

February 2026

NWC Submission on the Child and Family Homelessness Action Plan



National Women's Council

Introduction

Founded in 1973, NWC is the leading representative organisation working for women's rights and women's equality on the island of Ireland. We represent and derive our mandate from our membership, which includes nearly 200 groups and organisations from a diversity of backgrounds, sectors and locations across Ireland. As a membership organisation, NWC is uniquely placed to represent and communicate the concerns of women in Ireland.

NWC convenes and is a member of several key networks in which issues relating to housing, homelessness, and their determinants are a recurring theme. The Observatory on Violence against Women, established in 2002 and chaired by NWC, is an independent network of 40 grassroots and national organisations that provides a vital space for organisations to work for improved policies, service provision and advocacy in support of women victims–survivors of male violence. NWC is also a member of the National One Parent Family Alliance (NOPFA), which has consistently highlighted the disproportionate levels of poverty and homelessness experienced by lone parent families and the urgent need for targeted action.

In recent years, NWC has undertaken significant work on the links between housing insecurity, exploitation and violence against women. Our 2024 research on sex-for-rent exploitation highlighted the risks faced by women with limited access to safe accommodation, including those fleeing domestic violence and migrant women.¹ In 2025, NWC convened a national conference examining the intersection of housing precarity, homelessness and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV), which demonstrated how women and children are often trapped between unsafe homes and homelessness.²

NWC welcomes the opportunity to inform the development of a dedicated Child and Family Homelessness Action Plan. It is essential that this Plan aligns with the Third National Strategy on DSGBV and its successor as part of a whole-of-government approach to ending violence against women and girls, and that it is integrated with social protection and other key supports. This is a critical opportunity to implement robust, preventative and survivor-centred actions that recognise the distinct and compounding barriers faced by women and children and address the mutually reinforcing relationship between homelessness, poverty, and DSGBV.

Context: Child & Family Homelessness is Gendered

Ireland continues to experience extremely high levels of child and family homelessness. In the week of 22–28 December last year, Department of Housing figures recorded 16,734 people living in emergency accommodation, including 5,188 children. There were more than

¹ National Women's Council (2024). 'Sex For Rent'. Available at: https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWC_Sex_For_Rent_Research.pdf

² National Women's Council (2025). Joining the Dots. Prepared for the National Women's Council by Dr. Kathy Walsh. Available at: https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/16450_NWC_Joining_The_Dots_V2_FINAL.pdf

4,500 women in emergency accommodation, and 56.3% of the 2,478 families experiencing homelessness were lone parent families – despite lone parent households making up only 17% of families nationally.³ The vast majority of lone parent households are headed by women, highlighting the gendered nature of family homelessness.

Women and children experience homelessness differently from single adults. Many women are not rough sleeping but are instead in emergency accommodation, domestic violence refuges, overcrowded housing, or temporarily staying with friends and family. This “hidden homelessness” is not fully captured in official statistics, which also exclude women and children in refuges, the international protection system and other insecure living situations.

Particular groups of women face additional and intersecting barriers to accessing safe and secure housing, including Traveller and Roma women, migrant women, disabled women, older women and women leaving the international protection system. Traveller and Roma families continue to experience severe accommodation insecurity, while migrant women – particularly those outside the EU – are more likely to live in overcrowded housing and face homelessness. Approximately 27% of people experiencing homelessness have a disability, further highlighting the need for an intersectional approach.⁴

The impacts of homelessness on children are profound and long-lasting. Children living in emergency accommodation frequently experience disruption to education, lack of privacy, limited play and study space, and ongoing stress and insecurity. Where homelessness is linked to domestic abuse, children experience compounded trauma and instability. Addressing child and family homelessness is therefore essential not only for housing policy but for children’s wellbeing and development.

Women, Homelessness & Gender-Based Violence

Women and children are increasingly trapped between the housing crisis, rising levels of homelessness, and persistently high levels of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV) and exploitation in Ireland. These are not separate or parallel crises. Housing insecurity significantly increases women’s vulnerability to abuse and exploitation, while domestic abuse is a primary pathway into homelessness for many women and children.

For Traveller and Roma women, migrant women, disabled women, lone parents, older women, and members of the LGBTQ+ community, these risks are compounded by intersecting forms of discrimination and structural disadvantage. For these groups, the barriers to accessing safety, support and secure accommodation are often significantly higher and more complex.

³ Central Statistics Office (2023) [Census 2022](#)

⁴ ESRI (2018) [Discrimination and Inequality in Housing in Ireland](#)

Women experiencing domestic abuse are frequently forced to make an impossible choice: remain in an abusive home or leave and risk homelessness. Where women – often with children – choose to leave, they encounter a system that is primarily designed to respond to immediate crisis rather than to provide sustainable housing solutions. The availability of specialist refuge and emergency accommodation remains severely limited due to high demand. Once the initial crisis period has passed, many survivors are left with no clear pathway to long-term housing.

As a result, women and children may move between emergency accommodation, refuges and other insecure arrangements, piece together unsafe temporary housing, or return to abusive relationships simply because they have nowhere else to go. This revolving-door experience of homelessness compounds trauma and instability for both women and children.

Some progress has been made. The Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence sets out important commitments to improve service provision and access to safe, short and long-term accommodation for victims and survivors. Cuan, the statutory DSGBV Agency established in 2024, is working in partnership with specialist providers to expand refuge provision, including in areas where no services currently exist.

Delivering Homes, Building Communities 2025-2030 also recognises domestic abuse as one of the leading causes of homelessness among women. NWC welcomes this acknowledgement, as well as the Plan's recognition of the distinct and compounding barriers faced by women and victim-survivors experiencing homelessness. In particular, commitments to prioritisation within local authority allocations and to ensuring immediate access to the full suite of social housing supports for survivors relocating to a new local authority are both practical and necessary. Plans to establish and implement a protocol in the first half of 2026 allowing households fleeing DSGBV to transfer time spent on a social housing waiting list between local authorities are especially welcome.⁵

However, the relationship between housing precarity and DSGBV must be more explicitly recognised as structurally interconnected and addressed through robust, coordinated actions. Without this, policy responses will remain fragmented and insufficient to meet the needs of women and children

Lone Parent Families & Homelessness

Lone parent families are disproportionately affected by homelessness in Ireland. Although they make up only 17% of families in the general population, they account for over half of families accessing emergency accommodation. Lone parent households also experience significantly higher rates of enforced deprivation, at-risk-of-poverty and consistent poverty and have the lowest levels of household wealth of any household type.⁶ Lone parent poverty

⁵ [Housing Policy – Thursday, 22 Jan 2026 – Parliamentary Questions \(34th Dáil\) – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

⁶ CSO (2025) [Survey on Income and Living Conditions \(SILC\) 2024](#)

and homelessness is a distinctly gendered issue: approximately 85% of lone parent families are headed by women.⁷

The Child and Family Homelessness Action Plan must include a specific focus on the needs of lone parent families, recognising the structural barriers they face and providing targeted policy responses. An intersectional approach is essential, as additional and compounding barriers to secure accommodation are experienced by lone parents from Traveller and Roma communities, lone parents seeking or leaving international protection, and disabled lone parents.

Lone parents face a range of challenges beyond direct housing barriers. Research by Focus Ireland, *Lone Parents and Homelessness in Ireland*, highlights the difficulties many lone parents encounter in accessing affordable and flexible childcare, secure employment, education and training opportunities, and adequate income supports.⁸ NWC has consistently highlighted the gendered nature of these barriers and has advocated for coordinated, cross-government responses, including public provision of early childhood education and care and reforms to the social protection system to move away from a traditional “male breadwinner” model towards one that reflects diverse family structures.⁹

Adequate income and rental supports are central to preventing homelessness among lone parent families. Current Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) limits do not reflect market rents and are insufficient for many families, while suitable HAP properties remain scarce. Although discrimination against HAP recipients is prohibited under equality legislation, it remains widespread and can be difficult to challenge in practice. Many lone parents do not have the time, resources or capacity to pursue complaints through the Residential Tenancies Board.¹⁰

Additional income supports for households in receipt of HAP are also required. Households relying on HAP face some of the highest poverty risks after housing costs, and targeted social protection measures are needed to prevent families from falling into homelessness.

Lone parents leaving the international protection system face further barriers, including discrimination in the private rental market and inconsistent application of policy by local authorities. Despite confirmation that the local connection test should not apply to people leaving the international protection system, it continues to be unevenly applied in practice. For families still in IPAS accommodation, the transfer of families between centres continues to cause significant disruption and distress, particularly for children who are moved away from schools and community supports. This practice should end.

To effectively reduce and prevent child and family homelessness, the Action Plan must adopt a gender-responsive, prevention-focused and whole-of-government approach that

⁷ CSO (2023) [Census 2022 Profile 3 – Households, Families and Childcare](#)

⁸ Sheridan, S. (2025) [Lone Parents and Homelessness in Ireland – Focus Ireland](#)

⁹ National Women’s Council (2025) [Pre-Budget Submission 2026](#)

¹⁰ Sheridan, S. (2025) [Lone Parents and Homelessness in Ireland – Focus Ireland](#)

recognises the interconnected nature of housing insecurity, poverty and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV).

Recommendations for the Action Plan

1. Recognise and respond to the gendered drivers of family homelessness

- Explicitly recognise DSGBV as a key driver of homelessness for women and children.
- Embed a gender and equality lens across all actions in the Plan.
- Ensure alignment with the Third National Strategy on DSGBV and its successor.
- Adopt a Housing First approach for families experiencing homelessness, including women and children experiencing DSGBV.

2. Improve data, definitions and accountability

- Revise the Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS) to include:
 - women and children in domestic violence refuges
 - families in the international protection system
- Collect disaggregated homelessness data – in line with best practice with respect to equality data collection.
- Publish this disaggregated homelessness data regularly.
- Ensure representation of specialist DSGBV services and victims-survivors on Regional Homelessness Consultative Groups, in collaboration with Cuan.

3. Ensure access to safe and appropriate short-term accommodation

- Continue expansion of refuge and emergency accommodation, particularly in counties without provision.
- Ensure all emergency accommodation is:
 - trauma-informed in its approach
 - culturally competent and anti-racist
 - adequately staffed and resourced
- Provide mandatory training for staff on:
 - Gender-sensitive approaches – including how to properly engage and support women and children in all their diversity. Training on specific issues like DSGBV, anti-racism, trauma-informed approaches, etc.
- Develop clear referral pathways between refuges, Tusla, Gardaí and housing authorities to prevent families entering homelessness.

4. Expand long-term housing options for survivors and families

Legal and safety measures

- Strengthen legal protections enabling women and children to remain safely in the family home where appropriate.
- Ensure perpetrators are removed and rehoused where necessary.
- Develop sanctuary schemes.¹¹

Social housing

- Increase access to social housing for families experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- Introduce a mandatory Housing First approach for survivors of DSGBV.
- Establish a clear national protocol to transfer from joint to sole tenancy
- Progress the social housing passport to allow time on waiting lists to transfer across local authorities.
- Ensure victims and survivors can leave tenancies without penalty where safety is at risk.

Private rental sector

- Increase HAP and Homeless HAP limits to reflect real market rents.
- Extend Residential Tenancies Act protections to licensee arrangements to prevent exploitation, including sex-for-rent arrangements.
- Strengthen enforcement against discrimination towards HAP recipients.

5. Strengthen income and prevention supports for lone parent families

- Introduce an additional social protection support for individuals reliant on HAP.
- Extend Jobseeker's Transition Payment until the youngest child turns 18 or finishes second-level education.
- Ensure both rates and disregards for lone parent support payments are benchmarked to adequate income levels and indexed to account for inflation.
- Ensure child maintenance is not counted as means for housing eligibility or secondary benefits.
- Invest in affordable, accessible childcare and pathways to education, training and employment.

¹¹ In the UK, Sanctuary Scheme is a programme where agencies work together to make it safer for a woman and children to remain in the family home by removing the perpetrator and providing a range of supports, such as safety planning, improving home security, assistance with legal issues and in managing finances and providing tailored support for any relevant issues as needed (such as mental health, disability, substance abuse, immigration status), that may hinder their ability to maintain housing.

6. Strengthen tenancy sustainment and prevention services

- Enhance resourcing of tenancy sustainment services and the Residential Tenancies Board.
- Provide targeted supports for lone parents at risk of losing tenancies.
- Fund early intervention and prevention supports for families at risk of homelessness.
- Strengthen Local Authority Integration Teams and inter-agency responses.

7. Address barriers for families in the international protection system

- End the unrequested transfer of families with children between IPAS centres.
- Ensure local connection tests are not applied to families leaving international protection.
- Provide targeted housing pathways for families exiting IPAS.

8. Address Traveller and Roma homelessness

- Implement the recommendations from the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review.
- Provide ring-fenced multi-annual funding for Traveller accommodation.
- Ensure culturally appropriate accommodation options by working with Traveller organisations on accommodation policy and solutions.

9. Governance and implementation

- Set measurable targets to:
 - reduce time spent in emergency accommodation
 - prevent entries into homelessness
- Ensure ongoing consultation with civil society, service providers, women with lived experience of homelessness and DSGBV, and other key stakeholders.

Contact Details

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