



## Threshold's Submission to the Census 2021 Consultation

As we continue to grapple with the housing and homelessness crisis the need for a better understanding of the housing system in Ireland is more urgent than ever. According to Census 2016 there were 831,636 people in private rental accommodation, with 309,728 households renting from a private landlord. As the leading charity on the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in Ireland Threshold have a number of suggestions on how the Census can provide a more detailed profile of the rental market.

We have the following proposals for the Census Household Form:

### **H1 What type of accommodation does your household occupy?**

- Threshold calls for the removal of question 6 under section H1 as bedsits were banned by Section 6 of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008 which came into force on 1 February 2009. There was a four year grace period from the bedsit ban (for existing properties) until 1 February 2013.

#### **A bed-sit:**

6  Bed-sit (with some shared facilities e.g. toilet)

- Threshold would like to see an additional question at the end of section H1 to capture whether people on Census night are:
  - *Sharing with tenants in private rented accommodation*
  - *Sharing with tenants in private rented accommodation but not a registered tenant*
  - *Renting a room in a private house/apartment where the landlord also resides*
  - *Renting student accommodation on or off third level or college campus*
  - *Staying with family/friends/couch surfing*
  - *Staying in homeless accommodation*

Threshold believes these additional categories are necessary to provide a clearer analysis of peoples living situations in Ireland. At present it is very difficult to ascertain from the Census or the Residential Tenancies Board's data how a rented household is composed. By including the category *"Sharing with tenants in private rented accommodation"* it would be easier to ascertain if it was a group of individuals living together or a family situation.

The categories of *"Sharing with tenants in private rented accommodation but not a registered tenant"* and *"Renting a room in a private house/apartment where the landlord also resides"* would help capture those individuals who are not registered as tenants but in fact in licensee arrangements. Threshold has recorded a growth in the number of people renting a room in their landlord's home or sub-letting from other tenants because of the lack of accommodation. It would be helpful to track the prevalence of these often unregulated living situations which are not protected by the Residential Tenancies Acts.

Having a category entitled *"Renting student accommodation on or off third level or college campus"* would be a helpful indicator for the housing needs of the student population.

In addition to a category specifying *"Staying In homeless accommodation"* it would be helpful to categorise the growing number of people who are residing in precarious and unstable situations such as *"Staying with family/friends/couch surfing"* due to the lack of affordable accommodation.

## **H2 When was your house, flat or apartment first built?**

- Threshold proposes that this question should be amended as follows:

*"If you are the homeowner, when was your house, flat or apartment first built?"*

It is our experience that tenants do not generally have this type of information.

- Threshold would like to see an additional question in section H2 as follows:

*"If privately renting how long are you in your current accommodation"*

- *Under 6 months*
- *6 months to 2 years*
- *2 years to 4 years*
- *4 years to 6 years*
- *Over 6 years"*

Such data would show the trends on how long people are living in private rented accommodation. The PRS has, in the past, been viewed as a transition or stepping stone to other tenures such as home ownership or social housing. Census 2016 showed that almost a third (30.7%) of primary school children were living in rented accommodation. This is a 75.4% increase since 2006. With more and more people choosing to live in the rented accommodation or not being able to access

other tenure types it is important to track the average durations of people's tenancies in order to map and plan policies around security of tenure and rent certainty in the private rented sector.

Alternatively, the following question could be asked to track the parameters of a 'Part 4 Tenancy' in line with the Residential Tenancies Acts:

*"If privately renting how long are you in your current accommodation*

- *Under 6 months*
- *6 months to 6 years*
- *Over 6 years"*

If you have been renting for at least 6 months and have not been given a written notice of termination, you automatically acquire some security of tenure called a 'Part 4 Tenancy'. If you remain in your tenancy for the full period of your 'Part 4 Tenancy', another cycle automatically begins called a 'Further Part 4 Tenancy'. From 24th December 2016 all new Part 4 and Further Part 4 tenancies have been extended to 6 year cycles.

### **H3 Does your household own or rent your accommodation?**

- Threshold would like to see an additional question in section H3

*"If you are renting privately from a landlord do you pay the rent*

- *from your own earned income only*
- *with the assistance of Rent Supplement*
- *through Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme*
- *through the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)*
- *Other*

According to Census 2016 the numbers renting from a local authority increased by 11 per cent from 2011 however it is our understanding that households in receipt of state housing supports such as Rent Supplement, the Housing Assistance Payment and the Rental Accommodation Scheme may believe they are renting from a Local Authority when in fact they are renting from a private landlord. As the State moves more and more towards subsidising housing in the private rented sector Threshold believes that by adding this supplementary question at the end of section H3, it will provide clarity and will ensure that the Census can get a more accurate analysis of the breakdown of households living in the private rented sector.

