

# GENERAL ELECTION 2024



A VOICE  
FOR  
CHANGE

**A MANIFESTO CALLING FOR SYSTEMATIC  
CHANGE TO TACKLE HOMELESSNESS FROM  
DEPAUL IRELAND**



DEPAUL



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Grounded in our Vision, Mission and Values, Depaul's work is guided by the highest standards of governance, management and service delivery. Our people and teams are committed to meeting the challenges of the changing landscape and increasing complexity of homelessness in Ireland head on and we are calling today for our next Government to make the same commitment.

Depaul is one of the largest provider of homeless services on the island of Ireland, providing 42 specialised services to close to 11,000 people in 2023 alone. Throughout 2024 we have seen month-on-month increases in homelessness. By the time this general election comes around, we believe that we will have 15,000 people experiencing the intense trauma and hardship of living in temporary accommodation services around Ireland. These numbers are putting unprecedented pressure on society's most vulnerable households and our services across the island of Ireland. Families and individuals trapped in the cycle of homelessness feel at risk of losing the agency and voice vital to enabling them to reach their potential and escape homelessness.

Our challenges today have changed since Depaul's foundation in the Republic of Ireland in 2002 and Northern Ireland in 2005. Recently, we have seen how the ongoing homelessness crisis has been exacerbated by international conflict, the cost-of-living crisis and, increasingly, climate change. There has not only been an increase in demand, we have also seen changing patterns in employment, technological development, economic management and inward migration, all of which affect the way we approach and undertake our work. Amid political polarisation and wider pressure on the NGO sector, it is becoming more challenging to play our part in ending homelessness.

We continue to be unable to understand how, as a society, we can tolerate almost 8,000 children in homelessness across the island of Ireland. We stand proud in calling for a radical response to record levels of homelessness, but have yet to see a difference on the ground. Our temporary accommodation is full, there are waiting lists for our services, and the challenges and complexities that our service users face are increasing.

There is a fraught environment for people who are homeless, those in direct provision and those who have to sleep rough. Depaul is committed to creating a society where homelessness has no place and we're asking the next Government to share that vision.



# SUMMARY

As Ireland approaches a general election, we stand at a critical juncture. The choices made in this election will shape the future of our society for many years to come – way beyond their term. With this in mind, we believe that it is essential for the incoming Government to recognise immediately the need to tackle the housing and homelessness crisis we are facing – and to put in place robust plans to find better solutions to serve this vulnerable cohort of people.

We have seen year-on-year increases in the total number of people accessing emergency accommodation across Ireland. It is critically important that the next Government turn their attention as a matter of urgency to the desperate need of those most vulnerable living with homelessness. It is Depaul's belief that the most viable and long-lasting way to give people the solid foundation to build a decent life is through the increased role of and investment by the State. Radical action is needed to respond and deliver. It's not going to be a quick fix but there are actions we believe can be taken.

Our manifesto lays out our asks of the new Government and our recommendations for the best way forward. Depaul was born out of collaboration, and we hope it is collaboration with the next Government that will take us one step closer to an Ireland, where everyone has the dignity and security of a place to call home and a stake in their community.

## **We are asking any new Government for:**

- 1. A plan to end homelessness by the end of 2030. This requires a new national and homelessness housing plan which uses the housing commission report as its key driver. A national plan to reverse the over-reliance on temporary accommodation is required.**
- 2. A comprehensive review of mental health services – with more focus on harm-reduction measures.**
- 3. Increased HSE funding for homelessness services particularly focusing on drug and alcohol interventions and mental health.**
- 4. A solution to the critical situation in International Protection and Direct Provision where thousands of people with permission to remain in Ireland are stuck.**
- 5. An immediate increase in funding for staff pay and conditions in the voluntary and social sector and a link to any future public service pay awards.**



## **1. A NEW NATIONAL AND HOMELESSNESS HOUSING PLAN – TO REVERSE THE OVER-RELIANCE ON TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION**

A lack of housing is the greatest barrier homeless people in Ireland are facing when trying to exit homelessness. Depaul is incredibly concerned that the lack of housing options will exacerbate homelessness even further into 2025.

Depaul supports a housing-led approach. The number of people in emergency accommodation has increased year on year – reaching close to 15,000 by the time this general election arrives. Families and Individuals are suffering from a lack of move-on options from temporary accommodation and this must be addressed urgently by any new Government.

- We are requesting the Government to fully commit to the EU Lisbon Declaration to end homelessness by 2030 ensuring that no one sleeps rough for lack of accessible, safe and appropriate emergency accommodation and that no one lives in emergency or transitional accommodation longer than is required for a successful move-on to a permanent housing solution.
- We are asking any new Government to work to end the overreliance on temporary accommodation; we are seeing families going into their second or third Christmas in temporary accommodation, and this is not right. A new Government must arrive at a national plan that reverses the utilisation of temporary accommodation and prioritise those households that are longest in temporary accommodation for any new social housing being delivered.
- The escalating homelessness crisis is driven by a severe lack of affordable housing and an over-reliance on temporary solutions. The housing market is not working for those most vulnerable, and the gap between supply and demand is only widening. We need a robust response and a strong commitment by any new Government to increase public and affordable housing supply in the right places and right configuration that meets local needs, including housing-first tenancies. The target of 55,000 new public and affordable homes must be delivered in the next 4 years.



## **2. A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**

- Homelessness is a fundamentally unhealthy state, with far-reaching consequences for a person's physical, mental and social well being.
- Many of our service users present with multiple complex support needs, including any combination of physical health, mental health and addiction issues. On any given night in our services, at a minimum, 1 in every 7 of our service users will be experiencing enduring mental health concerns.
- We want a focus on the development of specialised accommodations for people experiencing homelessness with enduring mental health needs. We are asking for single-unit housing solutions to be delivered for this particular cohort of service users, where shared accommodation is not the answer for someone with significant mental health concerns.
- An increased focus on primary mental health specialised services and resources for physical health, mental health and addiction support for those experiencing homelessness is required.
- An increased focus on harm-reduction focused methods and increase in available treatment and funding to help people who present with both mental health and addiction problems.
- Reduce Stigma: By integrating harm reduction strategies, we can help normalise discussions around homelessness, mental health and substance use, reducing the stigma often associated with these issues and encouraging more individuals to seek help.



### **3. INCREASED HSE FUNDING FOR HOMELESSNESS SERVICES PARTICULARLY FOCUSING ON DRUG AND ALCOHOL INTERVENTIONS**

We are asking for the findings of the Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Use to be put into the Programme for Government and resourced.

#### **This includes:**

- **Prevention and early intervention:** Focus on facilitating early intervention programmes in communities, reducing the risk of homelessness for individuals struggling with addiction. This proactive approach can lead to better outcomes and lower long-term costs. Investing in these services benefits the broader community by reducing the social and economic costs associated with homelessness and substance abuse, including healthcare and emergency services.
- **Access to treatment:** Improve access to vital drug and alcohol treatment programs, including detox facilities, rehabilitation services, and ongoing support for recovery among those experiencing homelessness.
- **Stabilisation and support:** Understand the need for stabilisation services, such as housing first initiatives, that provide secure housing alongside addiction support, which can significantly improve recovery rates.
- **Data-Driven solutions:** Advocate for funding that is directed towards evidence-based interventions, ensuring that resources are used effectively and can be evaluated for success.



## **4. A SOLUTION TO THE CRITICAL SITUATION IN INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION AND DIRECT PROVISION WHERE THOUSANDS REMAIN STUCK**

- We are asking for urgent political attention to address the 6,000 people stuck in Direct Provision with permission to remain in Ireland, as there seems to be no clear solution in sight.
- We are asking any new Government to establish a pilot shared-tenancy scheme funded by state sources for single people with permission to remain in Ireland.
- Establish a tenancy sustainment service for those who have moved on from the Direct Provision system to support the prevention of homelessness. This was previously piloted by Depaul as an important homeless prevention measure.
- Identify and plan for those who have permission to remain and who are assessed as vulnerable in the Direct Provision system. To seek specific funding through state sources to develop housing for this group. Local authority Housing Delivery Action Plans should play a key role in supporting this objective.



## **5. ADEQUATE PAY FOR OUR STAFF AND ALL STAFF IN THE VOLUNTARY AND SOCIAL SECTOR**

- Clarity and recognition of the need for an immediate increase in funding for staff in the voluntary and social sector and a link to any future public service awards.
- In order to attract and retain talent, we must have the ability to offer competitive salaries to help attract skilled professionals and reduce turnover. High staff turnover can disrupt services and negatively impact those relying on support.
- It is critical that we can recruit and retain workers that are needed to respond to this worsening crisis, all while adhering to the extensive regulatory requirements we are subject to. Section 39 and 10 organisations all receive contracts from the State to deliver public services, but staff do not receive pay or employment conditions equivalent to public sector employees.
- The result is many organisations across the sector have services at risk of closure due to a lack of staff.
- An agreement must be reached by the Government with ICTU in the Workplace Relations Commission process on pay parity for the voluntary and community sector with an automatic link to the Public service award process.






## **A VOICE FOR CHANGE**

**WORKING WITH VULNERABLE AND COMPLEX INDIVIDUALS  
MEANS TAKING ACTION TO TRANSFORM LIVES.**

We must continue to acknowledge that addressing homelessness requires more than temporary solutions. We know the State can do more to reach those most in need. As an organisation, we are advocating for more focus on key areas such as Housing, Health, and International Protection.

**MAKE THE NEXT GOVERNMENT URGENTLY  
PRIORITISE THE WOMEN, MEN, AND CHILDREN OF  
IRELAND WHO ARE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.**





**HOMELESSNESS HAS NO PLACE  
WE PUT OUR WORDS INTO ACTION.**

**GET IN TOUCH**



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