particularly important.

25. Review work experience, placements, training opportunities etc. run by the Department of Social Protection that are currently available to ensure that they are serving young people experiencing homelessness. Promote awareness of same among homeless service providers. Identify any gaps in provision and make recommendations

There are also supports required beyond health needs or living skills. In order to have a well-balanced, fulfilling life, many young people require access to education and employment. These supports are essential to giving young people a chance to establish a life and a career beyond homelessness.

26. Engage with the Equity of Access Subcommittee of the National Apprenticeship Alliance, in order to provide timely and informed input regarding the type and level of supports required to ensure that young people experiencing or exiting homelessness can participate in apprenticeships

This Strategy intersects with the Action Plan for Apprenticeship, 2021 to 2025, specifically under one of its five key pillars – 'Apprenticeship for All'. DHLGH will engage with the relevant representative bodies within the apprenticeship system, to ensure that young people experiencing or exiting homelessness are considered in the context of the apprenticeship population profile objectives, specifically the Equity of Access Subcommittee of the National Apprenticeship Alliance. This Subcommittee will have responsibility for a targeted bursary programme for apprentices who are experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage and who are from specific target groups, including the homeless community.

27. Produce a guide setting out supports for young people exiting homelessness

From direct consultation with young people with experience of homelessness, it became apparent that young people are often unfamiliar with the array of available support services. This frequently occurs because services operate in siloes and consequently information is disparately located across a variety of sources. This action would aggregate into a single guide information on accessing all available supports for education, health care and childcare.

5. Summary of Actions

Summary of Actions in the Youth Homelessness Strategy			
No.	Action	Owners	Timeline[7]
Strategic Aim 1: To prevent young people from entering homelessness			
1.	Develop information and awareness campaigns on housing rights and available supports specifically targeting young people	DHLGH, DCEDIY, Tusla	Ongoing
2.	Develop and implement homelessness prevention programmes for young people	LAs	Q4 2023, Q2 2024
3.	Strengthen support structures for young people and families who are experiencing domestic conflict and breakdown	Tusla	Q3 2023
4.	Enhance connectivity between local authorities and Tusla, to ensure that appropriate supports can be provided	LAs, Tusla	Ongoing
5.	Consider and implement, as appropriate, the recommendations by NHAC Subgroup C on enhancing family support and prevention and early intervention services for children and their families, particularly those recommendations relating to teenage children	DHLGH, DCEDIY, Tusla, LAs	Q1 2023, Q1 2024
6.	Tusla to finalise its Strategic Plan for Aftercare 2023-2025, which should align with this Strategy, as well as including a commitment to an integrated approach to implementing key recommendations providing an appropriate continuum of accommodation for young people with care experience	DCEDIY, Tusla	Q3 2023 Ongoing
7.	Review and update Housing Circular 46/2014 on the Protocol on Young People Leaving State Care	DHLGH, DCEDIY	Q1 2024
8.	Work with the LTACCs to consider and put in place any additional supports that are required at a local level to assist young Travellers who are at risk of experiencing homelessness	DHLGH, LAs	Ongoing
9.	Consider measures to be implemented as recommended by NHAC Subgroup B in the context of young people leaving prison.	DHLGH, DOJ	Q2 2023

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7   In this context, "ongoing" can mean the action has already commenced at time of publication or the action will commence as soon as practicable.

Strategic Aim 2: To Improve the Experiences of Young People in Accessing Emergency Accommodation			
10.	Examine the establishment of a framework for specific assessments for young people presenting to services in order to identify supports required	DCEDIY, Tusla, LAs	Q2 2024
11.	Establish further dedicated emergency accommodation for young people that promotes an inclusive ethos, including for LGBTI+ and Traveller communities, and which has designated spaces allowing for visits from family members of residents	DHLGH, LAs	Q1 2024 Ongoing
12.	Ensure that service providers are trained in developmentally informed approaches, including trauma-informed care	DHLGH, LAs	Ongoing
13.	Review the availability of mental health supports for young people in emergency accommodation and implement any recommendations	HSE	Q2 2024
14.	Provide adult guidance services to identify suitable Further Education and Training (FET) courses for people experiencing homelessness	DFHERIS, ETBs	Ongoing
15.	Ensure the specific inclusion of young people in Regional Homelessness Action Plans, with consideration given to those who have been identified in the Strategy as vulnerable cohorts	DHLGH, LAs	Ongoing
16.	Design and deliver training sessions for homeless service providers, to ensure that they have the knowledge base to provide support and relevant information to disabled people	HSE	Q3 2023 Ongoing
17.	Review existing supports and identify any additional supports that could be made available to young pregnant women in homelessness from an early stage that follows through with postnatal care	HSE, Tusla	Q1 2024
18.	Review different types of parenting support services that are currently available for young parents experiencing or exiting homelessness and seek to identify gaps in the national and local provision of services for young parents who are experiencing or exiting homelessness. Following the completion of the review/s, an agreed approach should be developed to facilitate a more consistent provision of these services	DCEDIY, Tusla	Q3 2023
19.	Offer LGBTI+ Youth Homelessness Training Workshops for service providers, to ensure that they have a better understanding of LGBTI+ issues and the various forms of discrimination faced by members of this community	DCEDIY LAs	Q4 2023
20.	Develop privacy and safety strategies for young LGBTI+ people using emergency accommodation, informed directly by LGBTI+ youth, to be implemented by the homeless service providers	DCEDIY LAs	Q1 2024
21.	Include specific actions in future Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs), to address youth homelessness	LAs	Q4 2025

Strategic Aim 3: Assist Young People in Exiting Homelessness			
22.	Develop a pilot model of a housing-led intervention for young people: Supported Housing for Youth (SHY)	DHLGH	Q3 2023
23.	Establish Youth Tenancy Support Programmes	LAs	Q4 2023
24.	Pilot the use of social housing as shared accommodation for young people	DHLGH, LAs	Q1 2024
25.	Review work experience, placements, training opportunities etc. run by the DSP that are currently available to ensure that they are serving young people experiencing homelessness. Promote awareness of same among homeless service providers. Identify any gaps in provision and make recommendations to address.	DSP	Q1 2024
26.	Engage with the Equity of Access Subcommittee of the National Apprenticeship Alliance, in order to provide timely and informed input regarding the type and level of supports required to ensure that young people experiencing or exiting homelessness can participate in apprenticeships	DHLGH, DFHERIS	Q2 2023
27.	Produce a guide setting out supports for young people exiting homelessness	Housing Agency	Q3 2023

6. Implementation of Actions

A Steering Group will be established under the auspices of NHAC to drive the delivery of actions set out in this Strategy and to monitor progress. This Group will meet on a regular basis and will be required to provide a progress report of actions at each quarterly NHAC meeting.

Membership of the Group will be reviewed annually, to ensure appropriate representation. The initial membership will consist of:

- Representatives from the following Government Departments: DHLGH, DCEDIY;

- Two representatives from local authorities;

- A representative from Tusla;

- A representative from the HSE;

- A representative from the Housing Agency

- A representative from the NGO members of NHAC; and

- A representative from a Youth Organisation

Any Department or organisation that is responsible for an action within this Strategy, but is not a member of the Steering Group, will be contacted by DHLGH for an update on a quarterly basis.

Appendices
Glossary
References

Appendix 1: Previous Policy Reponses

2000: The Government published *Homelessness – An Integrated Strategy*, which outlined the first cohesive national approach to tackling adult homelessness in Ireland. The key objectives of this Strategy were *"to ensure adequate emergency responses for those who become homelessness"* and *"to ensure reintegration to the family and/or community of those who have been homeless".* This Strategy also acknowledged youth homelessness and referred to the Government Strategy on youth homelessness that was being developed at the time of publication.

2001: The then Department of Health and Children published a *Youth Homelessness Strategy*. The stated goal of the Strategy was *"to reduce and if possible eliminate youth homelessness through preventative strategies and where a child becomes homeless to ensure that he/she benefits from a comprehensive range of services aimed at re-integrating him/her into his/her community as quickly as possible".* A 2013 review of the implementation of the *Youth Homelessness Strateg*y gave a positive assessment of its achievements; this reflected falling youth homelessness since its publication and, in particular, the expansion of services for homeless children. However, the review also identified a need for service improvement, including better supports for young adults, especially those leaving foster or residential care.

2008: A follow-up homelessness Strategy titled *The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008-2013* was published by the then Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. This document outlined the three core objectives of *"eliminating long-term occupation of emergency homeless facilities; eliminating the need to sleep rough; and preventing the occurrence of homelessness as far as possible".* *The Way Home* includes 21 recommendations, one of which relates directly to youth homelessness: *"Closer links should be developed between the Youth Homeless Forum and the Adult Homeless Forum in each area to improve and monitor the effectiveness of systems at local level and ensure continuum of care for the individual upon reaching 18 years of age."*

2016: *Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessnes*s contains five pillars, the first of which addresses homelessness. This pillar describes its primary aim as follows: *"providing an urgent response to the homeless crisis, Pillar One focuses on taking immediate action to help those on the streets and those in emergency accommodation, including families in hotels".* This Action Plan specifically mentions young people and action number 1.7 states: *"We will work to ensure that young people leaving State care and at risk of homelessness are identified and catered for through appropriate housing and other supports for their needs."*

2021: *Housing for All – A New Housing Plan for Ireland* was launched in September 2021. It includes 18 distinct actions tailored to eliminate homelessness in Ireland. Action 3.15 reiterates the *Programme for Government*'s commitment to *"Develop[ing] a Youth Homelessness Strategy".*

Appendix 2: Other Current and Key Strategies and Policy Frameworks

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)

Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020

Better Outcomes Brighter Futures represents the first overarching national children's policy framework encompassing the age ranges spanning children and young people (0-24 years). It adopts a whole-of-Government approach and is underpinned by a number of constituent strategies in the areas of early years, youth, and participation. A successor framework is currently in development.

National Youth Strategy 2015-2020

This publication has its basis in *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*. This framework sets out the Government's agenda and priorities in relation to all children and young people under the age of 25 and provides for the development and implementation of policies and services in relation to the following interconnected and mutually reinforcing outcome areas, whereby youth are:

1. Active and healthy, in terms of their physical and mental wellbeing;

2. Able to achieve full potential in all areas of learning and development;

3. Safe and protected from harm;

4. Given economic security and opportunity; and

5. Connected, respected and contributing to their world.

LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020

This document was published on 29 June 2018 and is a world first. It was a key commitment for the Department as part of the 2016 *A Programme for a Partnership Government*.

The Strategy is making a significant contribution towards the Government's broader commitment to continue to strive to ensure that all LGBTI+ young people are visible, valued and included in Irish society.

National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021

Travellers and Roma are among the most disadvantaged and marginalised people in Ireland. This *Inclusion Strategy* is a cross-departmental initiative to improve the lives of the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland.

Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)

National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028

The recently published *National Access Plan* has as its overall vision *"that the higher education student body entering, participating in and completing higher education, at all levels and across all programmes, reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population"*. It has the further ambition that *"our higher education institutions are inclusive, universally designed environments which support and foster student success and outcomes, equity and diversity, and are responsive to the needs of students and wider communities"*.

A number of priority goals and associated objectives were established to support the implementation of the Plan. Target groups whose members have been historically underrepresented in higher education are also identified, with specific targets set for their increased participation.

Department of Health (DoH)

Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery 2017-2025

The Government's policy on drug and alcohol use is set out in the National Drugs Strategy, Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery: A Health-led Response to Drug and Alcohol Use in Ireland 2017-2025. The Strategy aims to promote healthier lifestyles within society and encourage people to make healthier choices around drug and alcohol use. Local and regional drug and alcohol taskforces implement the National Drugs Strategy in the context of the needs of their region or local area.

The Strategic Action Plan explicitly references the joint commitment of DHLGH and DoH to addressing the needs of people who are homeless and have addiction issues. One of the strategic priorities for the period 2021-2025 is the development of integrated care pathways for high-risk users, including people who are homeless.

Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone 2020-2030

This publication is the successor to A Vision for Change, which was launched in 2006. It carries forward those elements of the original policy that still have relevance in light of expert opinion. It incorporates new recommendations, as appropriate, to enhance national policy, while simultaneously aligning with the 10-year vision for reform and transformation of Ireland's health and social care services encapsulated in the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2018).

Sharing the Vision focuses on developing a broad-based, whole system mental health policy for the whole of the population. A large-scale consultation process informed the recommendations in this policy, and directly engaged a wide range of stakeholders, including people with personal experience, family members, along with community and voluntary sector groups and staff.

Sharing the Vision includes people who are homeless as a priority group. The following recommendations are included in the Strategy:

- In order to address service gaps and access issues, a stepped model of integrated support that provides mental health promotion, prevention and primary intervention supports should be available for people experiencing homelessness.

- Assertive outreach teams should be expanded so that specialist mental health care is accessible to people experiencing homelessness.

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH)

National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027

This publication sets out the Government's vision for delivering housing and related supports for disabled people. The second National Strategy to 2027 will build on the considerable achievements of the 2011, continuing the journey of the last 10 years, which saw:

- The allocation of many people with disabilities to suitable housing;

- The development of new structures to align housing provision with the required health and social supports;

- Progress being made in decongregation into community residential care; and

- Increasing awareness and understanding of disability and housing within housing and disability services.

The 2022 Strategy re-echoes the vision of the first Strategy, with particular emphasis on disabled people having choice and control over their living arrangements.

Traveller Accommodation: Expert Review (2019)

This report sets out an integrated set of recommendations intended to improve the effectiveness of the arrangements for providing accommodation for members of the

Traveller community, as established by the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998. These recommendations address four key themes:

- Delivery reflecting need;

- Planning;

- Capacity and resources; and

- Governance.

The review concludes that while the arrangements established by the 1998 Act have significant strengths and have enabled the delivery of considerable accommodation for Travellers, they have not met the full scale of accommodation needs among members of this community. This is evidenced by the high rate of Traveller homelessness, the increase in numbers of Traveller households sharing accommodation and living in overcrowded conditions, and the uneven record of delivery of Traveller-specific accommodation among Local authorities and AHBs.

Department of Justice (DoJ)

Youth Justice Strategy

A new Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027 has been developed under the guidance of an expert Steering Group chaired by Minister of State James Browne TD and with the benefit of broad consultation with stakeholders.

The Strategy is conceived largely as a developmental framework, which provides a starting point for a range of actions and initiatives. It is grounded on child welfare principles, deriving in particular from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The objectives in the Strategy are premised on the need to maximise opportunities to promote positive behavioural change, and includes a wide range of issues relevant to children and young people at risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system, such as:

- Early intervention and preventative work;

- Family support;

- Diversion from crime;

- Court processes;

- Supervision and support in the community; and

- Detention and support post release.

'Working to Change': Social Enterprise and Employment Strategy 2021-2023

The Minister for Justice launched the Department's "Working to Change" Strategy in November 2020. The Strategy sets out the Department's direction for supporting employment options for people with convictions by working to remove the systemic barriers that make progression for individuals challenging. People with education and training, who are in work, are less likely to offend and more likely to make good citizens. They are also less likely to fall into homelessness, which can be a stress factor in reoffending behaviours. The Strategy follows a whole-systems approach to increasing employment options for people with past convictions, which recognises their skills and capabilities leading to active citizenship, safer communities, fewer victims, and supporting desistance.

Zero Tolerance: Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual & Gender-Based Violence 2022-2026

In June 2022, the DoJ launched Zero Tolerance (DSGBV). This is a five-year strategy, which is to be expanded and detailed in a series of Implementation Plans. The first Implementation Plan was published simultaneously with the Strategy and covers until the end of 2023.

The Strategy recognises and acknowledges the need to provide support for all survivors of DSGBV. It acknowledges the need to respect lived experiences and particular victim/survivor groups, including migrants, Travellers and Roma, people with disabilities and the LGBTI+ community, and recognises additional risk factors created by overlapping forms of discrimination. The Strategy uses the four Istanbul pillars of prevention, protection, prosecution and policy coordination as the levers for change to deliver its central goals. It recognises that violence from an intimate partner is a primary contributor to women's homelessness, in particular.

Department of Social Protection (DSP)

Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025: Summary of Ambition, Goals and Commitments

In January 2020, the Government produced the Roadmap for Social Inclusion, which will build on the work of its predecessors with the aim of reducing the number of people in consistent poverty in Ireland and increasing social inclusion for those who are most disadvantaged. This is reflected in its clearly stated ambition to: "Reduce consistent poverty to 2% or less and to make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive countries in the EU."

Appendix 3: Consultation Process and Views Received

The Roadmap for Social Inclusion translates this ambition into seven goals underpinned by 66 unique commitments (actions) to be taken to help deliver these goals. It includes the mention of an Inclusion Health Policy, which is a framework for driving improvements in health outcomes for vulnerable groups (including homeless individuals), encompassing research, policy coordination and services delivery. It aims to improve access to health and related services for these groups through coordinated and targeted actions.

An extensive consultation process was undertaken to ensure that a wide range of views informed the development of the Strategy.

i. **NHAC**
   Members of NHAC provided feedback on the first draft of the Youth Homelessness Strategy.

ii. **Local authorities**
   DHLGH held an online consultation, in March 2022, with representatives from local authorities from around the country.

iii. **Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness**
   DHLGH met with the Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness to discuss the first draft of the Strategy in April 2022.

iv. **DCEDIY and Tusla**
   DHLGH consulted with DCEDIY and Tusla in May 2022 with a particular focus on Care Leavers.

v. **Public Consultation**
   Members of the public and interested organisations were invited to have their say via survey or written submission. During the 3 weeks in which the consultation was open, the Department received 35 submissions from 15 organisations and 20 individuals.

Organisations that responded via the public consultation:

1. Irish Aftercare Network;
2. Teen Parents Support Programme (TSP);
3. Sinn Féin;
4. Probation;
5. Belong To;
6. FLAC;
7. Cope Galway;
8. EPIC;
9. Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness;
10. Le Chéile Mentoring;
11. National Traveller MABS;
12. Novas;
13. Tusla Dublin South-Central;
14. Cork Traveller Visibility Group; and
15. National Traveller Organisations (Irish Traveller Movement, Pavee Point, National Traveller Women's Forum).

vi. **Direct consultations with young people with homelessness experience**

The Department followed best practice, as outlined in the National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (2021) It was accepted that written submissions would not be best practice for reaching this particular cohort and therefore a direct consultation was facilitated through Hub na n-Óg.[8]The consultation was carefully designed to ensure that the young people consulted were given the space and information to freely provide their views, were listened to by the appropriate decision-makers, and shown that their views were taken seriously.

Participation Officers worked with two organisations involved with young homeless people and one organisation working with young Travellers.

In total 25 young people aged between 19 and 26 years, all with lived experience of homelessness, participated in the consultation. The older young people had lived experience of homelessness when aged between 18 and 25 years.

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8   Hub na n-Óg was set up by DCEDIY to support Government Departments, State agencies and NGOs to give children and young people a voice in decision-making, with a particular focus on those who are seldom-heard.

Pilot

- One young mother (with young child) currently experiencing homelessness.

Young people from Traveller community

- Nine young people aged between 19 and 26 (4 males/5 females).

Young people accessing homeless services

- Fifteen young people aged between 19 and 25 (9 males/6 females).

Summary of views received via Consultations

The following five questions were posed in the public consultation:

i. How do you think the housing needs of young people (age 18-24) differ from those of other age groups?

ii. What do you believe are the main barriers to young people accessing housing?

iii. What do you think are the main risk factors that can result in a young person becoming homeless?

iv. What services/initiatives do you think should be introduced to prevent homelessness and/or support young people exiting homelessness?

v. What top five priorities should the Youth Homelessness Strategy focus on?

A number of recurring themes emerged across all the consultations. Many of these issues are cross-departmental in nature, demonstrating the need for a cross-departmental approach to addressing youth homelessness. The contributions from the consultation process – both the responses that addressed the questions and those that did not – can be summarised as follows:

Causes of Youth Homelessness

- **Family Structure**
  - Lack of family support;
  - Family conflict, instability and/or breakdown; and
  - Adverse childhood experiences, namely, neglect and/or abuse.

- **Financial Barriers**

  ◦ Socio-economic disadvantage;

  ◦ Low income/lack of steady income; and

  ◦ Reduced rate of social welfare payments.

- **Rental Market**

  ◦ Unaffordable rents.

  ◦ Competitiveness of the market.

  ◦ Discrimination due to age, lack of rental history and references, etc.; and

  ◦ Lack of suitable properties.

- **Social Housing**

  ◦ By virtue of their age, young people cannot accrue time on the list and are therefore unable to access social housing in a timely manner.

- **Lack of Life Skills**

  ◦ Lack of understanding of budgeting, paying rent and bills on time, etc.;

  ◦ Tenancy sustainment issues; and

  ◦ Lack of knowledge of the system and rights.

- **Education and Employment**

  ◦ Lack of opportunity and employment; and

  ◦ Poor educational attainment, or early school leavers.

- **Health/Complex Needs**

  ◦ Mental health issues; and

  ◦ Substance misuse.

- **Anti-Social Behaviour**

  ○ Anti-social behaviour;

  ○ Neighbourhood stressors;

  ○ Being exploited by others or becoming criminalised; and

  ○ Imprisonment/interaction with the criminal justice system at an early age can make it more difficult for people to access social housing supports.

- **Particular Cohorts**

  ○ Care leavers have to attempt the transition to independence at a much younger age;

  ○ Challenges associated with finding suitable housing for young people with disabilities; and

  ○ Travellers often start families earlier than their settled counterparts and struggle to find suitable accommodation; and are more likely to face overcrowding in the family home and discrimination in the private rental market.

How Best to Support Young People Experiencing Homelessness

- Through providing youth specific homeless services;

- By conducting comprehensive assessments on presentation to homeless services;

- Through offering improved training for service providers;

- By providing increased supports, including family mediation services and mental health supports; and

- By focusing on rapid transferral from emergency accommodation.

How Best to Support Young People Exiting Homelessness

- **Providing Improved Accommodation Options for Young People**

  - Supported living environments;

  - Shared housing; and

  - More semi-independent accommodation.

- **Offering Additional Supports**

  - Tenancy sustainment supports; and

  - o Supports with employment, education and training.

Appendix 4: Existing Services for Young People Experiencing or At Risk of Experiencing Homelessness

Youth-Specific Accommodation Services

Cork

- Wellsprings: offers short- to medium-term residential placements for young women aged 16-23, with the possibility of lifelong support through a dedicated outreach aftercare service, and with an additional tenancy sustainment service.

Dublin

- George's Hill (Focus Ireland): a long-term supported housing project for people of all ages with 12 self-contained units reserved for those aged 18-25;

- St Catherine's Foyer (Peter McVerry Trust): a 48-bed emergency hostel providing supported temporary accommodation for those aged 18-24;

- Peter's Place (DePaul): provides short-term supported accommodation for stays of up to 6 months with 35 beds for young homeless people; and

Galway

- Simon Communities: Youth Homeless Service and transition housing for 12 clients and provision of a Tenancy Sustainment Service to support a further caseload of 16 clients.

Kildare

- Jigginstown Manor (Tiglin): a 12-unit facility for young single adults.

Limerick

- The Youth Housing Project: based on the Youth Housing First Model developed by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and operated by Focus Ireland. The Project primarily provides accommodation, support, planning, advice and guidance to young people, male and female, aged 18-23. This Youth Housing Project is also operated by Focus Ireland in Clare; and

- DIAL Aftercare Services (Novas): a 6-unit residential service that accommodates care leavers with learning disabilities and/or mental health issues at risk of falling into the cycle of homelessness.

Waterford

- Focus Ireland: 30 HF4Y tenancies. Wrap-around services via Care & Case Management are provided to complex homeless or at-risk-of-homelessness youths to prevent the long-term homeless cycle at an early stage.

Other Services for Homeless Young People

- Cork City: Focus Ireland operates a tenancy sustainment service to divert those in the 18-25 age group from emergency accommodation and to provide resettlement support for same.

- Dublin: The Extension Service, run by Focus Ireland, is a drop-in centre providing food, advice and information services, as well as support to young people in finding stable housing. Key workers are available to provide ongoing support to those who need it;

- Dublin: The Peter McVerry Trust runs a Youth Café that offers food, internet access, and laundry and shower facilities for homeless young people;

- Dublin: Focus Ireland Family mediation services is funded by Tusla, which works with young people and families identified by social workers as being at risk of homelessness. The service works with young people and their broader families to deal with conflicts that have the potential of resulting in family breakdown and homelessness; and

Other Services for Young People

A number of important services targeting young people, funded by the HSE and other agencies, operate throughout the country:

Nationwide

- Jigsaw: provides mental health support and advice nationwide for 12-25-year-olds. Support is available via face-to-face sessions, text, phone and video conferencing; and

- BeLongTo youth services: the national organisation supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI+) young people aged 14-23. Services include support groups for young people and parents and counselling (in partnership with Pieta).

Cork

- The HSE: operates a Youth Health Service in Cork City, which provides sexual health and counselling services for young people aged 23 and under. It also provides drugs and alcohol counselling and youth work and support for young people and parents.

Dublin

- Edenmore Drug Intervention Team: runs YAS! Group, a youth aftercare support group for young people aged 15-21 who are drug and alcohol free. It also runs the EDIT Youth Programme, which provides one-to-one support to young people aged 14-21 using drugs or alcohol. This service includes key working and counselling; and

- Crinan Youth Project: runs an evening service that provides information and support to young people aged 14-21 and experiencing difficulty relating to their use of drugs. Includes outreach workers, crisis intervention and counselling.

Galway

- No 4 Youth Service: a voluntary agency with charitable status, based in No 4 Augustine Street, Galway. It is funded by DCEDIY and receives additional grants from HSE West and Tusla, with a further contribution from the Galway Diocese. Targeted at young people aged 17-25, it offers preventative homeless services such as practical life skills training, assistance with form completion, budgeting, showering facilities, a food service, and referral to mainstream services. No 4 Youth service also offers counselling and career guidance, as well as non-structured activities.

Midlands

- Midlands Youth Drug & Alcohol Support: operates an under 18s drug and alcohol prevention and treatment service that has a working partnership with the over-18s Drugs and Alcohol Treatment Support service run by Merchants Quay Ireland. Both coordinated care services complement and enhance existing treatment and prevention support services across the Midlands, with one of the main aims of the services being to coordinate the care of individuals (both over and under 18 years) and families experiencing problems as a result of their drug and/or alcohol use.

Mid-West

- Limerick Youth Service: a registered charity in receipt of funding from, among others, DSP, DCEDIY, DoE, HSE and Tusla. Their 'Be Well' Youth Mental Health Project provides counselling for 14-25-year-olds and supports them with a youth mental health worker.

South-East

- Waterford & South Tipperary Community Youth Service: runs The Frontline Project, an adolescent-specific Outreach Drugs project. It targets young people aged 10-21 involved in high-risk substance use. It offers screening, assessment and referral to appropriate services;

- The HSE operates a Substance Misuse Service in Tipperary County Council. It is a community-based drug and alcohol service for young people and adults affected by alcohol and substance misuse. The service provides confidential drug and alcohol treatment services. Support is also provided to friends, families and carers. A Youth Outreach and Family Support Project operates within the HSE Substance Misuse Service. The project aims to support young people, aged 12-25, who are actively misusing substances, and their families. It does this through intervention sessions, key working, and referral to residential services; and

- Aiséirí runs the Aislinn Centre in County Kilkenny, which provides treatment for young people aged 15-21 living with the destructive impact of alcohol, drugs and/or gambling. It includes a 4-bed detox facility and a 12-bed, 6-week rehabilitation programme.

Acronyms and Glossary of Terms

Acronyms

DCEDIY	*Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.* This Department's mission is to enhance the lives of children, young people, adults, families and communities, recognising diversity and promoting equality of opportunity.
DFHERIS	*Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.* This Department funds and creates policy for the higher and further education and research sectors. It also oversees the work of the state agencies and public institutions operating in these areas. This Department's role is to make sure that these sectors support and encourage Ireland's social and economic development. To make sure that public investment and policy in these areas give opportunities to everyone, including the most vulnerable in society.
DHLGH	*Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.* This Department's mission is to support the sustainable and efficient delivery of well-planned homes and effective local government.
DoE	*Department of Education.* This Department's mission is to help children and young people, through learning, to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, economic and cultural development.
DoH	*Department of Health.* This Department's mission is to improve the health and wellbeing of people in Ireland by delivering high-quality health services and getting best value from health system resources.
DoJ	*Department of Justice.* This Department works to advance community and national security, promote justice and equality, and safeguard human rights, in order to achieve a safe, fair and inclusive Ireland.

DSP	*Department of Social Protection.*
	This Department's mission is to promote active participation and inclusion in society through providing income supports, employment services and other services.
ETB	*Education and Training Boards.*
	In 2013, the former Vocational Educational Committees were dissolved and replaced by 16 Educational and Training Boards responsible for delivering primary, post-primary and further education in their regions, and developing appropriate further education and training programmes in conjunction with SOLAS.
HAP	*Housing Assistance Payment Scheme.*
	This scheme is a form of social housing support provided by all Local authorities. Under HAP, Local authorities can provide housing assistance to households with a long-term housing need, including many long-term Rent Supplement recipients.
HF4Y	*Housing First for Youth.*
	This adaptation of the well-known Housing First model (see Glossary of Terms) aims to tackle youth homelessness from a housing-led approach. It shares the underlying philosophy that individuals who have experienced homelessness will do better and recover more effectively if they are first provided with housing. As with *Housing First*, in HF4Y individuals are not required to first demonstrate that they are 'ready' for housing. Housing is not conditional on sobriety or abstinence, and housing and treatment are distinct. Clients are actively involved in decision-making, and they jointly determine the nature of the supports they receive over the course of the programme. HF4Y recognises that each young person has a unique level of need and so requires a unique level of support.

LGBTI+	*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex +.*
	This acronym refers to the spectrum of sexual orientations and identities.
	*Please note that the variations of this acronym used within the main text reflect the acronyms used by the authors of the various studies referenced
NHAC	*National Homeless Action Committee.*
	Established in Q4 2021, and chaired by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, NHAC includes representatives from key Government Departments, state bodies and NGOs. The purpose of NHAC is to ensure that a renewed emphasis is brought to cross-Government collaboration to implement actions in *Housing for All,* along with better coherence and coordination of homeless-related services in delivering policy measures and actions to address homelessness.

Glossary of Terms

Aftercare Services	Support services provided to young people who have been in care for a period of time before their 18th birthday (eligibility depends on having 12 months care experience since the age of 13).
Assertive Outreach Teams	Assertive outreach is an evidence-based practice to combat street homelessness, and one strategy in efforts to end homelessness. Assertive outreach teams provide support to those currently experiencing homelessness, including street homelessness and those in temporary accommodation.
Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS)	The Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) funds Approved Housing Bodies to provide housing for people with specific categories of need, such as older people, people with disabilities and those experiencing homelessness
Care Leavers	Children and young people are sometimes placed "in care" with the HSE because their parents are unable to care for them for a variety of reasons. These young people can spend some, or all, of their childhood in care. Care leavers are young people who are leaving/have left residential care, transitioning from the care environment to independent living.
Cross-departmental	Across departments; involving more than one department.
Emergency Accommodation	Emergency accommodation is categorised by private emergency accommodation (this may include hotels, B&Bs and other residential facilities that are used on an emergency basis, where supports are provided to services users on a visiting basis), Supported Temporary Accommodation (accommodation, including family hubs, hostels, with onsite professional support) and temporary emergency accommodation (emergency accommodation with no, or minimal, support).

Holistic Approach	Providing appropriate supports by taking all factors into account.
Housing First	This housing-led approach to tackling homelessness enables people with a history of rough sleeping or long-term use of emergency accommodation, and with complex needs, to obtain permanent secure accommodation with the provision of intensive supports to help them to maintain their tenancies.
Housing for All	The Government's housing plan to 2030 that contains 213 actions to support the delivery of a range of housing options for individuals, couples and families.
Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness	This declaration commits all signatories, Ireland included, to working towards ending homelessness by 2030.
Local authorities	Local authorities are multi-purpose bodies responsible for delivering a broad range of services in relation to roads; traffic; planning; housing; economic and community development; environment, recreation and amenity services; fire services; and maintaining the register of electors.
Our Shared Future	The Programme for Government which sets out the Government's mission to tackle the housing crisis and contains a commitment to develop a *Youth Homelessness Strategy*.
Stakeholders	Stakeholders are individuals or groups who have an interest in, or may be affected by, any decision or activity of an organisation.

Tenancy Support Programme	Tenancy Support Programmes provide advice and support to people in relation to maintaining tenancies.
Tusla	A state agency that supports and promotes the development, welfare and protection of children, and the effective functioning of families.

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