



**Barnardos**

Because childhood lasts a lifetime



# Homelessness, Poor Housing and the Impact on Children **2025**

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# Introduction

The Housing Crisis in Ireland has been getting progressively worse over the past five years, resulting in an extremely short supply of accommodation and rapidly increasing house prices. This is having a significant impact across all sections of society.

Unfortunately, it is traumatising thousands of children within the country, greatly affecting their current wellbeing and future opportunities. A large proportion of the children and families we support are living in homeless, overcrowded, unsuitable and poor standard accommodation. A larger number are living in constant worry about falling into that accommodation. Below we outline what those issues are in more detail, and the impact they are having on the children and young people we support.

We appreciate that solving the overarching housing crisis will require significant increases in house building and numerous medium- and long-term actions. However, there are immediate actions the government can immediately take to mitigate the harm children are facing. It is vital they do so, because childhood lasts a lifetime.

We provide support services at 56 service locations across the country. In every single one of them housing is a substantial issue for the families we support, and in every one of them staff have repeatedly stated the issue is getting worse. Approximately one in five (18%) children we support live in unsuitable accommodation. For the children we work with it is directly damaging their childhoods. We highlight the multiple reasons how below.

Our intensive family support services work with families and children in emergency accommodation by providing them with practical help. They also work with those parents and children to try and give them tools to keep themselves regulated while building coping mechanisms to deal with the stress and trauma resulting from being homeless. In this way our staff do their best to mitigate the harm children may suffer from entering and living in emergency accommodation, reducing the



impact it has on other aspects of their lives as much as possible including engagement with school and maintaining friendships.

## Emergency Accommodation

Over the past year, the number of children living in emergency accommodation has hit record levels. The most recent figures show that 4,958 children were living in emergency accommodation in June this year. That is an increase of over 500 children (4,404) from June 2024 and almost double the figure from five years ago in June 2020 (2,653). Additionally, more children are spending very long periods of time living in emergency accommodation. Figures show<sup>1</sup> that there has been a substantial increase in the number of families spending more than two years living in emergency accommodation, with more than one fifth (21%) now there for that length of time compared to 13% in 2022<sup>2</sup> and just under half for more than a year (46%) compared to 28% in 2022.

Across our services we have seen more and more families we support living in emergency accommodation, most frequently due to no fault evictions, despite many often having substantial notice they have simply been unable to source alternative affordable accommodation. A significant number have spent months of uncertainty, with little to no housing support, counting down the days to their eviction and officially becoming homeless and presenting to their local authorities.

The families we support report the standard of emergency accommodation varies considerably both locally and across the country. In some locations families can be fortunate to have their own small units with multiple bedrooms and washing and cooking facilities. However, in many places accommodation consists of a solitary room, sometimes in a hotel or B&B, shared facilities with numerous families, exceptionally limited furniture and no storage space.

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<sup>1</sup> [Homeless Quarterly Progress Report 2025 Q2.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> [homeless-quarterly-progress-report-for-q2-2022.pdf](#)



### **Lone Parents**

We support a disproportionate number of young lone mothers living in emergency accommodation, echoing national statistics. They have often faced considerable additional adversities including domestic violence and poverty among others.

## **Impact on Children**

### **1. Trauma**

It is hard to understate the potential impact that moving into emergency accommodation can have on a child. For many children we work with, it is a case of suddenly leaving their homes, most of their belongings, potentially their pets, and moving into much smaller accommodation that is less suitable and a considerable distance from their previous homes. This event can be extremely traumatic for children and unfortunately, without supports, long lasting. The trauma can affect children's relationships with others, their behaviour and ability to engage in school, their confidence levels and feeling of wellbeing, in essence all aspects of their lives.

Case study<sup>3</sup>: Mother with two young children entered emergency accommodation. They had suddenly lost their home, social housing, and moved into an extremely cramped one-bedroom hotel room. This was very traumatic for the older child, who was 4 at the time, as he had to give up his bedroom and home which he loved within a few weeks of his grandfather dying. The hotel room they were provided by the local authority had stained sheets and faeces on the curtains. When a complaint was raised the mother, she was simply told to go to a local store to purchase new sheets. The son couldn't understand what she had done wrong to be put there, and became withdrawn in his crèche.

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<sup>3</sup> While the case studies used throughout this document are true, we have changed some other details in order to protect the family's identity. Any photos used on the cover are models



Case study: Mother with three young children was told she was being evicted by her landlord having lived in her rented property for four years. She tried to find alternative accommodation but was unsuccessful. Her children had been through previous traumatic experiences, witnessing domestic violence, and as a result she was extremely reluctant to move into emergency accommodation, as she felt it would be another traumatising event for them. Unfortunately, upon being forced to move this proved to be the case. Two of her children started to wet the bed when they moved and stopped wanting to see their friends (who they fortunately still lived relatively close by).

## 2. Developmental space and privacy

A significant proportion of families we support living in emergency accommodation are forced into very small spaces, compelled to share solitary hotel rooms with parents and siblings. Space is extremely restricted. This can limit the areas in which young children can develop physically, for example learn to crawl and walk, and can cause developmental problems<sup>4</sup>. For older children it means there is less space to study and do their homework and less privacy as they get older.

Case study: Mother, step father, son and daughter lived in homeless accommodation for 18 months. It was a one-bedroom property. Daughter was 15 when they moved into the accommodation. Despite being very positive relationships, it was difficult and uncomfortable given the daughters age and her period of development in such proximity to her brother and stepfather.

Additionally, there are issues as to where to store children's possessions such as clothes and toys in such a cramped space. Children we work with have described

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<sup>4</sup> Controlling for a range of relevant characteristics, and SDQ score at age five, research has found that length of exposure to housing that is considered too small for the family, significantly increase total SDQ difficulties scores at age nine.

[https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS183\\_1.pdf](https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS183_1.pdf)



having to leave most of their possessions behind when they become homeless, there's no space in their homeless accommodation and they have nowhere else to store them.

Outdoor space is generally also very restricted and the emergency accommodation settings can be very unsuitable locations for children to play. There is a greater need in most cases to leave the accommodation frequently during the day, simply because of the lack of space, with parents describing feelings of claustrophobia. Some parents have described literally roaming the streets, despite this being in very urban areas, where safety is a concern.

Case study: Father and mother living in emergency accommodation in central urban setting. Parents would find themselves most evenings walking the streets just to stay out of the tiny one bedroom that they had. They knew their two older children needed to get out. In previous accommodation they would let them out to play by themselves. However, they found it more worrying to do so now because of the location.

### **3. Engaging in school and accessing services.**

Families we support often are forced to move long distances when they enter emergency accommodation. For some it means significant sacrifices and difficulties keeping their children in their existing schools. It can require children getting up very early every morning and commuting long distances for long periods. For other children this simply is not possible and they are compelled to start in new schools, regardless of the time of year or stage they are at in school. Children have expressed concerns about stigma of starting new schools, particularly in the middle of a school year, fearing new classmates will know it's due to them becoming homeless.



Case study: Family was forced to move into city centre from suburbs in order to access emergency accommodation. Oldest child was in second class. The commute to school took an hour and a half. The mother would have to wait in the school area most days with her younger child, until the older child was finished school for the day, or else face a three-hour roundtrip to go back to her accommodation.

Case study: For one mother the commute was so long that she had no choice but to move her child's school. She tried to stay with her brother for a period which was closer to the school but it was just too cramped. The commute in the morning to school was taking almost two hours, too much for her and her son. Changing school was difficult and upsetting for the boy for obvious reasons. He also felt like the other children in his new class new why he had to move schools and felt ashamed about that.

Younger children may no longer be able to attend their early years care. Due to the shortage of places parents will struggle to transfer them to a new provider, and often they will simply no longer be able to attend early years' services. This can have an impact on their social development and also raise huge issues for parents who are working. Quality early year care is extremely beneficial to all children, particularly those experiencing disadvantage.

Many children we support living in emergency accommodation are engaged with other professional services, for example for health or developmental reasons. Accessing these services for many families becomes substantially more difficult after moving into emergency accommodation, requiring more time and expense. Parents will continue to try and bring their children to these services, appreciating how essential they are. There are limited options to move service location and if there are, children have to build new trusting relationships with new professionals which can be difficult.



## 4. Socialising, safety and rules

Given that many families we support have to move long distances to emergency accommodation, it makes socialising with existing friends and family very difficult given the required travel now involved. This problem similarly applies to any clubs or extra-curricular activities children might have been engaged with, such as GAA clubs.

Most settings have strict rules about who can and cannot enter the premises, with some families reporting restrictive curfews. This means children can never have friends or family members over, even if the accommodation has relatively more space than others. That might seem minor but they can't engage in a regular and important part of childhood, for example having grandparents over for birthdays. It is important to stress that for one in four children in emergency accommodation, this is something they have had to deal with for more than two years.

In some cases, the rules of the particular accommodation might be restrictive and cause confusion for children. For example, some state that children under a certain age, 16 in many places, cannot be left on their own in the rooms, despite them being more than old enough if they were living in their own properties.

Finally, many children we support live in emergency accommodation that is simply not suitable for their needs or might make children and their parents anxious. For some families this is due to children having additional needs, particularly sensory, while for others it can be the result of living beside numerous units with multiple adults dealing with considerable adversities.

Case study: Mother with two young children. One of the children has additional needs, who recently got a further diagnosis. They have been living in one-bedroom room for the entire time. Not enough space for him, she feels like he has deteriorated considerably.



Case study: Family with three children living in property beside numerous couples who had significant adversities, including drug use and domestic violence issues. Children witnessed this on a frequent basis and were often woken up by it during the night.

Case study: Mother and young daughter had room in B&B that was primarily for single men, as the local authority was so stretched. They did not stay there for long but it was very concerning for them at the time.

## 5. Nutrition and Clothing

In a lot of emergency accommodation settings, the ability to cook and store food is severely restricted. This might mean sharing cooking facilities with multiple other families, or not having any at all. Obviously, this can impact the nutrition that children can access. Again, given the length of time that children can end up spending in these settings this can lead to real problems. It's appreciated that a substantial proportion of emergency accommodation facilities provide families with meals. This can be positive, but again does restrict options and what families might want to provide their children with.

Case study: Mother and father with 9-month old son struggling to store milk in convenient location. Have been trying to wean their child, found it exceptionally difficult to do so due to no proper cooking facilities.

Cleaning clothes can be equally difficult to manage and can prove costlier. Sharing facilities can be difficult, particularly when there are young children going through multiple outfits on a daily basis. They will need clothes cleaned more frequently, but also can't be left on their own in the rooms so will need to go with their parents to the laundry facilities.



## 6. Impact on parenting

Parents can find moving into emergency accommodation extremely traumatic. They may feel like they have let their children down. It is an all-encompassing issue and can greatly exacerbate or lead to additional issues, such as stress, anxiety and financial pressures. It is difficult for parents to think about anything other than their housing problems.

It can make focusing on other issues much more difficult, such as difficult family relationships, wellbeing problems and struggles with engaging in school when their housing situation is poor. For some, the uncertainty can lead to a sense of hopelessness. It can be difficult to see a way out, particularly when there is such limited private rented accommodation available and even fewer properties that will accept HAP payments.

Case study: A young mother with a very young child was moved into emergency accommodation due to problems with the child's father. In the past the mother dealt with mental health issues as well as some minor problems with substance use. She had been coping extremely well and demonstrating wonderful skills as a mother. Unfortunately, herself and her young daughter, were moved to four different emergency accommodation settings within three months, all B&Bs. This was extremely difficult for the mother who never knew every night she went to sleep if she would be forced to move the next day. It escalated her mental health issues and made her think about using substances again. A referral was made to Tusla as a result. It was clear that this would not have happened if it wasn't for her distressing housing problem.

## Overcrowded Accommodation

Homelessness and emergency accommodation are not the only housing issue that families we support face. A significant proportion of families we work with across the country, in both rural and urban areas, have to share accommodation with other extended family members in order to avoid becoming homeless.



The most frequent scenario is families having to live in grandparents' homes, sometimes with uncles, aunts and cousins also in the properties. There are occasions where families we support have been forced at times to effectively couch surf at friends' homes with their children, preferring this to moving into emergency accommodation. These situations can lead to crowded accommodation, creating very limited space for children and young people, who can be cramped together.

Case study: Mother and son living in two-bedroom apartment with her brother and his fiancée. Mother and son had to share a single bedroom with one bed. The fiancée became pregnant and it was unclear whether or not if there was going to be enough space for everyone when the baby arrived. This led to significant uncertainty for the mother and her son.

In some instances, mothers and fathers have to live separately in different households as a result of there not being enough space in one. In most situations it is uncertain how long the accommodation can be sustainable.

Case study: Mother and father with two children were evicted from their home as the landlord wanted to sell the house. They couldn't source any rented accommodation and didn't want their children to move into emergency accommodation. The mother moved into her parent's house with the two children, sharing one bedroom together. Her brother was also staying in the house. Her husband moved into his mother's two-bedroom apartment, which was thankfully close by, so the children would have some degree of space.

There are of course positives for some children living closer to extended family, building bonds with them and having additional supports so close to hand. However, the lack of space can lead to additional tensions within the homes. This can be exacerbated when grandparents have different views on how to parent, which conflict with parents.



Case study: Mother moved back in with her own mother due to struggles with the emergency accommodation she was in and the lack of space for her child. Unfortunately, there was regularly disagreements with the grandmother about the best interests of the child, often involving the father. The child became confused and gradually more and more withdrawn over time.

Case study: Couple with two children moved in with mother's parents for a year. The grandmother parented much more differently and harsher than the parents. Mother felt it definitely impacted the oldest child, hugely knocking her confidence. There was little they could do as the space was so cramped and the alternative was emergency accommodation.

Case study: Couple with two children were evicted because the landlord was doing work and moved in with brother in law. It was very cramped but the alternative was emergency accommodation, which was quite far away. Brother in law ended up getting into arrears on mortgage payments but failed to tell them. They were suddenly evicted for a second time which was very difficult for the children.

Many of the families we support are living in their own accommodation which is far too small for what the family and children's needs. This is not a case of a slight discomfort but instances whereby three or four children are sharing bedrooms, parents in rooms with multiple children and essentially no living space. The cramped conditions make it difficult for parents to carry out normal household activities.

Case study: Mother and father living with six children in two-bedroom house in Limerick. Four siblings are sharing a single bedroom, oldest is finding it very difficult, whilst the other three find it constantly very difficult to regulate themselves. The other two younger children are in the parents' bedroom. They are under two, hard to know what they will be able to do when those children get older.



# Unsuitable and Poor Accommodation

A lot of families we work with find themselves in poor and unsuitable accommodation. This can be both with private landlords and within social housing. In the former there is a fear that they don't want to rock the boat, that they are fortunate to have accommodation and don't want to risk doing anything that could cause them to lose it.

Even though there are substantial issues with the accommodation, they don't want to upset their landlords because they are concerned they might be served notice. These issues range from damp and mould, to problems with access and lack of facilities. There are considerable health implications for children, mainly in relation to mould and damp, as they can cause and aggravate respiratory conditions for children and can lead to increased incidents of sickness.

Unfortunately, we have witnessed on numerous occasions recently in which local authorities have told families living in emergency accommodation that they have sourced private rented accommodation for them and that if they don't take it they would be classified as being purposely homeless, meaning the local authority no longer have an obligation to provide them with emergency accommodation. When families have viewed these properties, they have been completely unsuitable and, in some instances, uninhabitable.

Case study: Mother with two children living in social housing that was constantly very damp and often covered in mould. She did as much as she could to reduce it, getting items to absorb some of the moisture in the air. However, she couldn't afford to buy and run a dehumidifier or to regularly repaint the property. Her heating regularly broke down and took weeks at a time to fix. She felt this was exacerbating one of her child's asthma and making her other child sick more frequently than she otherwise would be.



Case study: Lone mother with two young children living in emergency accommodation was told by local authority that they had sourced her HAP housing she could afford. Unfortunately, there was no heating at all in the property along with other problems. Mother was told that all she had to do was to buy plug-in electric heaters. She had considerable concerns about the cost of running these, their effectiveness and whether it was a health risk to her children. However, she was told if she did not take the property the local authority would no longer have a duty to house her and her children.

Case study: Family were delighted to be leaving emergency accommodation after two years, moving into private rented property council had sourced for them. Unfortunately, there was only a half-finished kitchen and only half the flooring in the house was put down.

## Homelessness, parental separation and domestic violence

An increasing problem that we have seen across our services in recent years is parents separating but not being able to move into separate accommodation. They have to remain in the homes with one another due to being unable to afford to find a second property. There are some parents who are in a position to share the accommodation relatively amicably, in a way that doesn't cause their children too much confusion. However, this is not always the case. There's often a problem regarding communication, and children then have to face this conflict far more regularly and for longer periods of time than they would have otherwise.



Case study: Two parents who are co-parenting living in the same home but separated. Conflict has reached a point whereby parents can't speak to each other and will avoid one another completely. They had to go to court to address access and custody issues. Child was sick on the day father had access, he would not let mother see the son, despite her being in the house. This caused considerable conflict while the child was sick and exacerbated the illness.

An extremely concerning issue that has come up more frequently in some of our services is some parents who have been victims of domestic violence who have stayed in the home with the abusive partner because the lack of housing options outside of the home for them and their children. Although this has always been a huge issue in relation to domestic violence, it has been raised in some services regarding parents who would otherwise have moved out into alternative accommodation previously when housing was less expensive.

## Recommendations

The trauma and harm children are facing across the country as a result of homelessness and poor housing is considerable and widespread. Action needs to be taken now to mitigate some of the damage being done to childhoods and reduce the impact the trauma could have on future wellbeing and development, because childhood lasts a lifetime. Below we set out four measures the Government should focus on.

### Local authorities and best interests of children

Too often local authorities make decisions around families and emergency accommodation based solely on parents without giving adequate consideration to children. They should always be compelled to take into account best interests of children. This would increase the likelihood they would be housed closer to their schools and that they would move into more suitable emergency accommodation more quickly.



## **Improve minimum standards and reduce length of stay**

Standards of emergency accommodation vary considerably across the country. Too many children are spending years and years living without any playing space, little to no areas to study or do their homework, limited cooking and washing facilities. Minimum acceptable standards of emergency accommodation for children need to be improved further, with additional allowances for children spending more than 12 months in emergency accommodation. For example, no child should have to live in a hotel room with their parents and siblings for more than 12 months.

## **Increase rates of Housing Assistance Payments**

A substantial proportion of families we support receive Housing Assistance Payments. This has helped them to afford to rent properties that would otherwise be out of their financial reach. Although there has been some progress made, there remains extremely few properties available to rent within the current limits<sup>5</sup>. No family household should fall into poverty and deprivation after paying for their accommodation. The maximum rent limit on HAP properties should be increased in Budget 2026 to realistically reflect increases in market rents.

## **Trauma informed family support**

All children moving to emergency accommodation and their family should be offered intensive trauma informed family support. This would help to mitigate some of the trauma they face whilst also providing some support around both practical issues and parenting coping mechanisms to try and reduce harm as much as possible. In Budget 2026 the Government should ring fence money for this at a cost of approximately €5 million.

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<sup>5</sup>The latest figures showing only 32 properties across 16 areas <https://www.simon.ie/e-publication/locked-out-of-the-market-executive-summary-june-2025/>. Parents are forced to top up substantially. Although this shouldn't exceed total rent being more than 30% of their net income, we see this happening regularly. This puts increased financial pressure on parents. Lone parents are disproportionately impacted by top up, as only one person there to top up. This demonstrates that HAP rates are not sufficient.

## About Barnardos

As Ireland's leading children's charity, helping vulnerable children since the 1960's, Barnardos works with vulnerable children and families to provide practical, social and emotional support.

Barnardos supports children and families all across Ireland who have been affected by traumatic life events such as abuse, parental mental health, neglect, separation, bereavement and addiction.

Our core purpose remains the same; 'to help the most vulnerable children in society achieve their full potential – regardless of their family circumstances, their gender, race or disability' – **Because Childhood Lasts a Lifetime.**



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