

From: Gráinne de Barra, Pat Grant and Eamonn Magrath members of  
Protest against Homelessness in Ireland, Less Talk More Action! \*

To srhousing@ohchr.org for the attention of the Special Rapporteur.

Copy to: [registry@ohchr.org](mailto:registry@ohchr.org)

17<sup>th</sup> November 2019

Your Guidelines for the implementation of the right to adequate housing, Invitation to provide written comments

Dear Special Rapporteur,

We are making this submission as a group of individuals who are members of 'Protest against Homelessness in Ireland, Less Talk More Action!' a group of Irish citizens currently approx. 61,000 in number (and rising) who have come together on Facebook and will on 5<sup>th</sup>. Dec. march peacefully on the streets of Ireland (population 4,901,927) to protest the right to adequate housing, the right to live somewhere that offers security and dignity.<sup>i</sup>

The above-named members are making this submission without the 'umbrella' of the main group as the group Administrators are so busy organising December protest that they have asked the three named members to make this submission themselves. The group is a citizens group and have no political affiliations.

We have no specialist academic knowledge of the subject but simply on-the-ground experience in our local areas. Sheer frustration with the policies of our government who leave most housing provision in the hands of the private sector rather than finance much needed social housing using public funds brought us together. Social housing is in short supply and announced plans to increase supply are considered to be overly ambitious.<sup>ii</sup> As a result of these policies the private sector sets both purchase prices and rents as high as they possibly can leaving many of our people unable to afford either and many become homeless. Homelessness can involve couch surfing, bedding down in temporary charity or state provided accommodation on a first-come-first-served basis or being compelled to sleep on the streets. Ireland has a temperate climate not conducive to outdoor living for 90% of the time. Deaths from hypothermia etc. are occurring on our streets as a result and there are also people driven to suicide in their despair.

Our homeless come from all different groups including those working but finding housing unaffordable, those who have been evicted from either own houses or from rentals, people escaping violent relationships, people with addictions, the unemployed, those with mental health issues etc. etc.

'Vulture' funds have been actively encouraged<sup>iii</sup> to buy blocks of bank seized properties and they sell and rent these using aggressive and sometimes illegal<sup>iv</sup> methods but ultimately, they tend to exacerbate the problems.

Some 10,300 are officially accepted by our government as being homeless and of these nearly 4,000 are children who are being punished by our modern capitalist society for something that they had no hand nor part in. These figures however ignore people who are not accessing homeless services but are 'couch surfing' etc. The real figure could be as high as 15,000.<sup>v</sup> There are many 'hidden homeless' impossible to enumerate and there are increasing numbers of rent and mortgage slaves, those barely able to exist once they've paid for their housing. There are many more vacant houses/apartments around the country than there are homeless people. These properties, mostly privately owned, are not being offered to house the homeless.<sup>vi</sup>

Many voluntary groups provide temporary housing, street meals, soup kitchens, clothing etc. in an attempt to assist the less fortunate.

As a group of citizens, we do not possess any great amount of data pertaining to homelessness and realise that a huge amount of work has already been done worldwide to understand the subject. We feel however, realising that we're probably preaching to the converted, that from Ireland's perspective certain items need highlighting and might influence some part of your report:

1. Speed is of the essence in finding solutions. People are suffering now, some are dying. Whilst forward planning is by its very name long term it should offer immediate viable solutions even if temporary to recognise the immediacy of the needs.

2. Private owners are dictating which of us can afford a roof over our heads. This is not good enough. We need our government to be internationally shamed/forced to insert a right to housing into our Constitution. This will need a referendum which is being denied to the electorate. In 2017 our current government defeated a bill in our parliament aimed at achieving this.<sup>vii</sup>
3. Our government constantly pleads poverty when asked to finance solutions yet can find similar amounts of money to finance their own pet projects. The Irish league of Credit unions even offered them access to €5 billion to provide social housing but they refused.<sup>viii</sup> The need to make public finances available should be addressed in report.
4. The term 'affordable housing' is much used by our government and local councils. Housing and rent values that they consider affordable are rarely agreed to be such by many needing to access these markets. They are averse to capping rents. Formulae used to determine affordability seem to be based on private housing stock values and here in Ireland at least, are rarely agreed to as being affordable to those needing the housing. Some formula which takes account of mean family incomes needs to be struck which would become a universal yardstick to tie down the meaning of the term. Some similar yardstick needs to be devised to measure when rents should be capped.

We are aware that you perhaps do not envisage receiving comments from such small groups but will be extremely pleased if ours are heeded and perhaps influence in some small way your final document. Our only wish is that our fellow man/woman, whoever and wherever they may be, might never have to suffer the indignity that is homelessness.

Gráinne de Barra  
161 Knockaphunta,  
Westport Road,  
Castlebar,  
Co. Mayo  
Ireland

Pat Grant  
386 Ballyoulster Park  
Dublin Road  
Celbridge  
Co. Kildare  
Ireland

Eamonn Magrath  
Woodfield House  
Hillstreet  
Carrick-on-Shannon  
Co. Roscommon  
Ireland

[gradebarra@gmail.com](mailto:gradebarra@gmail.com)

[patgrant386@gmail.com](mailto:patgrant386@gmail.com)

[eamonnmagrath@gmail.com](mailto:eamonnmagrath@gmail.com)

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<sup>i</sup> (1) Protest against Homelessness in Ireland, Less Talk More Action!

About this group

When the first Dáil met in Dublin on January 21st, 1919, it was the most representative democratic assembly ever to have met in Ireland. On that first day, it passed a document called the Democratic Programme, a pithy statement about what the republic it had just declared would look like.

Those criteria are the things that a child needs in order to grow up with security and dignity.

The words that made this radical statement of national purpose are few and plain:

“It shall be the first duty of the Government of the Republic to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the children, to secure that no child shall suffer hunger or cold from lack of food, clothing, or shelter, but that all shall be provided with the means and facilities requisite for their proper education and training as Citizens of a Free and Gaelic Ireland.”

We find ourselves now in 2019 - 100 years on and look how badly our successive governments have so badly let our children down.

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We are calling on anyone who feels that seeing children eating off the streets, people dying on our streets cold & alone, homelessness in all capacities is wrong to stand with us on the 5th of December and speak out for justice. Justice for those that are suffering now, our children of the future and those that unfortunately didn't survive and have sadly passed. Together we can make a difference

<sup>ii</sup> (2) "At the moment (2018), according to the ESRI, we have 253,000 social housing units in Ireland. That equates to 15% of all of the homes in the country. Promising to add an additional 100,000 units to that total in just four years is an incredibly ambitious target. If delivered it would represent a 40% increase in social housing units by the end of 2021."

<https://www.rte.ie/news/2018/0721/980007-social-housing-george-lee/>

<sup>iii</sup> (3) In May 2016 the then Minister for Finance was recalled talking about vulture funds at an oireachtas committee on housing and homelessness.

"You criticise me for not intervening with vulture funds. Well, it was a compliment when they were so dubbed in America because vultures, you know, carry out a very good service in the ecology. They clean up dead animals that are littered across the landscape." Vulture funds enjoy special tax exemptions in Ireland and this is being questioned as to its legality.

<sup>iv</sup> (4) <https://www.thejournal.ie/edmund-honohan-vulture-funds-4553565-Mar2019/?fbclid=IwAR3WSEpohmsTwyL3AHKp30TZlbgvwqvMJ3xIXIYz46Sknh7OgktBodkG8vk>

<sup>v</sup> (5) <https://pmvtrust.ie/news/facts-and-figures/>  
<https://www.irishmirror.ie/news/irish-news/up-15000-people-ireland-spend-20889789>

<sup>vi</sup> (6) 183,312 in 2016 according to our Central Statistics Office.

<sup>vii</sup> (7) A right to housing bill was defeated in Irish parliament <https://www.thejournal.ie/right-to-housing-bill-3609627-Sep2017/>

<sup>viii</sup> (8) <https://www.thejournal.ie/credit-unions-social-housing-fund-2667513-Mar2016/>

- Protest against Homelessness in Ireland, Less Talk More Action! (email: [protestagainsthomeslessness@hotmail.com](mailto:protestagainsthomeslessness@hotmail.com)) Can be found here <https://www.facebook.com/groups/487072738687586/> on Facebook