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PART A

Aspects of Social Policy and Housing in the European Welfare States

Measuring Homelessness: Implications for Policy

Eoin O'Sullivan[1]

Abstract

Who we define as experiencing homelessness and how we research the experience of homelessness may seem technical matters for statisticians and researchers to agree on rather than matters of public policy. In this paper I argue that the way in which we collect data on homelessness and how that data is presented has significant implications for the framing of homelessness, with the majority of countries measuring homelessness at a point-in-time, which provide little information on the dynamics of homelessness. Using the example of the Republic of Ireland, we can see that the stock and flow data on homelessness show very different patterns of the experience of homelessness, with the number of adults in emergency accommodation at a point-in-time is determined by the numbers entering emergency accommodation, the length of time in emergency accommodation and the rate at which exits occur.

Keywords: point-in-time measures; dynamics of homelessness; homelessness in Ireland

Introduction

Policy responses to preventing an episode or a spell in temporary or emergency accommodation designated for those experiencing homelessness, the supports provided to ensure successful exiting from such accommodation or responding to literal homelessness is in part determined by how the issue is framed. The framing of homelessness is the outcome of the complex interactions between, for example, how the public perceives the issue, how the media report the issue, how we measure homelessness and how these presentations and measurements are interpreted by policy makers. That many of the public think that the appropriate response to homelessness is the provision of shelter and food, and that a significant number of NGOs provide such shelter and soup, suggests a framing of homelessness that is equated with literal homelessness or rough sleeping (Parsell and Watts, 2017). Recent research in Ireland (Crowley and Mullen, 2019) and England (Crisis, 2018) for example, suggests that the dominant popular perception of those experiencing homelessness is that of a middle- aged man sleeping rough with addiction

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and/ or mental health issues. Certainly, those sleeping rough are the most visible and evocative manifestations of homelessness in cities of the Global North, and indeed the majority of press stories on the topic of homelessness are usually accompanied by an image of a rough sleeper or sleepers, thus reinforcing this popular perception.

In this paper, I wish to explore how homelessness is framed *via* measuring homelessness; that is the increasing efforts by local and national governments to estimate the extent of homelessness (see OECD, 2020 for an overview of these efforts), and the characteristics of those experiencing homelessness is an important contributor to how homelessness is framed. Using Ireland as a case study, the paper notes that research design issues such as using point or period prevalence measures, how broadly or narrowly homelessness is defined, presenting the rate as well as the number of those experiencing homelessness by for example age and gender, and the degree to which the dynamics of homelessness are captured are significant issues in how homelessness is presented by social scientists, statisticians and others.

Point prevalence studies are widely used in estimating the extent and characteristics of those experiencing homelessness in a number of countries, either as part of the national census in the case of Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018), or specific surveys of those experiencing varieties of homeless experiences in the Nordic countries (Benjaminsen et al, 2020) and the US (Henry et al, 2021) to name a few. As Shinn and Khadduuri (2020) acknowledge, this method can be useful for monitoring trends and identifying service needs, but minimizes the scale of homelessness, and period-prevalence surveys are required to more accurately estimate the number of people who experience homelessness over a time period. However they argue that time-frames (2020, pp. 26-27) are critically important when researching homelessness as the numbers who experience homelessness and their characteristics will differ significantly depending on the time-frame used. Shorter time-frames largely capture those experiencing long term homelessness, with longer time-frames capturing the significantly larger number of people who enter and exit homelessness each year. For example, Link et al. (1994) found that the life-time prevalence of homelessness was 7.4% in comparison to 3.1% over a five-year period. A recent study utilising a similar methodology in eight European Countries found a lifetime prevalence of nearly 5%, albeit with significant variations by country, with a 5-year prevalence of just under 2% (Taylor et al., 2019).

Homelessness is a dynamic process and capturing the experience of homelessness at a point in time does not reveal the fluidity of the experience of homelessness and that the majority who experience a spell in an emergency shelter, for example, will exit to housing and stay housed (Lee et al., 2021). This was demonstrated when an increasing number of researchers from the 1990s onward, initially almost exclusively in North America, and subsequently in a number of European countries and Australia, utilising longitudinal research methods were showing very different patterns of homelessness than that found in cross-sectional research, with profound implications for policy, when exploring the experience of homelessness over time, both for families and adult-only households (Dworsky and Piliavin, 2000; Kuhn and Culhane, 1998; Klodawsky et al., 2007; Shinn, 1997, Waldron et al, 2019). The importance of subsidised housing, poverty, and other structural factors in contributing to homelessness rather than individual level dysfunctions came to the fore, with 'residential instability' rather than prolonged experiences of homelessness the typical pattern observed (Sosin et al., 1990, p. 171). Crucially this research also highlighted

that the majority of people who experienced a spell of homelessness did so for a short period of time and successfully exited to accommodation. A crucial observation from this research was that '[a]lmost everyone who will be homeless two years from today is housed now, and almost everybody who is homeless today will be housed two years from now" (O'Flaherty, 2010, p. 143).

Who is counted as experiencing homelessness varies significantly (OECD, 2020), with for example Australia and the Nordic countries comparatively unusual in counting not just those experiencing literal homelessness and staying in designated temporary and emergency accommodation, but also those in overcrowded accommodation or sharing with friends or family. Other countries aspire to measure these categories, but no statistical data is available for these forms of homelessness (Baptista and Marlier, 2019). However, the majority of OECD countries define homelessness more narrowly for the purposes of counting, largely only including only those experiencing literal homelessness or staying in accommodation designated as homeless services. Thus, comparative research on homelessness is particularly tricky given the wide variation in who is counted as homelessness. Who is defined is also important in terms of how homelessness is framed, as research designs that adopt narrow definitions tend to conclude that dysfunctional individual traits contribute significantly to the reasons why people experience homelessness, whereas broader definitions are more likely to indicate that dysfunctional social services and supports, particularly the lack of affordable housing, are more important that individual traits (Pleace and Hermans, 2020; O'Sullivan et al, 2020). Rates of homelessness are also important as they take into account population growth and demographic change (Johnson and Taylor, 2020). Thus, dependent on the research design, capturing data at point-in-time or longitudinally, the definition of homelessness utilised will shape how homelessness is frame.

Measuring Homelessness in Ireland: A Case Study

In the remainder of the paper these issues are teased out in respect of a case study of Ireland. Ireland is comparatively unusual in having a national integrated bed and case management system since 2013. The PASS (Pathway Accommodation & Support System), established in Dublin in 2011, was rolled out nationally in 2013, and this development allowed for data on number of adult individuals with accompanying child dependents experiencing homelessness and residing in *designated emergency accommodation funded by Section 10 and Local Authority contributions* during the third week of every month in each county to be generated on a monthly basis. The publication of these Monthly Reports commenced in April 2014 on a trial basis, and from June 2014, with some modifications, has been produced on a continuous monthly basis. Data is generated from PASS on the profile of households in the designated services by household composition, the gender, age and nature of accommodation provided for adults and the number of accompanying child dependents. While not a comprehensive figure of the extent of homelessness in Ireland, in that it only captures those households in designated emergency and temporary accommodation funded under Section 10 of the *Housing Act, 1988*, it nonetheless provided timely, detailed, reliable and consistent data monthly. In comparative terms, using the *European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion* (ETHOS) as a framework, this

monthly data provide provides data category 2, people staying in a night shelter; and category 3, people in accommodation for the homeless. Thus, it is a very narrow definition compared to, for example, the Nordic countries (Benjaminsen et al, 2020).

In addition, from 2014 onwards, at the end of each quarter, Local Authorities, were required by the Department of Housing to produce *Performance Reports* providing data on a range of indicators, included the number of new and repeat adult presentations to homelessness services per quarter; the number of adults in emergency accommodation for more than six months, the number of adult individuals exiting homeless services, and the number of rough sleepers. The production of the Monthly Reports and Quarterly Performance Reports followed on from the publication in 2013 of a *Homelessness Policy Statement* by the Department of Housing. A number of indictors were identified to measure progress in ending homelessness in Ireland, which was the over-arching ambition of the Policy Statement, and the purpose of these indicators was to 'give a clearer picture of homelessness in Ireland: the rate of entry, duration and exits, together with the type and nature of accommodation' (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2013, p. 4).

Point-in-time Counts

Since mid-2014, each month a brief report is published by the Department of Housing providing data on the number of adults and their accompanying child dependents (if any) in State funded emergency accommodation during the third week of each month. This data source, more than any other information on homelessness in Ireland, is most commonly cited when describing the extent of homelessness by the media, service providers and academic commentators. The publication of these data attracts considerable media attention each month, and is often accompanied by a picture or a news clip of a rough sleeper (although those rough sleeping are not directly included in the data), particularly as shown in figure 1, the number of adults in emergency accommodation during a week in each month rose rapidly from mid-2014, reaching a peak of nearly 6,700 in late 2019 / early 2020 despite the narrow definition of homelessness used. The number then declined and plateaued to approximately 6,000 adults and 2,500 child dependents in emergency accommodation since mid-2020. On average 3,280 adults were in emergency accommodation nationally in 2015 rising to an average of 6,510 in 2019 before declining to 6,208 in 2020.[2]

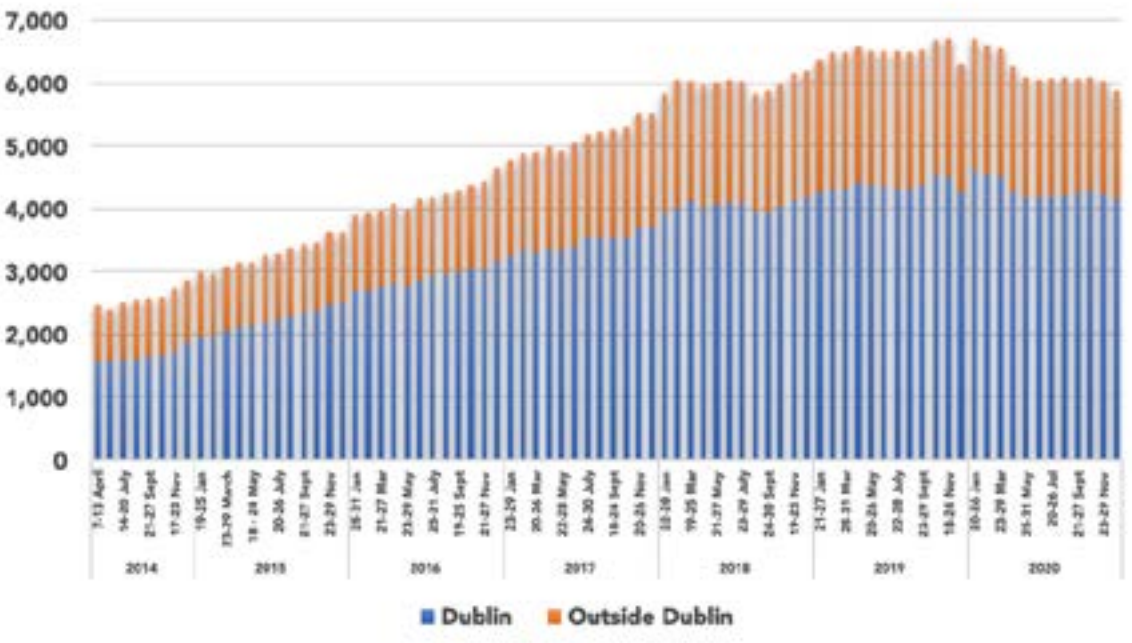
The number in emergency accommodation in the Dublin region has fluctuated between 65 and 70 percent of the total number of adults in emergency accommodation nationally over this period, and nationally, the number of adult males in emergency accommodation has fluctuated between 60

2. It should be noted that were two modifications made to the Monthly Reports, the first was that from January 2015, refuges for those escaping from gender-based violence (ETHOS category 4) - a total of 21 residential services with a bed capacity of approximately 250 transferred to the statutory Child and Family Agency (TUSLA), and these accessing these residential services have not been enumerated in the monthly data since that date; the second in 2018 where 625 in what were termed 'own door accommodation' were excluded from the data as they were deemed not be in emergency accommodation.

and 70 percent of all adults, and those aged between 25-44 hovered at approx. 60 percent over the period. In terms of household composition, on average 75 percent were adult-only households, that is single person households and couples without accompanying child dependents. Families, that is couples and singles with accompanying child dependents, made up the balance. The number of families increased each month between 2014 and mid-2018, but has declined significantly since that point, particularly in Dublin where the number of families in emergency accommodation declined from nearly 1,300 in the Autumn of 2019 to just under 800 at the end of 2020. Thus, based on this well-known measure, homelessness in Ireland is largely experienced in Dublin, by male adult-only households, and the overall numbers have remained stubbornly high, but stable between 2018-2020, following particularly sharp increases between 2014 and 2017.

In contrast to the increase in the number of adults in temporary and emergency accommodation, the numbers of rough sleepers, and we only have reasonably accurate and consistent point- in-time data for Dublin, have remained relatively low and stable, with a fluctuating minimum of between 90 and 150 individuals based on a biannual count over the past seven years. Between 70 and 80 percent of those rough sleeping also use emergency shelters, so that a significant number are also recorded in the monthly reports, indicating that only a minority of those individuals sleeping rough at a point-in-time, only a minority were not engaging with the emergency accommodation services.

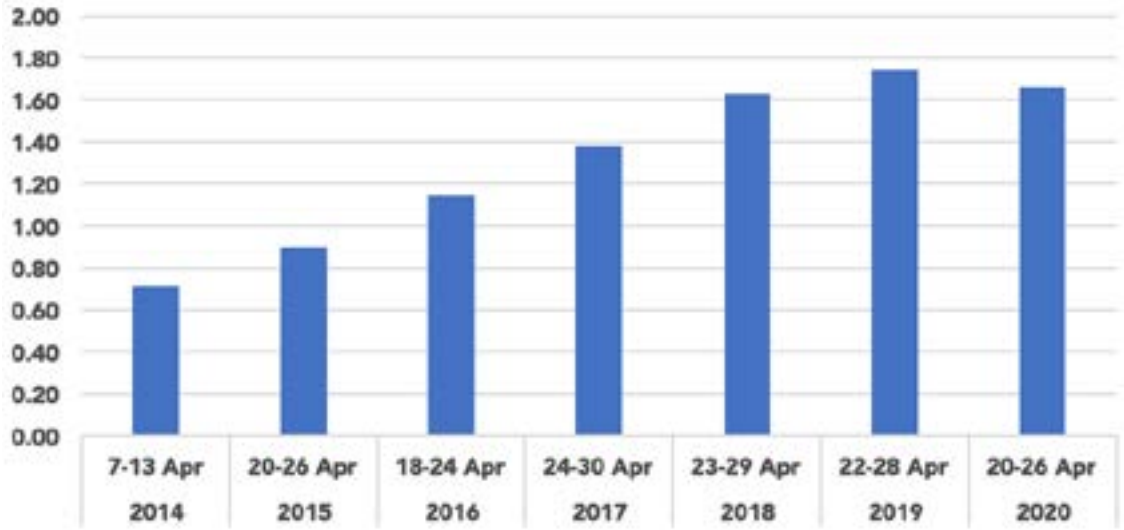
Figure 1: Number of Adults in Section 10 Funded Emergency and Temporary Accommodation, April 2014 - December 2020



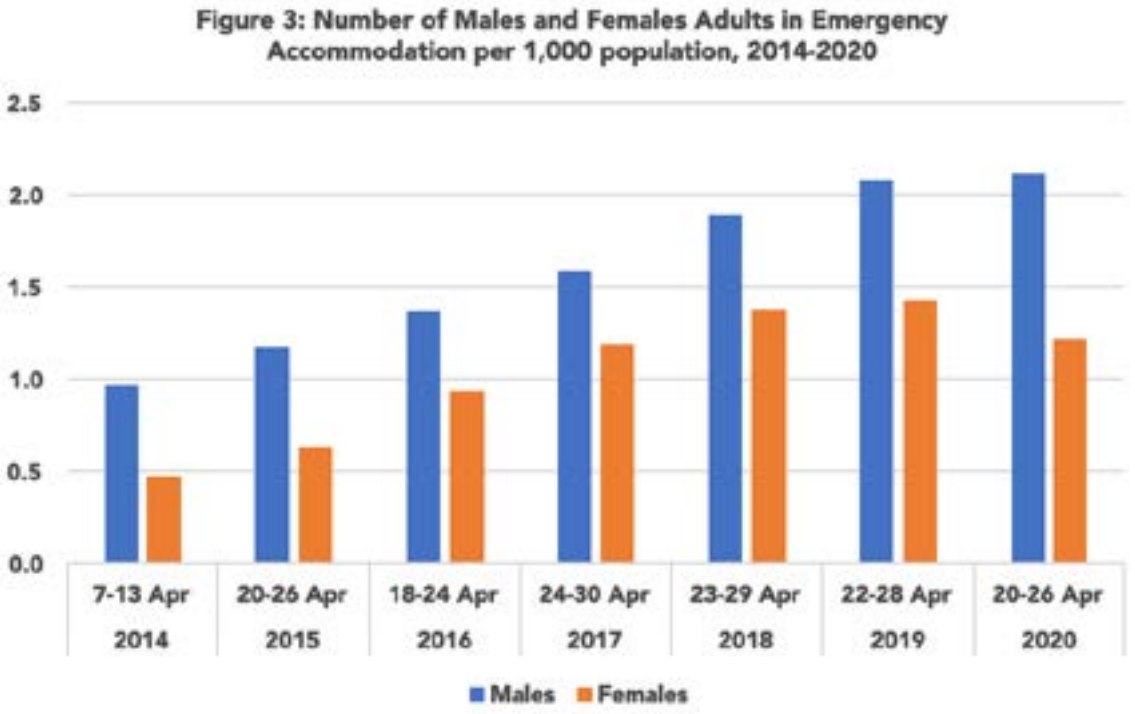
Source: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021a.

When we turn to look at the rate of adult homelessness baased on the point-in-time measure, we can see in figure 2 that the rate per 1,000 population aged over 18 increased from 0.71 in 2014 to 1.74 in 2019, and dropping slightly in 2020. The rate of males in emergency accommodation is consistently higher than that of females and the decrease between 2019 and 2020 are driven by a decline in the rate of homelessness for those aged 18-24 and 25-44. Rates of homelessness are important, because as noted above, they take into account population change and demographic shifts. The overall increase in the rate of adults experiencing homelessness in emergency shelters between 2014 and 2019 was not due to population changes, rather other factors brought about this increase. Furthermore, the rate of homelessness for those aged between 25-44 is nearly double those aged 45-64, while the rate of young people aged 18-24 experiencing homelessness dropped from 2.2 per 100,000 population over 18 in 2018 to 1.7 in 2020. Largely due to increase in families experiencing homelessness, the gap between rate of homelessness for adult males and adult females narrowed with 1.6 males and 1.2 females per 1,000 adults in emergency accommodation in 2017, but this gap subsequently widened as the rate of male homelessness continued to increase, with rate of 2.1 males and 1.2 females by 2020.

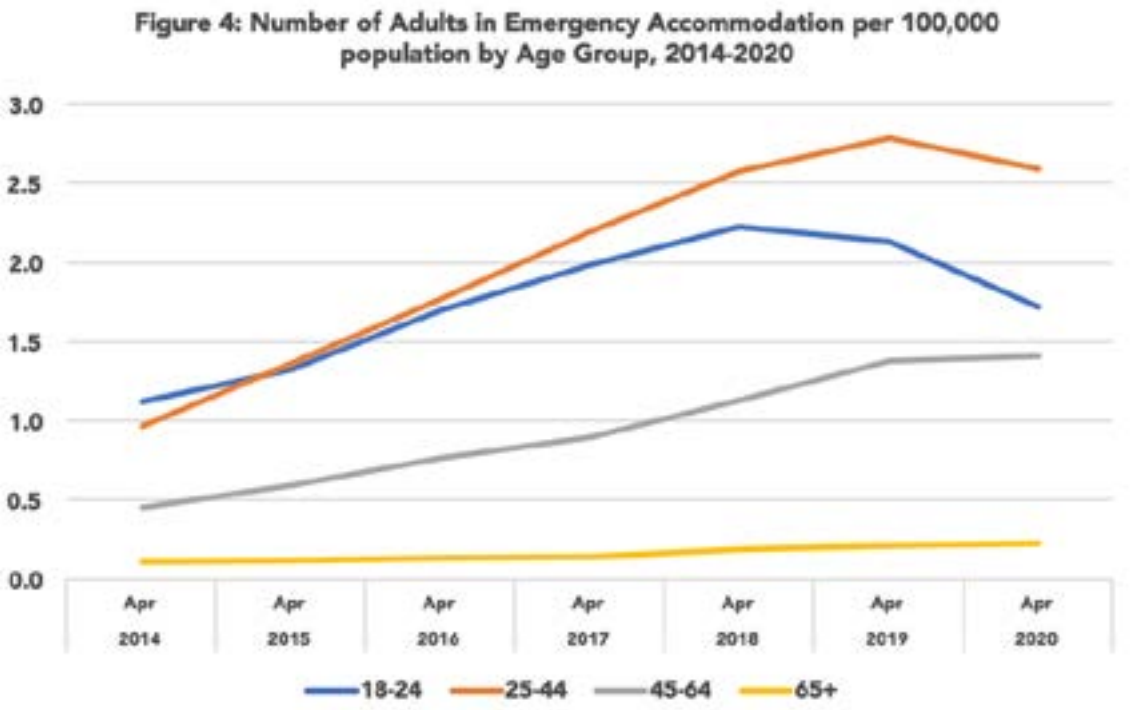
Figure 2: Number of Adults in Emergency Accommodation Per 1,000 population over 18



Source: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021a. / Central Statistics Office.



Source: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021a. / Central Statistics Office.

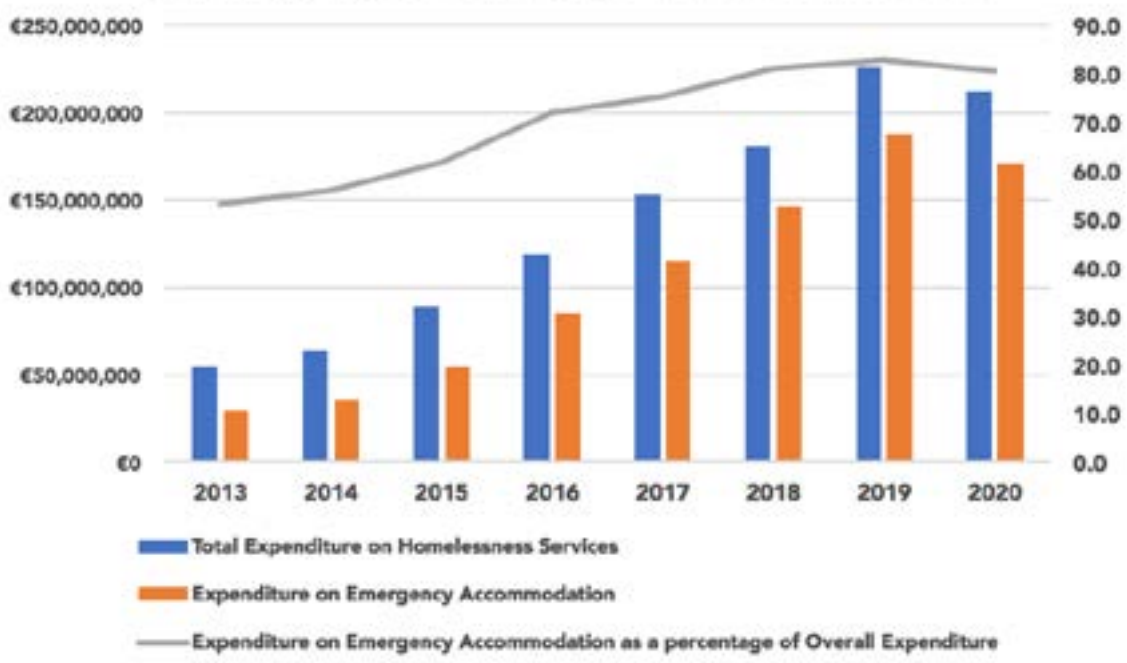


Source: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021a. / Central Statistics Office.

In summary, the number and rate of adults experiencing homelessness in Ireland, despite a raft of policy initiatives to address the issue (see O'Sullivan, 2020 for a summary), rose remorselessly between 2014 and 2019, and have remained stubbornly high in 2020. The cost of providing services to those experiencing homelessness, not surprisingly, also increased dramatically with central and local government expenditure rising from just over €50m in 2014 to just over €225m in 2019, before dropping slightly in 2020 as shown in figure 5 (see O'Sullivan and Mustafiri, 2020 for a more detailed analysis of expenditure on homelessness). Increasingly the bulk of expenditure was on the provision of emergency accommodation, accounting for over 80 percent of total expenditure in 2019 and 2020, much of going on the provision of rooms in private hotels and bed and breakfasts, as the capacity of the shelter services, particularly for families, was unable to provide the increase in demand for their services.

Based on these data sources it is reasonable to conclude that the policy response to homelessness in recent years in Ireland has been an expensive policy failure. This may be in part explained by the characteristics of those in emergency accommodation. For example, O'Carroll and Wainwright (2019, p. 1) note that the international evidence is that "[h]omeless people also have high rates of mental-ill health with high rates of schizophrenia, depression and anxiety. This increased mental illness burden has resulted in higher suicide rates. Homeless people also have much higher rates of alcohol and drug-addiction than the general population" and conclude that "Irish studies have found similar high rates of addiction, poor physical and mental health." Thus, part of the policy failure lie in the fact those experiencing homelessness have complex needs and are not amenable to an easy resolution, and indeed with a small number of exceptions, the numbers experiencing homelessness are increasing across the European Union (Serme-Morin and Coupechoux, 2021).

Figure 5: Expenditure on Homelessness Services in Ireland, 2014-2020

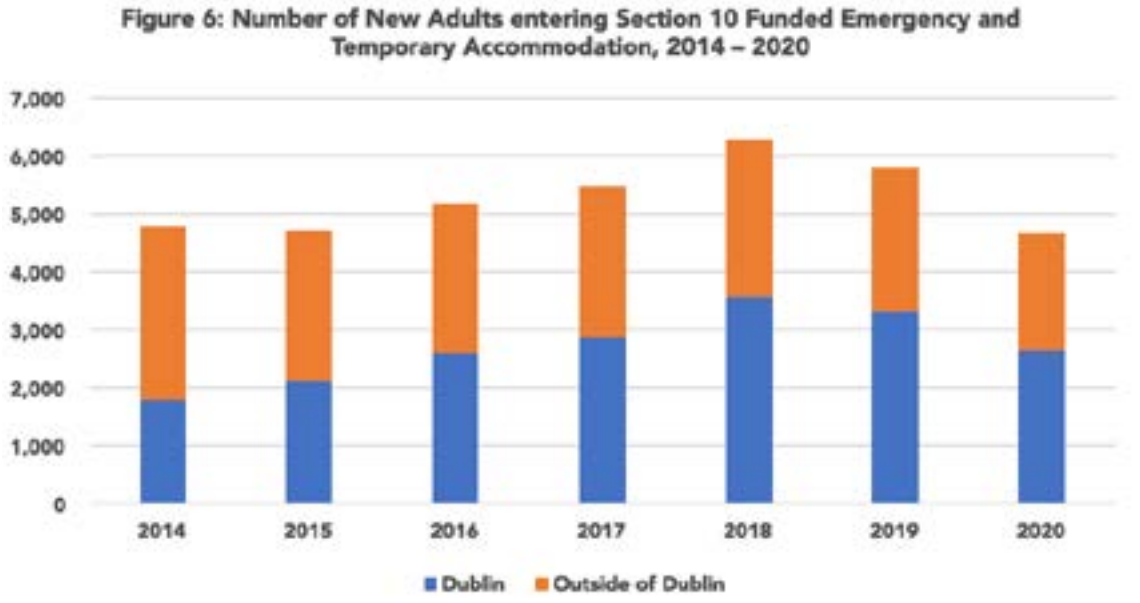


Source: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021a.

Dynamics of Homelessness

However, as we noted in the introduction to the paper, the experience of homelessness is a dynamic process and point-in-time data such as described above may not offer much assistance in understanding homelessness and the appropriate public policies to prevent and resolve homelessness. In addition to the production of the monthly reports described above, local authorities are also responsible to producing what are referred to as *Performance Reports* every quarter since the beginning of 2014, and these reports provide data on the number of adults entering and exiting emergency accommodation, in addition to the length of the spell in emergency accommodation. In contrast to the Monthly Reports, the data in these reports have rarely if ever been reported by the media when published, and the majority of commentators, either service providers or academic commentators, equally rarely refer to these data. This in part to due to the fact they these reports contain a substantial amount of detailed data – for example the Dublin Quarterly Performance Report for Q4 2020 is 16 pages in length, containing 16 tables and 10 figures of data - and are produced by nine lead Local Authorities; thus it requires an amount of work to summarize the data in these nine detailed reports each quarter. Although since quarter 2 2019, the Department of Housing have published a report summarising some of the data contained in these reports, even these summary reports generate little or interest from the media.

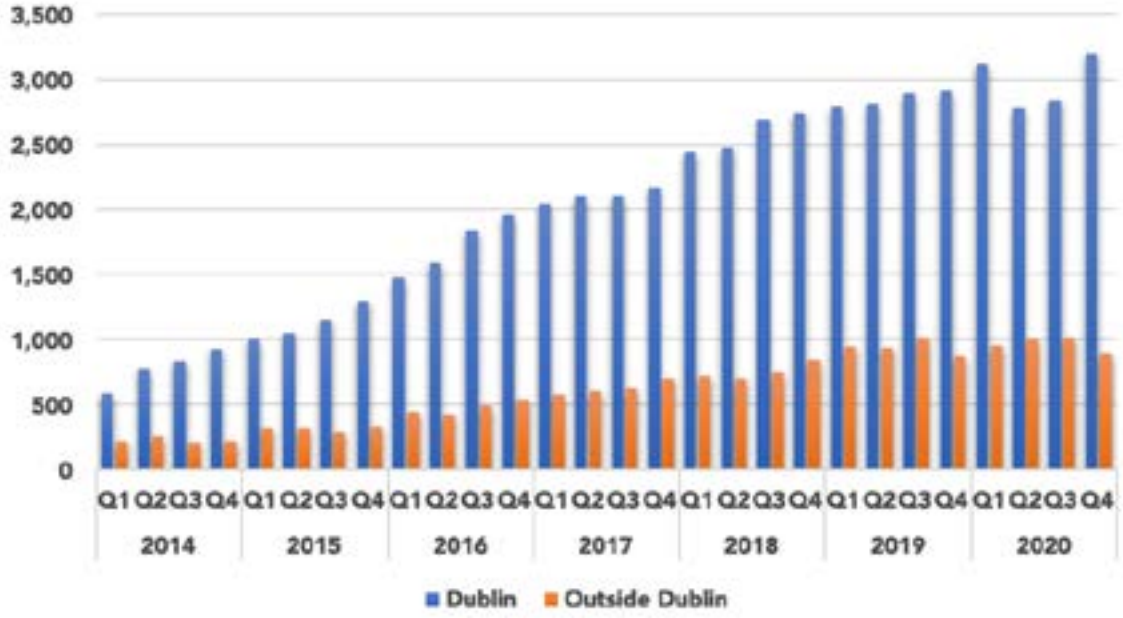
The first key set of data in these reports are the number of unique adult *entries* to emergency accommodation for the first time over the period 2014-2020 as shown in figure 6. This set of data shows a different pattern than observed in the monthly data. Firstly, nearly 37,000 unique adults experiencing a spell in emergency accommodation over the period 2014-2020 for the first time, compared to the average of just under 5,000 in emergency accommodation at a point in time over the same period. Second, the flow of adults experiencing a spell in emergency accommodation for the first time increased each year until the numbers peaked in 2018 and decreased significantly in 2019 and 2020. Third, at a point in time, on average, 70 percent of those in emergency accommodation are in the Dublin; however, the flow data shows that almost equal number of adults entered emergency accommodation for the first time in Dublin and outside Dublin. The reason why the point in time figure shows 70 percent of all adults in emergency accommodation in Ireland are in Dublin is that they are more likely to get 'stuck' in emergency accommodation in Dublin than outside of Dublin.



Source: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021a.

Figure 7 shows that at the end of 2020, 3,200 adults were in emergency accommodation for more than 6 months in Dublin, compared to less than 1,000 outside of Dublin. The numbers in emergency accommodation for more than six months in Dublin increased from just over 500 at the beginning of 2014 with nearly 80 percent of all adults in emergency accommodation in Dublin there for more than six months, compared to just under 50 percent outside of Dublin. On the basis of this data we can see that considerably more adults experienced a spell in emergency accommodation than suggested by the headline monthly figure. This is in line with the observation from Shinn and Khaddurri (2020) that longer time-frames capture a significantly larger number of people who experienced a spell in emergency accommodation.

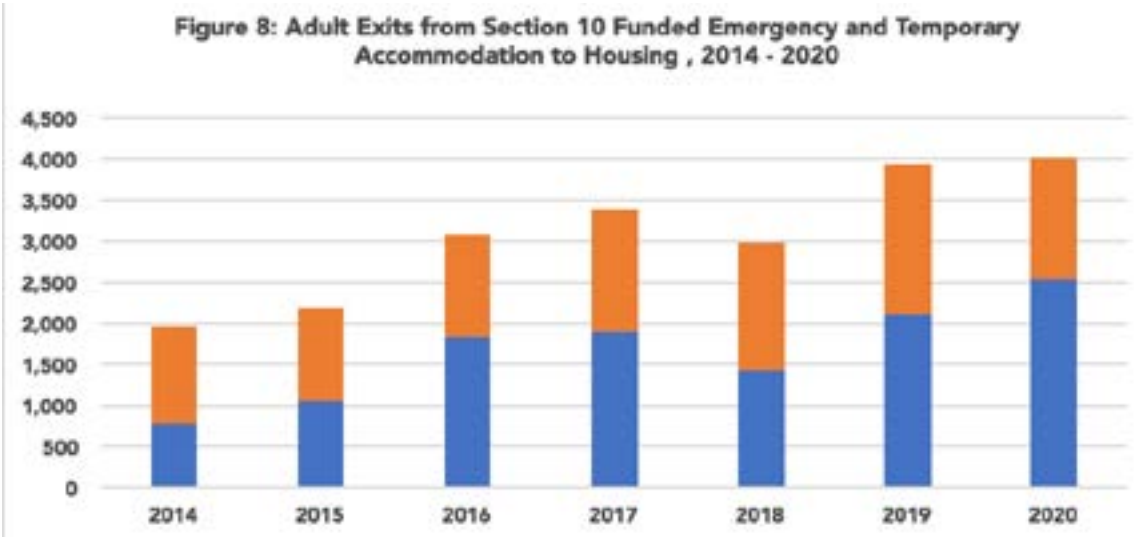
Figure 7: Number of Adults in Emergency Accommodation for longer than Six Months, Q1 2014 - Q4 2020



Source: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021a.

Exiting Homelessness

On the basis that the point-in-time data shows that was an average of just under 5,000 adults in emergency accommodation between 2014 and 2020, but 37,000 experienced a spell in emergency accommodation, then the majority must have exited their emergency accommodation. The data shows that just over 21,500 adults exited emergency accommodation to State subsidised housing in the 7 years between 2014 and 2020 – just under 10,000 outside Dublin and just over 11,500 in Dublin. Others exited to various insecure forms of accommodation or to other institutions such as prison or a hospital, often in a long-standing institutional circuit of repeated episodes of homelessness (Hopper et al, 1997; Daly et al, 2018). The numbers of adults who exited to housing has increased steadily each year from just under 2,000 in 2014 to 4,000 in 2020 as shown in figure 8. The majority of the adults who exited to housing over this period, did do without any supports other than income supports for those exiting to quasi-secure tenancies, and the provision of an affordable unit of housing for those making secure exits. Only those exiting *via* the dedicated Housing First programme, and there were just over 500 Housing First tenancies in place at the end of 2020 (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021b), required intensive supports to exit and maintain their accommodation.



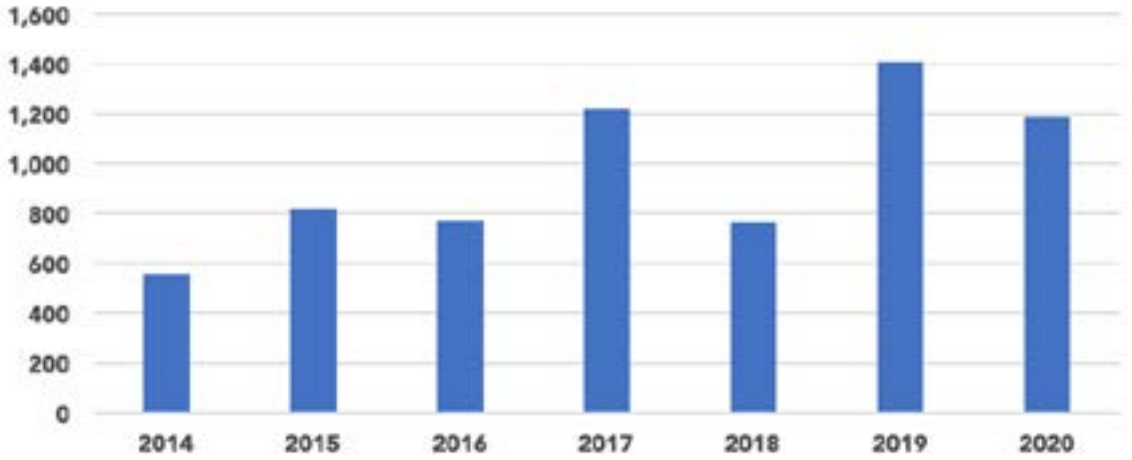
Source: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021a.

Not All Exits are Equal

Drawing on the work of Sosin et al. (1990) and Piliavin et al. (1996), we can think of exits from homelessness in Ireland as (1) *secure exits*, that is exiting to tenancies provided by municipal authorities or not-for-profit housing bodies that provide de facto security of tenure for life, and where rent is determined by income; (2) *quasi-secure exits*, that is tenancies provided by the market in the private rented sector, and although security of tenure is weak to moderate, the market rents are subsidised by the State, to allow the tenants' contribution to be based on their income (Norris and Hayden, 2021); and *dependent exits*, that is returning to family, staying with friends or families or moving to other institutions such as prison or hospital.

Taking the example of Dublin, between 2014 and 2020 there were nearly 16,400 exits from emergency accommodation, just over 6,700 or 40 percent were secure exits, 4,700 or nearly 30 percent were quasi-secure exits and remaining 4,900 exits were dependent exits. In Figure 9, exits to secure social housing tenancies are shown. These are tenancies provided by municipal authorities and not-for-profit Approved Housing Bodies where rents are income related and capped, security of tenure is high, with tenancies *de facto* for life. Those exiting emergency accommodation to this form of housing are *unlikely* to return to emergency accommodation due to high degree of security offered by state or not-for-profit landlords and that rents are guaranteed to be low and predictable, and based on the income of tenant rather than the cost of providing the dwelling or the market rate.

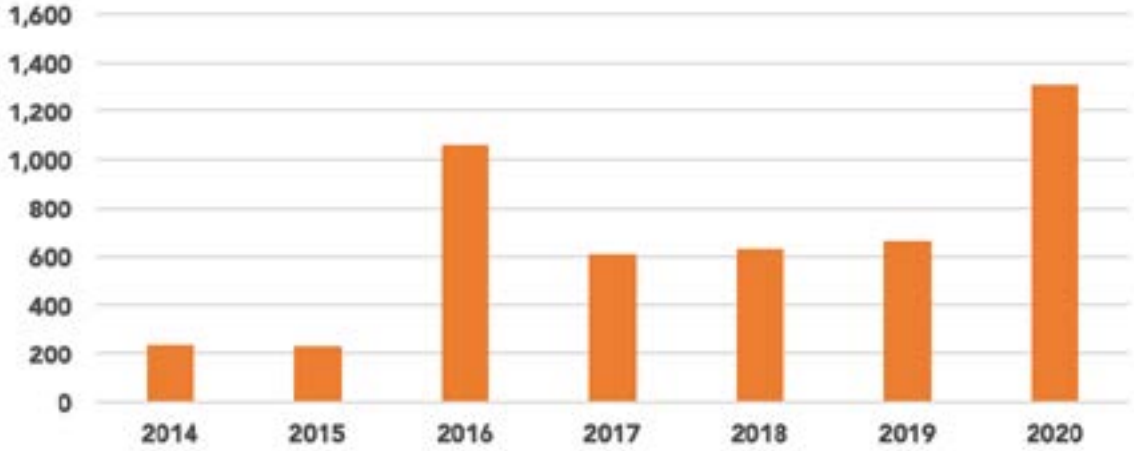
Figure 9: Secure Adult Exits from Emergency Accommodation in Dublin, 2014 – 2020



Source: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021a.

Quasi-secure exits, shown in figure 10, comprised of 4 distinct schemes that support tenancies in the private rented sector, with municipalities either leasing properties from the private market and making them available to qualified households or more commonly, providing a source of state funding to either the tenant or increasingly the case, directly to the landlord, to bridge the gap between the market rent and ability of the tenant to pay. Security of tenure varies depending if you are living in a dwelling that is leased or either the tenant or landlord is receiving a cash subsidy to enable renting. The most common form of assistance is the Housing Assistance Payment where the local authority pays the full market rent (subject to certain limits) to the Landlord, with the tenant paying an income related contribution to the local authority. However, landlords have the legal right to terminate a tenancy if for example the landlord wishes to sell the property or the landlord or landlord's family member wants to live in the property, alongside more the common reasons of breach of tenant's obligations. As a result, exits to these tenancies are considerably less stable than the secure tenancies and with a *low-moderate likelihood* of these exits resulting in a re-entry to emergency accommodation.

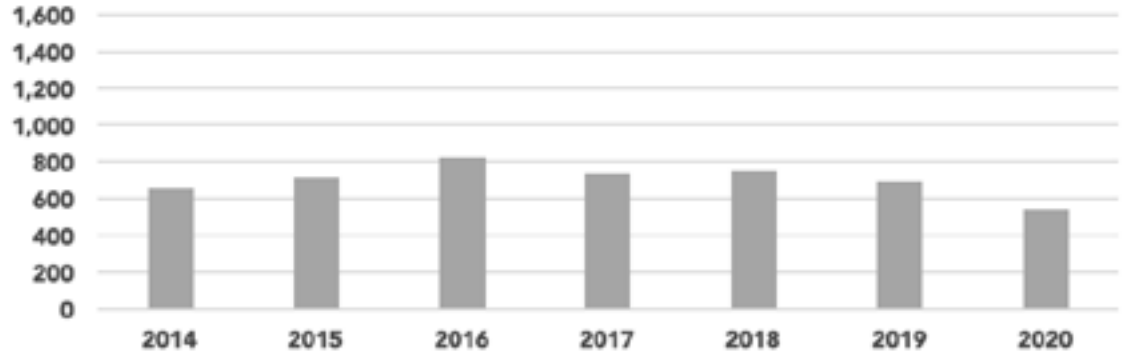
Figure 10: Quasi-Secure Adult Exits from Emergency Accommodation in Dublin, 2014 – 2020



Source: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021a.

Finally, we have dependent exits, where exits are to other institutions or to family and friends, and these exits are inherently unstable with a *strong likelihood* that those who exit *via* this route will return to emergency accommodation when their time in prison or hospital ends, or when a sharing arrangement breaks down.

Dependent Adult Exits from Emergency Accommodation in Dublin, 2014 – 2020



Source: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021a.

The flow data outlining the entries to and exits from emergency accommodation offers a very different interpretation of the nature of and responses to homelessness than does the point-in-time data. Given the scale of the entries it seems likely that entries to emergency are driven more by structural factors interacting with individual level vulnerabilities rather than by individual level vulnerabilities only. In terms of policy responses, the data suggests that very considerable success has been achieved in exiting adults from emergency accommodation, albeit not all exits are secure and depending on the type of exit, the likelihood of a further spell in

emergency accommodations ranges from low to high. The data also suggests that the massive expansion in the use of private emergency accommodation (hotels and bed and breakfast type accommodation), the construction of nearly 30 family hubs and the expansion of supported temporary accommodation (congregate facilities for adult-only households) was demand-led rather than the provision of such accommodation pulling households into homelessness. Adults were entering emergency accommodation as a consequence of the ending of their tenancy in the private rented sector and their inability to secure new accommodation, or that 'sofa surfing' arrangements became untenable rather than emergency accommodation acting as a pull factor.

In addition to the number of households in emergency accommodation at a point-in-time, we also have much larger number of households who are qualified for social housing, that is they are, for example, living in over-crowded, unsuitable or unfit accommodation, or have a reasonable requirement for separate accommodation and don't have the financial means to acquire accommodation, but who are waiting for such accommodation to be made available to them. The over-all number of households who qualify for social housing has declined from nearly 90,000 in 2013 to just under 62,000 in 2020. However, this decline is largely attributable to changes in way in which households in recent of various rent supplements are treated. If you focus instead on the number of households living in accommodation that is unfit or overcrowded only as shown in Table 1, that is households in inadequate accommodation as set out in European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS), a more consistent figure is noted, with outstanding need in the mid-30,000s over the past number of years. These households, primarily in the private rented sector or staying with family / friends constitute a minimum population, whose economic precariousness combined with the shock of for example a relationship breakdown, or termination of tenancy, vulnerable to experiencing a spell of homelessness.

Table 1. Households in Insecure / overcrowded Accommodation

	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Unsuitable accommodation due to particular household circumstances	20,349	18,920	18,920	18,920	19,422	18,750
Reasonable requirement for separate accommodation	9,587	11,476	11,914	11,108	12,045	11,445
Overcrowded accommodation	2,896	3,517	3,544	3,465	3,649	3,551
Unfit accommodation	647	2,304	948	648	511	544
Total	33,479	38,397	37,536	34,141	35,627	34,290

Source: Housing Agency (Various Years) Summary of Social Housing Assessments.

It seems plausible that the flows into emergency accommodation are coming primarily from this larger vulnerable population, and until the provision of secure housing for this larger group is addressed, there will a continuous flow of adults dislodged from their precarious housing into emergency accommodation.

Conclusion

The majority of adults who experienced a spell in emergency accommodation for their first time between 2014 and 2020 exited to housing and their likelihood of experiencing a repeat spell in emergency accommodation is low to moderate. On the other hand, those making dependent exits have a high likelihood of experiencing a repeat episode. For those making dependent exits and those getting 'stuck' in emergency accommodation, emergency accommodation is providing extraordinarily expensive poor quality shelter on either on an intermittent or long-term basis without resolving their residential instability through the provision of appropriate secure and affordable housing. Thus, the point-in-time figure is disproportionately made up of those 'stuck' in emergency accommodation, largely due to a mis-match between their household composition, that is single person households and those households with large numbers of child dependents, and the available stock of either social or private housing, and those cycling in and out of emergency accommodation as part of the institutional circuit that they are traversing.

The focus of much media and other commentary in Ireland in recent years in relation to homelessness has been on the relatively small number of adults experiencing literal homelessness, and to a lesser degree on the number in emergency accommodation at a point in time, but with little or no focus on the cumulative number of adults who experiencing a spell in emergency accommodation of the past 7 years. This has led to the neglect of understanding what factors contributed to 37,000 adults entering emergency accommodation for their first time between 2014 and 2020, and a focus instead on the characteristics of the, on average, 5,000 adults in emergency accommodation at a point in time over the same period, and the just over 100 rough sleepers in Dublin at a point in time. How we measure homelessness has implications for how public policies are constructed and how the issue is framed. In the case of Ireland, a focus on the 37,000 adults who experiencing homelessness for the first time over the past 7 years, rather the traits of the significantly smaller number in emergency accommodation or literally homeless at a point in time would frame homelessness as a consequence of housing insecurity and precariousness rather than resulting from individual level frailties and dysfunctions, with profound consequences for responding to homelessness.

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