

## OPEN DOOR

# ***Lone Parents in the Private Rented Sector: Problems and Policies***

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## Abstract

The new Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) requires local authorities to provide private rental accommodation for people in long term housing need when appropriate social housing is unavailable. Supplying satisfactory housing is important to underpin the other positive features of RAS for low income households. OPEN (One Parent Exchange & Network) and Threshold, the national housing organisation, joined forces to explore how to ensure that families have suitable and adequate housing under the scheme. A variety of research methods was used in the project, including a survey of a sample of lone parent families living in the private rented sector on rent supplement to learn about their housing issues. The 15 recommendations focus on housing standards and on the operation of RAS.

## Key Words

Lone parents, housing standards

### Disclaimer

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Research Project

Realisation of the fundamental right to a home that is adequate for health and well-being underpins this joint research project of Threshold, the national housing organisation, and OPEN (One Parent Exchange and Network) the national network of lone parent self-help support groups. (Profiles of OPEN and Threshold are contained in Appendix 1.) The two organisations view the new Rental Accommodation Scheme as an instrument of housing policy with the potential to make an important contribution to ensuring that all families are appropriately and decently housed. This project aims to illustrate the challenges faced by lone parents raising children in unsuitable accommodation occupying the lower end of the private rented sector. The project also highlights the requirements of providing family-friendly accommodation, identifying some key features that local authorities should stipulate in relation to accommodation for families, and making recommendations as to how to maximise the potential value of the Rental Accommodation Scheme as an instrument of housing policy.

#### The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)

The RAS was announced by government in July 2004, with the intended aim of providing a long-term housing solution for tenants who have been in receipt of SWA Rent Supplement for at least 18 months,<sup>1</sup> i.e. those who are in long-term housing need and provide for those needs from their own resources. The RAS is a collaborative project between the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (D/EHLG), the Local Authorities, the Department of Social and Family Affairs (D/SFA) and the Community Welfare Service. Under the scheme, local authorities source accommodation from the private rented sector and social housing associations, which are rented for a social rent under a long-term lease to eligible tenants. The aim is to move all eligible Rent Supplement recipients to the RAS by 2008.

Government has stated that RAS will improve security and affordability, and ensure compliance with statutory minimum dwelling standards.

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<sup>1</sup> A Rent Supplement is paid under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme to tenants in the private rented sector who cannot meet their accommodation costs from their own means. See Appendix 3 for more detail.

To realise this goal, it is critical that accommodation approved under the RAS must be of good quality, and appropriate to the needs of tenants, including one-parent families and indeed families more generally.

#### Structure of the Report

Section 2 outlines the various research methods deployed in this study including desk research, interviews with key informants and survey and focus group research with lone parents. Section 3 presents the growing amount of research into the links between housing and family health and well-being. Available material on the role of dwelling standards in protecting vulnerable households elsewhere in Europe is summarised; the policy context in which the RAS operates is examined and the experience with setting and enforcing rental dwelling standards in Ireland is reviewed, with an emphasis on the likely impact on vulnerable groups such as lone parent families.

Section 4 presents the findings of a survey of lone parents on Rent Supplement investigating the appropriateness and quality of their current accommodation. Analysis of the findings is supplemented with information generated in a lone parent discussion group. Section 5 discusses some of the issues to be addressed in implementing the RAS, with particular reference to the needs of low-income families. Finally Section 6 presents the conclusions and recommendations derived from the study.

## **2. Research Methodology**

To identify benchmark minimum standards for accommodation suitable for one parent families, a multi-faceted approach was adopted; encompassing desk research, interviews and meetings with service providers and policy makers, a survey of lone parent Rent Supplement (RS) recipients, and a lone parent discussion group.

### **2.1 Desk Research**

Desk research aimed to elucidate a number of areas.

Review of literature on the relationship between accommodation standards and family well-being highlighted the issues of respiratory problems and stress. In particular, research on accommodation conditions of private rented tenants and Rent Supplement recipients was reviewed to identify problem areas. Literature on the RS scheme and the RAS was examined in the context of the operation of the private rented market and its regulation.

Information was collected on the incidence of poverty and social exclusion amongst one-parent families and the extent to which RS provides basic support.

Desk research also helped to identify and define critical benchmark dwelling standards for RAS. Space and privacy are important aspects of accommodation quality. Accordingly, the size of unit (number of bedrooms) appropriate for single child one-parent families received special attention; standards employed in Ireland, Canada and the UK were compared.

### **2.2 Interviews**

Desk research on good practice in relation to dwelling standards in Ireland and Europe was supplemented through practitioner interviews:

- Particularly in the context of the increasing role for higher density, multiple unit properties for meeting the accommodation needs of low-income family households, an architect with extensive experience in social housing design was consulted and her advice incorporated into the specifications.
- Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (D/EHLG) officials and local authority officers responsible for implementing the RAS in the City Councils of Dublin, Cork, Waterford, and Galway as well as South Dublin County Council were

interviewed about their plans and expectations regarding dwelling standards under the RAS.

- Housing allocation officers in the five local authorities were interviewed in relation to criteria for deciding on dwelling size for single child one-parent families.
- When developing the survey questionnaire, a number of Dublin-based Community Welfare Officers (CWOs) were contacted by phone in relation to the aspects of accommodation occupied by lone parent Rent Supplement recipients which gave rise to most concern.

### **2.3 Survey**

Surveying lone parents in receipt of Rent Supplement in relation to their current accommodation and its suitability to their needs formed a key component of the research project. A questionnaire was drafted on the basis of desk research findings as well as interviews with Community Welfare Officers (CWOs) and an architect. This was piloted with staff and clients at Threshold's Eastern Region Advice Office. Using both face-to-face and phone interviews, the pilot established the effectiveness of phone interviews, both in terms of understanding the questions and obtaining full responses.

The questionnaire (see Appendix 5) contains 65 questions, 61 of which pertain to the respondent's dwelling and tenancy. All interviews were conducted by researchers directly involved in the project. The confidentiality of the responses was emphasised to every contact. At the end of each interview the respondents were informed that would receive a €15 voucher as a token of gratitude for their participation.

The survey achieved 51 completed questionnaires. The original target was to achieve 100 completed questionnaires in the Cork city area – using both OPEN's network of local self-help groups and clients of Threshold's advice office in Cork city.

To secure research participants in the Cork area, in February 2006 an information leaflet was circulated; group members of OPEN were asked to contact their own members directly and to advertise the project at events and on notice boards. Researchers also recruited the assistance of the local Centre for the Unemployed and the Cork city branch of the Citizen's Information Centre, and staffed a stand at a major retail shopping centre in Cork City.

Regrettably efforts in Cork yielded few completed questionnaires. A total of 11 was obtained in face-to-face interviews in Cork.

The survey was then extended across OPEN's national network. Staff were informed about the project and asked to invite members to participate by means of a phone interview. The search for participants was mentioned at all events and training sessions were organised by OPEN during the winter and spring. Follow-up phone calls were made to generate interest. Another 30 questionnaires were completed as a result.

Threshold's advice offices in Dublin and Galway were also involved in finding participants for four weeks during April and May. Each Regional Manager requested advice workers to ask lone parent callers on Rent Supplement if they would participate and provide their phone numbers so that a researcher on the project could make contact at a later date. Ten questionnaires were obtained in this manner.

The kind of small, non-random sample on which the study draws cannot be considered representative. However, it is probably fair to say that it provides a reasonably accurate picture of the quality of the rental accommodation currently occupied by lone parents. Given the manner of recruitment, the survey respondents are more likely to be members of one-parent organisations than the lone parent population at large, and to be aware of Threshold and the concept of tenant rights. This suggests a sample perhaps better equipped than average to search for accommodation and negotiate with landlords. Alternatively, it could be suggested that approaching a housing organisation may be a last resort for a lone parent experiencing a housing crisis, who is unwilling to raise these problems for fear of rent increases. In this regard, however, the survey findings presented in Section Four suggest that the participants were not disproportionately located in the worst housing. According to the 2002 Census 15 per cent of private rental housing was a 'flat or apartment in a converted or shared house' – a type of accommodation prone to poor standards. Only 6 per cent of the sample described their accommodation as a flat in a converted house.

## **2.4 Focus Groups**

A discussion of the survey findings with five lone parents took place in Coolock in June 2006. Two researchers, one from each organisation, were present at the group as facilitator and as note taker.

The members of the focus group ranged in age from mid-twenties to early forties. All five participants were women living in private rented sector accommodation in Dublin. Each participant received a €15 gift voucher on conclusion of the focus group as a token of appreciation. In relation to gender balance, it should be noted that a majority of all lone parents are female (85 per cent in the 2002 Census), and that women constitute 98 per cent of those in receipt of the One-Parent Family Payment.

Finally, a presentation of the research was made to the managers of Threshold's advice offices. Discussion and further analysis of the findings followed.

### 3. Policy Context: Lone Parent Families and Housing Standards

This section starts by providing a profile of lone parent families in Ireland, before moving on to a short discussion of the literature on housing and family well-being. This is followed by an examination of the issues of dwelling standards, and their impact on residents' well-being.

#### 3.1 A Profile of One-Parent Families

A one-parent family is defined by the Central Statistics Office as 'one parent together with one or more usually resident never-married children (of any age)'.<sup>2</sup> The 2002 Census found that there were 153,863 one-parent families living in Ireland. This figure may be an undercount as it does not include one-parent families living in households with other families, e.g. a lone parent household living in her own parents' home. Currently one-parent families make up 17 per cent of all families in Ireland.<sup>3</sup> Between 1996 and 2002 the number of one-parent families increased by 25 per cent.

The One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) is the primary social welfare payment for those parenting alone. It is estimated that at least 50 per cent of lone parents are reliant on social welfare transfers (there were 80,366 recipients of the OFP in 2005<sup>4</sup>). Over 130,000 children are supported by the OFP in Irish households.

There are a number of eligibility criteria for the payment:

- the recipient must be the main carer of a child or children, who must be living with them
- the recipient must not be cohabitating
- the recipient must satisfy a means test as well as the habitual residence condition.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Central Statistics Office (2002) Table E Private households by composition, 1996 and 2002. CSO: Dublin

<sup>3</sup> Source: Department of Social and Family Affairs (2006) Government Discussion Paper: Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents Dublin: Stationery Office

<sup>4</sup> Department of Social and Family Affairs (2006) Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services, 2005 Dublin: Stationery Office

<sup>5</sup> Habitual Residence Condition means you must have a proven close link to Ireland or other parts of the Common Travel Area (Ireland Great Britain, Isle of Man, Channel Islands) – [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie)

High levels of reliance by one-parent families on social welfare transfers has resulted in a very high incidence and risk of poverty; in fact one-parent families have the highest rate of consistent poverty of all household types.

The welfare of one-parent families has not improved as a result of the general increase in levels of prosperity. In 1994, 1 in 20 households in consistent poverty were one-parent families; by 2001 this had increased to 1 in 5 households.<sup>6</sup> In 2004, lone parent households were 3½ times more likely to be living in poverty than the average household; and almost 1 in 3 (31.1 per cent) were living in consistent poverty – unable to afford basic necessities.<sup>7</sup> Research shows that lone parents reliant on social welfare payments face a weekly shortfall of over €23 when simply trying to meet ordinary living costs.<sup>8</sup>

As a result of this poverty, lone parent households are over-represented on the waiting lists for social housing: in 2005, 16,795 one-parent families were in need of housing, constituting 38 per cent of all households in the Local Authority Housing Needs Assessment; most of these (69 per cent) had only one child. Many of these families face lengthy waiting periods before being housed: 40 per cent of one-parent families had been on local authority lists between 1-3 years while 23 per cent had been waiting between 4-7 years.

The majority (65 per cent) of one-parent families on the social housing waiting list are currently renting in the private sector; 12,946 of these are in receipt of Rent Supplement, over 50 per cent of whom have been on Rent Supplement for more than a year.<sup>9</sup> Rent Supplement recipients face some of the most severe poverty and unemployment traps in the social welfare system. Reliance on this supplement effectively traps many in poverty, thwarting attempts to achieve economic independence.<sup>10</sup> Appendix 3 reviews the scheme in greater depth.

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<sup>6</sup> Living in Ireland Surveys

<sup>7</sup> CSO (2005a) EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions Cork: CSO

<sup>8</sup> Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (2004) Low Cost Budgets for three households Dublin: Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice

<sup>9</sup> Department of Social and Family Affairs (2005) Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services Dublin: Stationery Office

<sup>10</sup> Loftus, C (2005) Out of the Traps? – ending poverty traps and making work pay for people in poverty Dublin: OPEN and EAPN (Ireland)

Lone parent families are also likely to experience housing disadvantage in terms of quality, appropriateness or affordability. Table 1, taken from an ESRI survey report commissioned by the D/EHLG, shows that one-parent families are more poorly accommodated than families headed by couples.

**Table 3.1 Dwellings Occupied by Selected Household Types**

	Couple with children	Others with children (i.e. lone parents)
	% with	% with
Utility room	52	26
Living room	97	95
Dining room	33	18
Study room	12	4
Family room	13	5
Play room	8	3
Only one common room	47	73
Bedrooms below English standard	11	18
Occupant says accommodation 'too small'	21	28
No central heating	4	14
Roof insulation present	91	80
Problems with dwelling condition (e.g. dampness)	15	34

Source: Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and ESRI (2003) *Irish National Survey of Housing Quality 2001-2002*

### 3.2 Accommodation Rights and Children's Rights: Irish Commitments

#### Rights to Accommodation

Access to accommodation of good quality, appropriate size and configuration is a basic expectation in modern, developed nations. Provision for adequate housing as the right of every human being is set out in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, and other international human rights treaties and declarations. These declare that 'Every woman, man, youth and child has the human right to a secure place to live, which is fundamental to living in dignity, to physical and

mental health, and to overall quality of life. The Human Right to Adequate Housing guarantees all people the right to live in security, peace and dignity'.<sup>11</sup>

The Irish government's definition of its own housing objectives echoes this principle: 'The overall objective is to enable households experiencing poverty and disadvantage to have available to them housing or accommodation which is affordable, accessible, of good quality, suitable to their needs, culturally acceptable, located in a sustainable community and, as far as possible, in a secure tenure of their choice' (Building an Inclusive Society, p.13).

*Towards 2016*, the new social partnership agreement, adopts D/EHLG's Housing Policy Framework, *Building Sustainable Communities*. Two of the main areas of focus are:

- Continuing improvements in the quality of houses and neighbourhoods, including improvement of consumer information in relation to housing, and
- Providing tailored housing services to those who cannot afford to meet their own housing needs.

### Children's Rights

The importance of a stable and comfortable home for child development is widely accepted. Article 27 of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* recognises the right of every child to an adequate standard of living, committing states to take appropriate measures to assist parents in implementing this right and 'in the case of need, provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing'.

In the Irish context, *Towards 2016* states that 'Every child should have access to world-class health, personal social services and *suitable accommodation*'; it promises that 'the Government and social partners agree to work together to deliver tangible improvements in health outcomes for children. This will involve a range of issues including: Policies ... such as education, income support, *accommodation*, childcare, food and the environment ...' (Italics added).

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<sup>11</sup> The right to housing is enunciated in a range of international human rights instruments including the Universal Declaration on Human Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families ([www.pdhre.org/rights/housing.html](http://www.pdhre.org/rights/housing.html))

### 3.3 Family Accommodation and Well-Being

Despite the complexity of the issues, researchers are actively exploring the links between health and accommodation conditions (Brooke, 2004). In 2006, The Institute of Public Health in Ireland published *Health Impacts of the Built Environment: A Review* which referred to studies on the impact on health of the air quality, temperature, humidity, noise, light, safety, space, accessibility, immediate surroundings and locality of housing and accommodation. It highlighted the increased vulnerability of elderly and young persons to the adverse effects of poor housing conditions (Lavin, 2006).

Researchers in the US, Australia and England are looking beyond the influence of accommodation on physical health to its impact on children's life chances. Bartlett, for example, commented, 'If housing is adequate for family needs and provides parents with a sense of control, choice, and identity (in other words, if it functions as a home), it can support the capacity of parents to function in goal-oriented ways, and to rear children ... as members of the larger society. If, on the other hand, housing fails to meet this ideal, and instead limits choice and control, it may contribute, along with other factors in life, to stress and to reactive parenting behaviour that is less likely to be responsive to children's needs' (Bartlett, 1997).

A report published by Shelter in England, *Chance of a lifetime: The impact of bad housing on children's lives*, finds evidence of adverse consequences for children in 'bad housing' that are both immediate and long term (Harker, 2006): 'Children living in poor or overcrowded conditions are more likely to have respiratory problems, to be at risk of infections, and have mental health problems. [Such housing] also threatens children's safety ... and affects a child's ability to learn, which can have a lasting impact on a child's chances of succeeding in life.'<sup>12</sup>

A study in Belgium which questioned a large sample of children directly about their housing and their well-being concluded that policy actions to improve housing should focus on two groups: young people from large ethnic minority households and children from single-parent families where the parent is in part-time work (Verhetsel, 2006).

Ireland's anti-poverty action plans have recognised that housing and improved opportunities for lone parent families are integral to achieving social inclusion (Ireland, Department of Social and Family Affairs, 2005). This project concerns a particular aspect of the

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<sup>12</sup> Lisa Harker, the author, was appointed an independent advisor to the UK Department for Work and Pensions (the department responsible for housing benefit) in June 2006.

government's anti-poverty programme: its policies and practices for ensuring that lone parents are able to raise their children in good quality homes.

The profile at the beginning of the report looked at the Rent Supplement scheme to help lone parents meet affordability problems. The rest of the section looks at policies to ensure that the families occupy dwellings that are fit to live in.

### **3.4 Experiences with Rental Dwelling Standards Outside Ireland**

Appendix 2 summarises desk-based research into practices for establishing good rental dwelling standards in other states. A search across European sites found few examples of minimum quality standards for existing stock but rather early and vigorous use of building controls over housing construction generally, and quality conditions attached to grant-supported building.

UK initiatives were singled out for scrutiny as they apply to all existing social housing and more tentatively to the private rented sector. Governments there are taking initiatives to upgrade existing rental stock to meet higher standards in relation to features such as thermal comfort, and to improve the health and safety of accommodation. Although these policy changes in England are recent, research anticipates positive effects. For example, in *Decent Homes: Better Health* (Gilbertson et al, 2006) researchers concluded that under Sheffield's programme, 'raised temperatures coupled with improved ventilation ... will help reduce levels of condensation, damp and mould, and the likelihood of respiratory disease; improved kitchens and bathrooms will reduce falls, trips, scalds and burns, with substantial savings to the NHS; new windows and doors will improve security, promote feelings of safety and have a major impact on mental health and well-being, with cost savings to the NHS.'

### **3.5 Rental Dwelling Standards in Ireland**

Minimum dwelling standards apply to all rented accommodation in Ireland; local authorities are responsible for their enforcement. However, the standards do not necessarily reflect the norms of modern Irish society or best practice in relation to building standards; in addition, they fail to take account of the needs of families. Some examples of how the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations, 1993 fall short of modern standards, and fail to require provisions for family life, are provided below.

**Table 3.2 Rental Dwelling Standards in Ireland**

<i>Existing Statutory Minimum Standards for Rented Accommodation</i>	<i>– and their shortfalls</i>
Roof, floors ceilings, walls, and stairs must be in good repair and not subject to serious dampness or liable to collapse	Watertight finish on kitchen and bathroom floors and shower not required
Running hot and cold water	Although there is no requirement to have this in both kitchen and bathroom
A bath and/or shower	However, this may be shared with another household, and may be on another floor of the property. Up to four one-person flats can be served by a single toilet and bath or shower
Hygienic food storage	Provision of a refrigerator or a fridge/freezer not required
Adequate, natural and artificial ventilation, lighting	No requirement to have a window in the bedroom or living room
Adequate means for heating, installing cooking equipment and food storage	No requirement for fixed heating system such as central heating or provision of a cooker
All electrical and gas supplies must be in good repair and safe working order	Safe exit routes in the event of fire not required; in addition, no requirement to provide sufficient sockets to safely meet modern needs
Common areas, facilities and stairways must be in good repair and safe working order	Smoke alarms, fire blankets and extinguishers are not legally required

In addition to the minimal content of the 1993 regulations, they have been poorly enforced. D/EHLG's statistics on the number of inspections under the dwelling standards regulations

report little or no activity by many authorities alongside a high degree of non compliance. As shown on the table, Limerick City conducted no inspections in 2005; 18 county councils also failed to inspect – 56 per cent of all local authorities failed to carry out any inspections last year. The 6,815 inspections across Ireland during 2005 uncovered 2,048 non-compliant dwellings, or 30 per cent<sup>13</sup> of those inspected; legal action was taken in only 11 cases. Fingal County Council was the only authority with significant inspection activity and reporting few non-compliant properties.

**Table 3.3 Local Authority Inspections of Private Rented Accommodation**

Area	Number of inspections, 2005	Private rented dwellings, 2002	Inspections as % of rental stock	Number of non-compliant dwellings, 2005
Dublin City	3,735	37,863	10	1,299
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	650	7,212	9	244
Fingal	719	4,941	15	5
South Dublin	314	4,815	7	12
Dublin subtotal	5,418	54,831	10	1560
Cork City	794	7,830	10	366
Galway City	113	5,826	2	108
Limerick City	0	3,290	-	-
Waterford City	3	2,044	-	1
Regional cities	910	18,990	5	475
<b>STATE</b>	<b>6,815</b>	<b>141,459</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2,048</b>

CSO 2002 Census Volume 13 Table 2; D/EHLG Annual Housing Statistics Bulletin 2005

<sup>13</sup> The number of dwellings found to be non-compliant as a percentage of the number of inspections will be an underestimate since a dwelling may be visited more than once if non-compliant.

### Fire Safety

Fire regulations for dwellings in multiple unit properties under the 1981 *Fire Services Act* and the 1990 *Building Control Act* are also poorly enforced.<sup>14</sup> Fire safety inspections in the residential sector are uncommon although that is where most fires occur. The Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) has voiced concerns about weak enforcement of fire safety regulations. In a letter to Threshold, the Association's Secretary stated, 'The CFOA are not confident that occupied residential properties that could pose a fire risk (e.g. due to their age or dilapidated state) have a high probability of being inspected by fire authorities ... The existing building stock is by and large ignored due to the lack of staff to deal with this area ... [However] where a problem/complaint is brought to the attention of the fire authority an inspection will generally take place.'<sup>15</sup>

Threshold's advice workers have encountered a variety of fire safety problems in the private rented sector including:

- Three and four storey Georgian buildings converted into flats with no exterior fire escapes and only one interior staircase;
- Windows at ground level barred or painted shut;
- A high proportion of fire alarms missing or not operational;
- Toxic material contained in ceiling tiles;
- Toxic material in furnishings;
- Only one exit door.

### *Other Quality Assurance Mechanisms*

Other checks that might be considered to provide protection to vulnerable tenants have limited impact. While the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 makes it easier for tenants resolve problems with their landlord, tenants are vulnerable to 28-day notice to quit without cause during the first six months of their tenancy, limiting the likelihood of complaints being made.

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<sup>14</sup> New building since 1992 has also been subject to building control regulation, but inspection in this area has also been subject to criticism (Buchanan, 2006)

<sup>15</sup> Letter dated 20 October 2005

Even when the state is subsidising rents through the Rent Supplement scheme, measures are not routinely taken to ensure that claimants are living in a reasonable standard of accommodation. Maximum rent levels applying under the scheme are often below market rates, making it difficult to secure decent accommodation within the limits. When Community Welfare Officers visit applicants in the rented property it is primarily to establish that the applicant is indeed resident at that address (i.e. fraud control) rather than to inspect the quality of the accommodation.

### **3.6 Incidence of Poor Rental Housing**

While there are no comprehensive data available on the extent of compliance with dwelling and fire safety standards in the private rented sector, a number of trends point to the conclusion that the degree of non-compliance is significant.

Threshold's advice offices in Dublin, Cork and Galway dealt with 785 cases concerned with dwelling standards in 2005, twice the level recorded in 2004 (Threshold, 2006). An ESRI/D/EHLG survey in 2001-2002 found that 17 per cent of private renters were dissatisfied with the condition of their accommodation, compared with 8 per cent of the full sample (Watson, 2003).<sup>16</sup> Based on the 2002 Census statistics, that finding implies that some 25,000 households renting privately considered their accommodation to be inadequate.

Accommodation which fails to comply with even the basic elements of existing statutory standards is most likely to be situated at the low-priced end of the rental market. People accept substandard accommodation because they cannot afford anything better or because landlords of better quality accommodation will not consider Rent Supplement tenants. In many locations accommodation priced within RS rent limits are scarce, and landlords willing to rent to RS recipients even rarer.

For example, the maximum RS rent limit in the Eastern Regional Health Authority area for a lone parent with one child is €953 per month. On 13 September 2006 on [www.daft.ie](http://www.daft.ie), a prominent source of information on properties to let, there were a total of 24 two-bedroom units to let advertised within the ceiling for Dublin. The majority of these were asking €950

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<sup>16</sup> Respondents were asked about a variety of conditions including damp and mould, state of repair, heating, problems with doors or windows. Taking all forms of tenure together, there was a positive correlation between when the accommodation was built and the percentage dissatisfied.

per month. Only 8 of the units advertised had Dublin post codes, with the rest located further afield. The vast majority (19) refused to accept Rent Supplement tenants.<sup>17</sup>

A Threshold research study that surveyed a sample of Rent Supplement recipients in Cork city in 2004 found that half lived in housing that was defective in at least one respect. Table 3 shows the kinds of problems these tenants faced.

**Table 3.4 Cork Survey Respondents Reporting Substandard Accommodation**

<i>Standard</i>	<i>% with difficulties</i>
Sink with hot & cold water	11
Moisture getting in through walls	21
A leaking roof	7
Windows not closing properly	17
No secure handrail	3
Windowless rooms (excluding bathrooms)	7
Mould on walls or ceilings	26

*Based on interviews with 70 persons in receipt of Rent Supplement who lived in Cork City; Threshold (2005) Seeking a home on Rent Supplement: Experience in Cork City in 2004*

The partnership agreement *Towards 2016* includes a commitment that ‘minimum standards will be updated by the Dept of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and effectively enforced by Local Authorities’. However, no time frame is indicated for implementation.

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<sup>17</sup> One advertisement stated ‘rent allowance welcome’; the acceptability of RS could not be ascertained for the remaining four advertised lets.

## 4. Research Findings

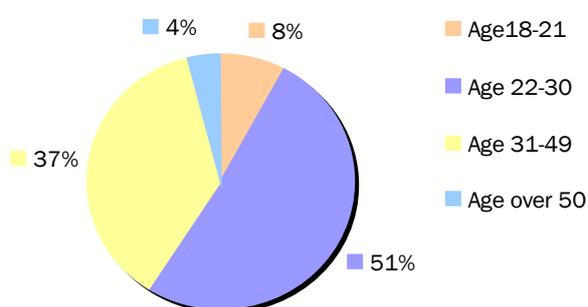
### 4.1 Introduction

This section explores the findings from a survey conducted with fifty-one lone parents across the country living in private rented accommodation and in receipt of Rent Supplement, supplemented, where relevant, by focus group data. The survey questionnaire was administered by telephone in most instances, with some interviews conducted in person. The survey took place between January and May 2006. After the survey findings had been analysed a focus group was held in a lone parents' resource centre in the north Dublin area in June 2006. The group consisted of five female lone parents, each of whom had been in receipt of Rent Supplement for periods of time varying from one to eleven years. While the focus group reflects the experiences of a very small number of lone parents, the data obtained offer a personalised account of the experiences of some lone parents in the private rented sector, which serves as a useful complement to the survey findings. The findings presented below allow examination of the housing experiences of lone parents in relation to a range of issues, including the rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants, appropriateness and quality of accommodation, as well as the issue of the adequacy of the subvention provided under the rent supplement scheme.

### 4.2 Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents

The demographic profile of survey respondents was similar to that of the general population of lone parents in Ireland. The majority of lone parents surveyed were female, aged between 22 and 49, with one or two children.

**Figure 1: Age Profile of Respondents**



Most respondents were aged between 22 and 49; 51 per cent were between 22 and 30 years old, while 37 per cent were aged between 31 and 49 years of age.

There was a small minority – 4 per cent – of young respondents between the ages of 18 and 21, while 8 per cent were over 50.

92 per cent of lone parents surveyed were women; 8 per cent were male.

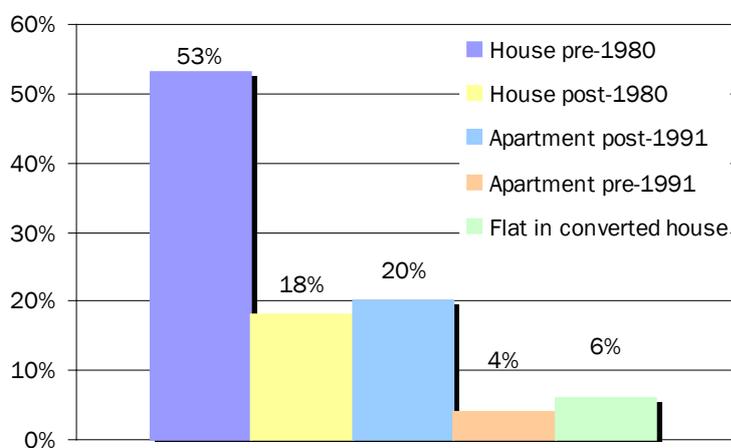
The vast majority of households surveyed (86 per cent) comprised families of one or two children. Just under half (49 per cent) the families had only one child, 37 per cent had two

children, with 10 per cent of families having three children. Only 4 per cent of households comprised more than four people.

### 4.3 Information on Current Tenancy

This section sets out data on survey respondents' current home, including information on accommodation type and the length of their tenancy to date, why they had chosen this property, and whether the tenancy was registered with the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB).

**Figure 2: Current Home**

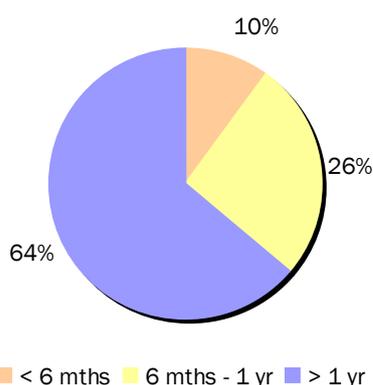


A majority of respondents, almost 53 per cent, described their home as a house (either bungalow or two-storey) which they believed pre-dated 1980. A further 18 per cent lived in houses which they believed to be constructed after 1980.

Nearly 20 per cent of survey respondents lived in modern purpose-built apartment complexes, which they believed were constructed during the past 15 years; a number of these respondents felt confident that their apartment complex had been built in the past 5 years. A very small percentage of respondents – 4 per cent – stated that they lived in purpose-built apartment complexes which pre-dated 1991. The remaining 6 per cent were living in flats in converted houses.

Most respondents rented either fully or partly furnished properties. Almost 55 per cent rented fully furnished accommodation; 41 per cent lived in partly furnished accommodation, while less than 4 per cent had rented unfurnished accommodation.

**Figure 3: Length of Time Resident in Current Home**



Almost two-thirds of survey respondents had been living in their current accommodation for more than a year; their average tenancy length was just over four years. A similar proportion (67 per cent) had been in receipt of Rent Supplement for more than 18 months, which means they would be eligible for the RAS.

In relation to why respondents had chosen their current accommodation, the most common factors cited were that the property was the best available within Rent Supplement limits (45 per cent), or that the rent was reasonable (41 per cent). Location was also important: 45 per cent chose their current home on the basis that there was nothing else available in their preferred area.

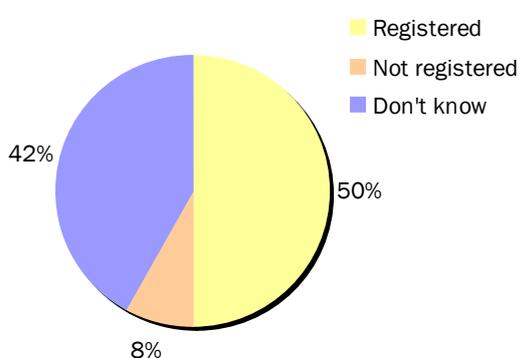
Prior to moving to their current rented accommodation, 45 per cent of respondents had already been renting for some time, either alone, with a partner or with others; 34 per cent had been living in the parental home and 20 per cent in a house owned by their parents. Only 2 per cent had been living in social housing with a partner.

#### 4.4 Rights and Responsibilities

The research revealed a significant degree of misunderstanding, or lack of awareness, of the respective rights and responsibilities of landlord and tenant. There were instances where landlords and tenants incorrectly ascribed responsibilities to the other party, and in particular, where tenants were unaware of their rights.

The Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) was established in September 2004 to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants, operate a national tenancy registration system and provide information and policy advice on the private rented sector. However, the lone parents surveyed were largely unaware of these functions. Some respondents had never heard of the Board. Many lone parents were unaware of the legal obligation to register a tenancy with the PRTB.

**Figure 4: Registration with PRTB**



Only half of all respondents to the survey could confirm that their landlord was registered with the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB), 8 per cent were confident that their landlord was not registered while 41 per cent did not know if their landlord was registered or not.

A number of respondents in the survey were frustrated or upset by their landlord's conduct; they did not know about their legal right to fair treatment or who to approach for help on

addressing the issues. For example, one lone parent was unable to secure her landlord's signature in a rent book or get a receipt for the rent paid. Another respondent explained that she felt harassed and intimidated by her landlord because he regularly entered her flat at various times during the day and even at night, without seeking permission or giving any advance notice of his arrival. Another respondent's landlord told her he was moving abroad for a number of months, but despite assurances, did not provide her with new contact details, or assign responsibility for managing the property while he was away. Consequently, when a plumbing problem arose, the tenant had no-one to contact, and could not afford to hire a plumber herself.

### Repairs and Maintenance

Particular questions in the survey highlighted a lack of knowledge among some lone parents regarding responsibility for repairs and maintenance. For example, a number of respondents had purchased smoke detectors for their rented homes, as there were none installed when they moved in; these tenants were unaware of the landlord's legal obligation to fit at least two smoke detectors in each unit. Conversely, a small number of respondents said they were waiting for their landlords to replace the worn-out batteries in their smoke detectors; they were unaware that this responsibility actually falls to them as tenants.

Some landlords were also unclear about their responsibilities in relation to repairs and maintenance:

*My landlord tried to make me pay for repairing the boiler!*

In contrast some lone parents asked their landlords to remove old, worn carpets or unfashionable wallpaper from their rented accommodation and were disappointed and frustrated when these requests were not granted: they did not know that landlords are not legally required to make aesthetic improvements to a dwelling once the existing floor and wall coverings are deemed adequate.

Some members of the focus group explained that while they understood their rights as tenants, they were uncomfortable exercising these rights and expressed concern at the possible consequences of requesting repairs:

*Only two burners on the stove work but I'm afraid to say it to my landlady, because even though she is really nice, I'm worried she will put the rent up and there is just no way I could afford it.*

They feared their rent could be increased as a result of asking the landlord to repair even essential appliances:

*The water heater in my apartment didn't work for two weeks but I just saved up and I paid for the repair myself because I don't want to take a chance on the rent being increased.*

Response times when repairs were needed were raised by the lone parents. One survey respondent was without hot or cold running water when she first took up her tenancy. Her landlord took two weeks to rectify the problem despite being aware of it before she moved in.

Other delays were encountered by members of the focus group:

*My house is really damp and the kitchen ceiling leaked for two years until it got so bad even the landlord saw something had to be done.*

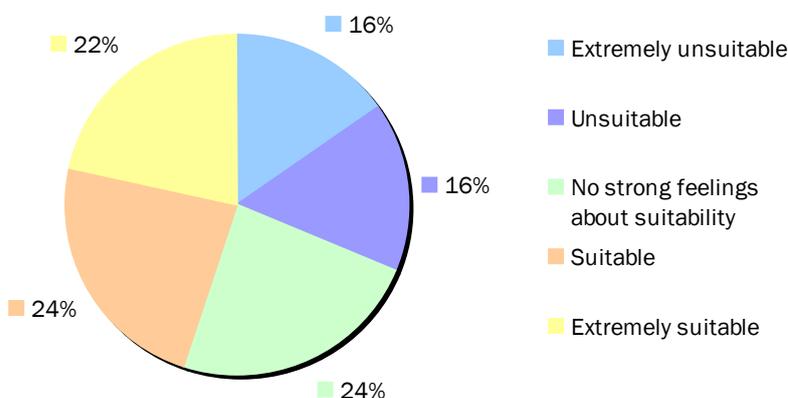
A slow response from a landlord to a request for repairs, or no response at all, can affect a family's standard of living and in some cases have a detrimental effect on health:

*I had no heat for 6 weeks last winter and my son got sick.*

#### 4.5 Suitability of Accommodation as Family Dwelling

This section sets out respondents' views on the suitability of their current accommodation for family needs, including issues such as the size of the dwelling, facilities available as well as access to play areas for children.

**Figure 5: Suitability of Dwelling**



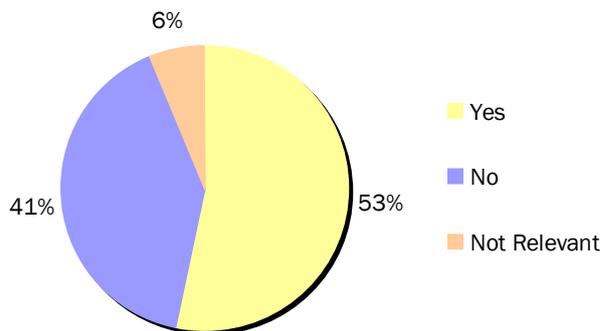
Survey respondents were asked to rate the suitability of their dwelling on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is 'extremely unsuitable' and 5 is 'extremely suitable'.

Almost 30 per cent described their accommodation as

'unsuitable' or 'extremely unsuitable'; while 45 per cent rated their accommodation as either 'suitable' or 'extremely suitable'. Nearly 10 per cent were living in overcrowded accommodation, e.g. one-bedroom or bedsit accommodation. Just over half of respondents (51 per cent) believed their current home was sufficient in size for their needs, while 12 per cent felt their accommodation was bigger than necessary; 37 per cent of respondents felt the accommodation was too small for their family's needs.

### Outdoor Play Space

**Figure 6: Outdoor Play Areas**



Access to secure outdoor play areas is an important issue for child welfare. A large minority of respondents (41 per cent) stated that their children did not have access to a safe or secure outdoor play area; 6 per cent of respondents were raising older children in their teens and they felt the issue of secure play space was not relevant to them.

Access to play space was a particular issue for lone parents renting apartments, many of whom could not let their children outside of the apartment unaccompanied, as the only outdoor area surrounding the apartment block was a car park. The implications for the physical health and mental well-being of children deprived of an area to exercise and play and perhaps socialise with other children are stark. For example, a member of the focus group expressed strong convictions on the importance of secure play space for her son's happiness and quality of life:

*I need a house with outdoor space for my son to play. I like my area although the house is awful and the neighbours are unfriendly because I'm 'only a renter'. But my son can play outside and feel safe. And I don't have to worry about him getting into trouble or mischief. I even pay €165 per month under the table to the landlord. I have to get a loan out of the credit union every month just to pay the rent but I'd refuse an apartment (even if it meant lower rent and better quality)*

*because of my son's needs. In an apartment he would have nowhere to play, he would end up playing on the balcony and that is no quality of life.*

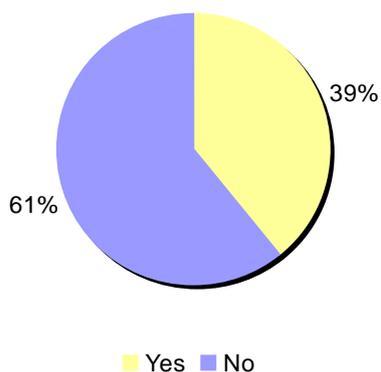
### Household Facilities

Survey participants were also asked about a number of other facilities which are of particular importance for families, including storage facilities, laundry facilities, household appliances and bathroom facilities.

### Storage Space

One-parent families need more storage space for clothes, toys, household items and food, as well as more food preparation space in the kitchen, than a single person renting accommodation of the same size.

**Figure 7: Adequate Storage**



Most respondents felt that their home did not have storage space to meet a family's needs, both in terms of general storage, and in relation to kitchen facilities.

61 per cent of survey respondents stated that there was inadequate storage space in their homes. The same percentage stated that there was no access to external storage space, e.g. a garden shed or storage lockers in apartment building basements. The need for storage was particularly acute in relation to bulky items such as prams and buggies, bicycles, vacuum cleaners and children's toys. 41 per cent of survey respondents also felt that there was inadequate kitchen storage available in their rented homes, an issue which was also highlighted by participants in the focus group.

*My kitchen is tiny, especially for three teenagers. I have the basics.*

### Laundry Facilities

Lack of access to clothes washing facilities for an indefinite period of time is unacceptable under the regulations governing the private rented sector. Without access to washing facilities lone parents have to make alternative arrangements in order to meet their family's demand for clean clothing. These arrangements might include more expensive options such as launderettes. 82 per cent of households surveyed had a washing machine in their

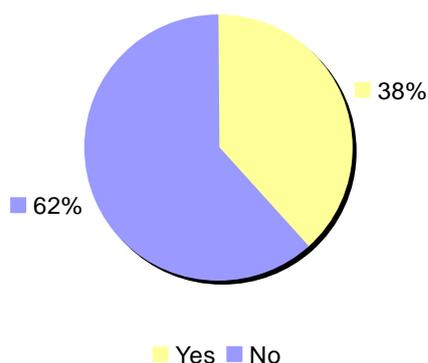
accommodation when they first moved in. However, some reported waiting weeks for their landlords to repair old and worn out washing machines which had broken down on more than one occasion.

*I have the basics although the washing machine doesn't always work.*

One lone parent described how for six weeks she transported dirty clothes from her rented house in her son's toy wheelbarrow to wash them in her parents' home, while she waited for her landlord to replace the old washing machine. In the end, she decided to pay for a new washing machine from her own pocket.

The extra laundry generated by a family, and particularly by small children, also requires access to adequate drying facilities, either outdoors on washing lines or tumble dryers in a well ventilated room within the apartment complex.

**Figure 8: Clothes drying facilities**



Most respondents (62%) did not feel that clothes drying facilities in their homes were adequate. While 22% had been provided with a tumble dryer or washer/dryer, 35% relied on clothes horses, radiators and airing cupboards to dry the family's clothes; this was particularly the case among apartment dwellers. Almost 6% of respondents used launderettes regularly to dry their clothes.

### Household Appliances

Besides washing machines, other common items provided by landlords included microwaves and kettles. 55 per cent of survey respondents' landlords provided fridges containing small box freezers only. 14 per cent of those surveyed had been supplied with a separate freezer as well as a fridge. 14 per cent of lone parents bought their own fridge freezers when they moved into their private rented accommodation, while a further 8 per cent bought separate freezers. Other items commonly purchased by tenants included microwaves, toasters, kettles and deep fat fryers.

### Bathroom Facilities

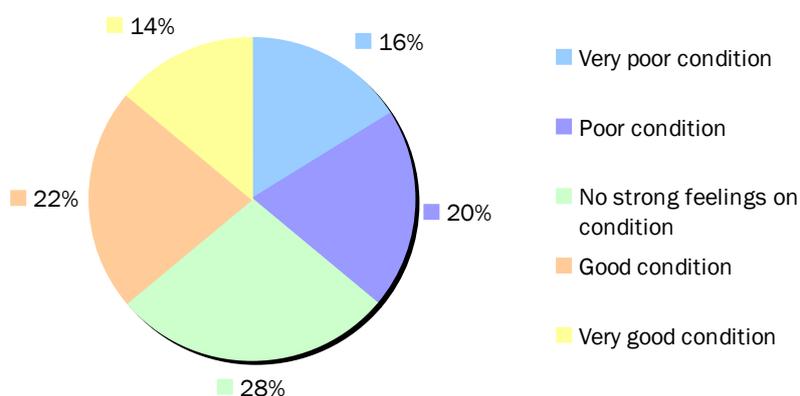
In relation to bathroom facilities, almost a quarter (24 per cent) of respondents occupied dwellings without a bath; their accommodation used free standing showers; 10 per cent of

respondents did not have a shower and only had baths. The majority of respondents (67 per cent) lived in dwellings which had watertight shower units<sup>18</sup> fixed over the bath.

#### 4.6 Quality of Accommodation

Respondents were also questioned about the physical condition of their home, including questions on the heating of their home.

**Figure 9: Physical Condition of Dwelling**



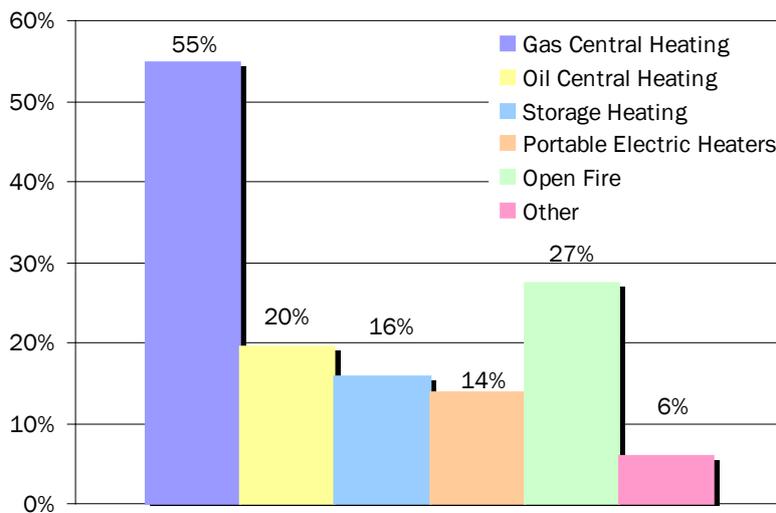
Survey respondents were asked to rate the physical condition of their home on a scale from 1 to 5 (with 1 signifying 'very poor' and 5 'very good' condition).

Almost a third of respondents (28 per cent) had no strong feelings about the condition of their

home, finding it neither very poor nor very good. 22 per cent rated their accommodation as in good condition, with 14 per cent giving a rating of very good. 36 per cent of respondents felt negatively about the condition of their accommodation, with 16 per cent of respondents rating it as very poor.

When asked about how their home was heated, a majority (55 per cent) indicated that their homes had gas fired central heating. 27 per cent of respondents had an open fire in their home, which could either be the only source of heat in the dwelling, or a supplement to other heating sources. Other forms of heating used included oil fired central heating (20 per cent), storage heating (16 per cent) and portable electric heaters (14 per cent). A small percentage of respondents (6 per cent) also described other forms of heating which they used in their accommodation, including SuperSers.

**Figure 10: Type of Heating in Home**

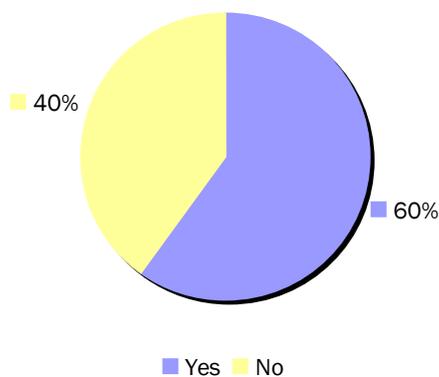


Survey respondents were also asked about the degree of control they could exercise over the heating system.

12 per cent said they could not adjust the heating system, either because the landlord controlled the timing and duration of heating system, or more

frequently, because the controls were broken; these tenants could control the heat only by turning the entire system on or off.

**Figure 11: Damp or Mould in Home**



Respondents felt that lack of adequate insulation in their homes compounded problems with heating systems.

60 per cent of respondents stated that they had noticed patches of damp or mould growth in their homes.

A similar percentage (35 per cent) reported that there was inadequate ventilation in part or all of their homes. For example, rooms without windows or extractor fans, and in one instance, the vents had been wallpapered

over by the landlord.

**4.7 Safety and Security**

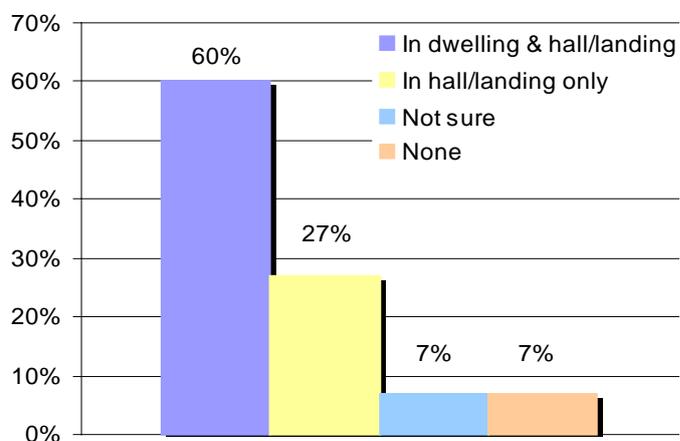
Survey participants were also asked questions about security and safety issues in their homes.

**Fire Safety**

35 per cent of respondents stated that they had concerns about fire safety in their homes. By law smoke detectors must be fitted in every housing unit as well as communal areas such as

halls and landings of apartment blocks; almost quarter of those surveyed (24 per cent) either did not have smoke detectors or had broken smoke detectors in their homes.

**Figure 12: Smoke Detectors in Multiple Dwelling Buildings**



In buildings with multiple dwellings, such as apartment blocks or converted houses, 60 per cent of respondents indicated that smoke detectors were fitted both in their own dwellings and in communal hallways and landings. However, 27 per cent of respondents in such buildings did not have smoke detectors fitted in their own homes, and could only confirm

the presence of detectors in communal spaces such as hallways and landings. 7 per cent of respondents reported no smoke detectors present anywhere in the building.

Many lone parents surveyed lived in accommodation with only one exit door (mainly apartments or flats in converted houses). These respondents were concerned about routes of escape in the event of fire, particularly if the source of the fire blocked the only exit. Many of these respondents called for the introduction of fire escapes to apartment blocks and tall buildings. In modern apartments and renovated buildings the introduction of fire resistant building materials and fire doors has rendered fire escapes less critical, at least in theory. However, fire safety in older rented accommodation may not be so rigorous. Older apartments and converted buildings containing multiple dwellings may not benefit from modern fire safety measures. In the absence of these measures, additional precautions to ensure fire safety may be required.

### Security

35 per cent of respondents had concerns about the security of their homes. Generally, these concerns related to two factors, the threat of burglary and the issue of anti-social behaviour. Several respondents had been burgled or knew of attempted burglaries in the immediate area. Some worried that they could not make their homes secure: windows were often loose in the frames and doors were made of flimsy materials. A number of participants reported having no locks on front, back or patio doors. Some homes had locks which were broken, while others had working locks without keys so the doors remained unlocked.

One lone parent in the focus group explained:

*My front door key is an easily copied bedroom key. My backdoor is also insecure, so I definitely worry about security, even though the area is lovely. When I was locked out of my house my neighbour showed me how easy it would be for someone to get in by the back door.*

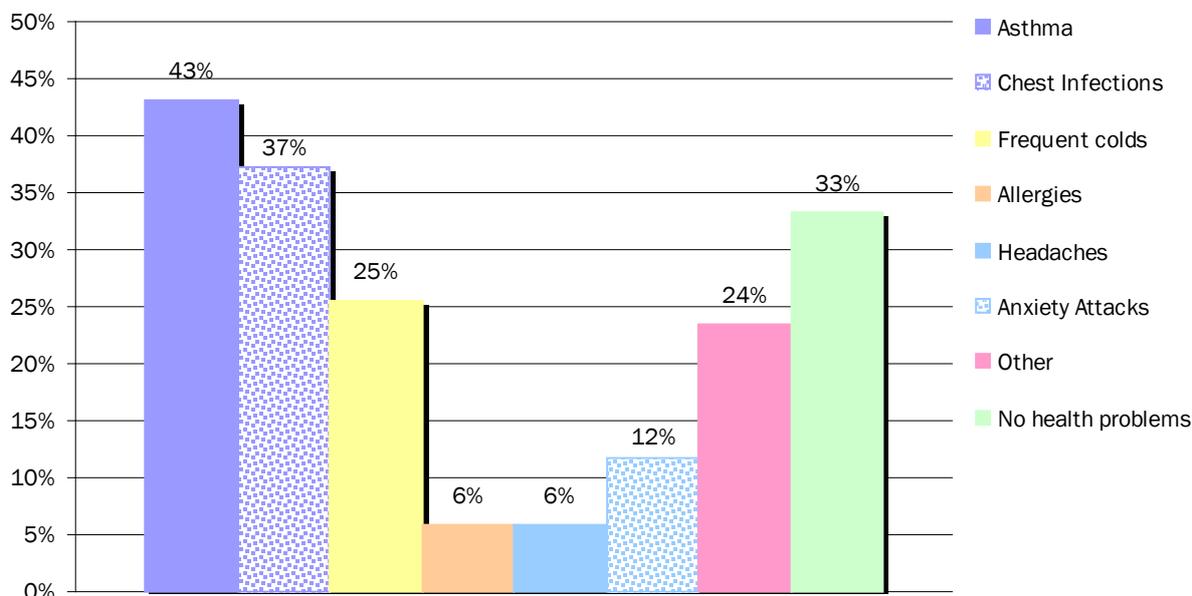
Several respondents attempted to solve their security problems by getting a dog and/or having a burglar alarm installed to feel more secure in their homes.

For others, their sense of security or safety was hampered by the level of anti-social behaviour prevalent in the local area, in particular groups of teenage boys loitering and drinking outside their homes. One lone parent had a football kicked against her windows and front doors regularly but felt too intimidated by the teenagers to complain.

### Health and Safety Issues

The relationship between poverty and poor health outcomes is well-established in the literature; in that context participants were asked about their health and that of their children, and whether their accommodation had an impact on their health.

**Figure 13: Children’s Health**



Turning first to the issue of children’s health, two-thirds of respondents reported health problems with their children; asthma was the most prevalent health condition, reported by 43

per cent of respondents. Chest infections and frequent colds were also recorded as quite common at 37 per cent and 25 per cent respectively. 33 per cent of respondents reported no health problems with their children. Almost half (46 per cent) of those who reported that their children had health problems felt that the living conditions in their homes was either causing the problem, or exacerbating it. Issues such as cold, damp, and old dusty furnishings such as carpets (which aggravate asthma) were cited as examples.

Amongst adults, a third of respondents reported health issues; 76 per cent of whom believed these problems were related to their housing conditions. Cold and damp were cited as issues here. However, impact on mental health were also reported. Stress, anxiety and depression were all reported as by-products of living in poor quality accommodation, and trying to pay household bills such as rent and heating on very limited income.

#### Safety Issues

Some lone parents were living in accommodation which was poorly constructed or structurally unsound, raising health and safety concerns. For example, one lone parent was living with her two-year-old son in a house with a garage attached, the roof of which caved in during her tenancy. One of the three bedrooms in the house was located over the garage and so become unsafe to use. Her landlord did not secure or repair the roof before the end of her tenancy. Another survey respondent had made a request to their landlord to have the electrical circuitry rewired. All electrical appliances used in the house required a two-prong adaptor because the circuitry was so old. Another lone parent lived in a house which had large gaps between each internal wall and holes in the external walls.

In other cases, discussed by members of the focus group, landlords' actions had compromised the health and safety of the tenants, such as where a landlord had wallpapered over air vents or where landlords had not had organised regular servicing of gas boilers.

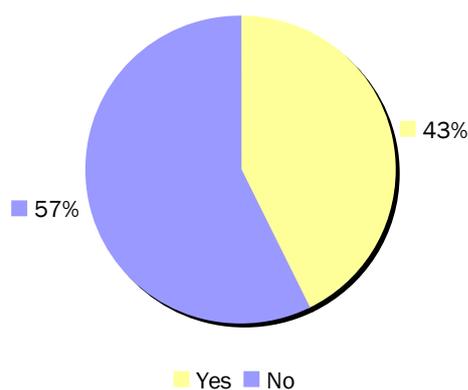
#### **4.8 Affordability and Subvention**

Survey participants were questioned about Rent Supplement, whether they believed it to be adequate, and any other issues arising. These questions elicited some of the most strongly held views in the survey.

**Table 4.1 Weekly/Monthly\* Rent Levels in each Health Service Executive Area**

Rent Supplement	ERHA	MHB	MWHB	NEHB	NWHB	SEHB	WHB	SHB
Couple/lone parent with 1 child	€953*	€140	€150	€140 / 150	€140	€150	€175	€153
Couple/lone parent with 2 children	€1,200*	€160	€170	€155 / 170	€153	€170	€200	€90
Couple/lone parent with 3 children	€1,200*	€175	€185	€191 / 200	€170	€170	€200	€203

**Note: Variations represent different maximum rent levels in different counties in the NEHB Area, Louth/Meath (higher rate), Monaghan/Cavan (lower rate).**  
\* per month

**Figure 14: Is Rent Supplement adequate?**

The majority of respondents (57 per cent) did not believe that the Rent Supplement payment was adequate.

Respondents felt that the limits set by the Health Service Executives were unrealistic; they did not reflect the cost of renting accommodation in the area. Many respondents felt this was particularly unfair, given the lack of availability of social housing.

To manage this, some respondents stated that they could only secure suitable accommodation by under-stating the rent in their Rent Supplement application, and making up the shortfall from their own funds, including by borrowing in some instances.

Respondents also noted that the potential loss of Rent Supplement made it very difficult for them to return to the labour force. Participating in training, education or even part-time work could result in so much Rent Supplement being lost that they were actually worse off. Respondents felt that this trapped them in their current situation.

## 4.9 Discussion

The findings from this study suggest that much private rented sector accommodation is ill-equipped to meet the needs of lone parent families. As the wider literature suggests, accommodation which fails to meet the needs of its occupants can cause unnecessary strain for the people living there; the cost of which is not only financial, but also impacts on occupants' health. Living in accommodation which is sub-standard or inappropriate may result in additional costs and/or inefficient use of funds. For example, lack of access to adequate laundry facilities can leave some tenants wholly reliant on commercial laundrette facilities – which is not an economical solution to families laundry needs and puts additional strain on already stretched incomes. Poor heating systems in some rented properties provide similar challenges for households on low incomes, a problem compounded in some cases by inadequate insulation. The cost of heating bills was a major concern for many lone parents participating in this study. This issue not only relates to the basic cost of fuel, but also to the fact that some systems require relatively large investments at particular points in time.

As the findings demonstrate the costs of inadequate housing go beyond the financial and can take a severe toll on physical and mental health. Many participants in the study reported that their accommodation was affected by damp and health and that this was having a negative effect on their children's health either causing or exacerbating conditions such as asthma. On a broader level inadequate housing can impact on children's development because of inadequate facilities to play. Although not specifically raised as an issue in this study, inadequate housing also has clear implications for educational attainment, e.g. where children lack a warm, quiet area to study.

This research shows that poor living conditions also affected parental well-being, leading to problems such as asthma and frequent colds. More significantly, respondents' living conditions affected their mental health due to anxiety about their children's health, financial stress and/or depression related to inadequate living conditions. In addition many respondents were dealing with anxiety caused by security concerns related to the risk of burglary or anti-social behaviour.

A striking feature of the survey findings is the limited knowledge which respondents had about their rights and duties as tenants. In many cases tenants were performing tasks which are the legal responsibility of landlords. Where tenants were aware of their rights, a sense of insecurity meant that some were afraid to press them, reflecting the weak position which rent

supplement tenants generally occupy in the rental market. This is an issue which the RAS scheme has potential to alleviate. However, it is imperative that the scheme is implemented in such a way that lone parent families are provided with accommodation which meets their specific needs.

## **5. The Rental Accommodation Scheme – An Opportunity for Change**

### **5.1 Overview of the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)**

The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) was announced by the Irish government in July 2004. RAS is a collaborative project between the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Local Authorities, the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Community Welfare Service. The scheme is a new social housing mechanism whereby local authorities source accommodation from the private rented market and from housing associations with the aim of providing good quality rented accommodation for those eligible, in secure tenancies, at a social rent. The aim is to transfer all those eligible to the RAS by 2008.

To be eligible for the RAS, a person must be unable to provide for his/her own housing needs on a long-term housing basis; in practice, this means any household that has been in receipt of Rent Supplement for 18 months or longer. Once transferred to the RAS, tenants pay a social rent, which is calculated on the basis of their household income, as is the case for local authority and housing association tenants. Tenants pay their rent to the local authority, while the authority pays close to market rents to the private or housing association landlord. Both private tenants and landlords continue to be covered by the *Residential Tenancies Act 2004*, and can take disputes to the Private Residential Tenancies Board for resolution. Lone parent households make up 36 per cent of Rent Supplement claimants, while 12 per cent are couples with children. In 2006, 56 per cent of all claimants had been in receipt of the payment for 18 consecutive months or more.<sup>19</sup>

The RAS involves a contractual relationship between the local authority and landlord, so that minimum dwelling standards can be set for accommodation under the scheme, the content of standards depending on the duration of the contract as well as the house type. The D/EHLG's 'General overview of Scheme' anticipates that the RAS will 'improve the quality,

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<sup>19</sup> Coates, D. & M. Norris (2006) *Supplementary Welfare Allowance, Rent Supplement: Implications for the Implementation of the Rental Accommodation Scheme*, Centre for Housing Research, Dublin

suitability and usage of private rented accommodation'. The Department issued a guidance circular to local authorities reminding them of the various statutory minimum standards that dwellings taken into the RAS should meet.

In addition to the direction provided by the D/EHLG, local authorities have to consider their potential liabilities when they contract with a landlord for rental properties. For example, accepting an inadequate property for the RAS could compromise their duty of care to the tenants to whom they assign the dwelling. Agreeing a long-term contract for the use of units of questionable quality could also lead to future problems for the authority, even though repair is a matter between the landlord and tenant under the Residential Tenancies Act 2004. On the other hand, refusing to accept a property can slow the expansion of the RAS unless the authority has alternative accommodation to hand into which tenants can be moved.

## **5.2 Emerging Practice**

As part of the research, the RAS managers of five urban local authorities were contacted to discuss their expectations regarding dwelling standards for RAS tenants. Managers divided the current accommodation of long-term Rent Supplement recipients into two broad categories: adequate housing with which the tenant was satisfied, and inadequate accommodation that failed to meet more than one statutory standard. The latter category was particularly common amongst single recipients for whom the Rent Supplement upper limit had been consistently set below prevailing market rates. In transferring tenancies into the RAS, managers expected most contracts with landlords to be short term or linked to the term of the existing tenant.<sup>20</sup>

Although few transfers to the RAS in the private rented sector had occurred, the managers had already developed guidance procedures in relation to dwelling inspections and visits by local authority staff. A feature typically required of RAS dwellings is the provision of basic white goods: cooker, refrigerator with in some cases a freezer facility and a washing machine. One authority had developed a lengthy check list that included the statutory requirements plus additional ones, such as adequate space heating (oil, gas or electric) controlled by the tenant, exclusive use of a bathroom, fire safety equipment, and rooms and flooring in good decorative condition. Another, less detailed, RAS inspection report looked for adequate refuse and security provision. A third manager considered it inadvisable to demand

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<sup>20</sup> It was noted that a VAT issue arises for landlords if contracts extend beyond ten years.

more than the statutory 1993 regulations on matters such as heating, but planned to ensure that existing fire safety standards were stringently applied.

A consideration mentioned by several managers was the repercussions of refusing a property with a sitting tenant eligible for the RAS. One officer pointed out that if an inspection failed, the CWO would be notified and the tenant given 12 weeks to find alternative accommodation.<sup>21</sup> Managers referred to efforts to get hold of alternative housing available under the RAS, such as through Part V of the Planning and Development Act. Meanwhile they might delay interviews with RAS candidates likely to be in problematic accommodation, even though they recognise that tenants would thereby be denied the advantages available under the RAS.

Information supplied by the RAS managers indicates that the standards expected of dwellings contracted for the RAS are still in flux. Moreover local authorities have not yet negotiated longer term contracts for properties not already occupied by Rent Supplement recipients, with some managers suggesting that property owners were waiting to see what terms would be possible. While properties accepted into the RAS should meet the statutory minimums, the scope for raising the level further by refusing compliant but poor quality units will depend on the willingness and capacity of local authorities to source alternative accommodation.

**Table 5.1 Rental Accommodation Scheme Statistics**

Date	Cases Reviewed	Voluntary housing association transfers	Private rented sector transfers	Total transfers	New housing units	Rent Supplement to social housing	Local Authorities operational
End 2005	1,590	500	5	505	0	101	12
Q1 2006	3,149	460	39	499	9	240	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,739</b>	<b>960</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>1,004</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>19</b>

Source: D/EHLG Advisory Committee

<sup>21</sup> If a 'visit' is made, as opposed to an inspection under the 1993 regulations, an improvement notice would not be forthcoming nor would the authority necessarily notify the tenant's CWO.

### 5.3 Raising Standards on the Rental Accommodation Scheme

A core concern for this project is developing recommendations towards establishing the appropriate quality of rental accommodation for low-income families living in private tenancies on a long-term basis. Situations that might be tolerable for a household anticipating a short stay must be distinguished from conditions appropriate for a long-term family home. Since families with children are not the typical household in private tenancies, their needs may receive little attention in the planned revision of Irish minimum standards for rental dwellings. The increasing prevalence of apartment blocks in urban areas raises concerns about space, storage and noise.<sup>22</sup>

Those eligible for the RAS include significant numbers of families in long-term housing need. To ensure that accommodation available under the RAS is appropriate for families' particular needs, additional standards, over and above existing minimums and, in certain areas, above the up-dated standards, should be considered.

As the main focus in Ireland and the UK regarding family homes has been on design guidelines for the construction of social housing (see Appendix 2), to explore what these additional standards might be, the researchers consulted with Fionnuala Rogerson, an architect with experience in the social housing and private housing sectors in Ireland.<sup>23</sup> A selective list of features important for a family home was identified, and cross-referenced against the findings of the survey. These features have been incorporated into the recommendations arising from this research.

The RAS will often involve simple transfers of tenancies, without the tenant moving location or a long-term relationship being negotiated between the landlord and the local authority. Existing accommodation in the private rented sector will be the subject of the contract. However, local authorities will also seek accommodation where long-term contracts can be agreed with private and non-profit landlords. Such 'fresh' accommodation should meet a more exacting standard, ensuring suitability for occupation as long-term homes. Also where a shorter term contract is coming to an end and the local authority is considering entering a new contract with the landlord, a higher dwelling standard becomes appropriate.

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<sup>22</sup> In 2005 18,035 apartments were completed, compared with 10,626 in 2001 (D/EHLG, 2005)

<sup>23</sup> The research team met twice with Ms. Rogerson

The next section of the report, outlining conclusions and recommendations, proposes two-tier dwelling standards. These standards draw from material for English and Scottish initiatives for existing housing stock, as well as some specifications in the D/EHLG's 1999 *Social Housing Guidelines*. Social housing design prescriptions play a larger role for long-term RAS contracts, where more rigorous standards are appropriate. Areas where standards are important, as well as aspects of their content, were primarily identified through the survey findings; complemented by the advice of the architect consulted during the research.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This section outlines some of the main conclusions from this research, and identifies key areas of reform to ensure that the Rental Accommodation Scheme adequately meets the needs of low-income families.

### 6.1 Making Rental Dwelling Standards Effective

The research identifies deficiencies in the enforcement of fire and rental dwelling standard for the current housing stock in the private rented sector; it is clear that a more effective inspection regime is called for.

To make best use of resources, inspection activity should focus on accommodation at lower rent levels, where deficiencies are most likely; however, this activity is obviously required in relation to all privately rented property, and not just RAS properties. Local authorities should ensure that there is sufficient, trained, staff, with access to all relevant information, to ensure compliance with appropriate standards.

Minimum standards regulations for the private rented sector urgently requires updating to reflect modern expectations in relation to residential accommodation, and to include, at a minimum, critical fire safety features to protect all tenants, whether or not their rent is subsidised by the state. The commitment in the new partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*,<sup>24</sup> along with the Minister's announcement of 'Action on Private Rented Accommodation Standards' to develop and enforce new standards, creates an opportunity to eliminate poor quality private rental accommodation in Ireland. It is important that this work proceeds without delay and that it includes consultation with tenant groups as part of the review process.

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<sup>24</sup> 'Minimum standards regulations for the private rented sector will be updated by the D/EHLG and effectively enforced by the Local Authorities. p.28, *Towards 2016*

To complement the 'stick' of standards enforcement, a 'carrot' should be provided by alerting landlords to tax incentives for repair and refurbishment; in addition, consideration should be given to reviewing the effectiveness of current tax incentives for up-grading of rental properties, with a view in particular to enhance their effectiveness in relation to the low rent end of the market.

A further mechanism to ensure compliance with standards worthy of consideration is that of requiring landlords participating in the RAS to take out building insurance. Insurers, especially in the case of multiple unit properties where statutory fire safety standards apply, would inspect the properties to calculate the risks involved in providing cover. Although such dwellings are not covered by Building Regulations if built or converted before 1991, *The Fire Services Act 1981* stipulates the maintenance of fire protection equipment and escape routes and keeping of records, which insurance inspections would verify. The *Residential Tenancies Act 2004* in Section 12 (3) qualifies the insurance obligation on landlords, undermining the potential of this mechanism to improve compliance with minimum standards.

#### **Recommendation 1**

*Local authorities* should significantly increase inspection of properties to establish compliance with both fire and dwelling standard regulation standards; this applies to all private rented tenancies, not just those with tenants eligible for the RAS. Inspections should be carried out by trained staff, and particular attention should be focused on properties suspected of failure to comply.

*The Dept. of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government* should improve its monitoring and reporting of standards enforcement activity, and ensure that adequate resources are provided to facilitate a high level of inspection activity.

#### **Recommendation 2**

*The Dept. of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government* should commence and complete the process of updating rental dwelling standards without further delay. The Department should consult with tenant groups as part of this process.

#### **Recommendation 3**

*The Dept. of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government* together with the *Department of Finance* should revisit the issue of tax incentives for refurbishing rental properties; in

particular, a scheme to incentivise private landlords to refurbish properties for long-term rental under the RAS would be of value.

#### **Recommendation 4**

*Landlords entering RAS contracts*, including those with dwellings in multiple unit properties, should be required to effect and maintain an insurance policy in respect of the building's structure.<sup>25</sup>

## **6.2 Dwellings Suitable for Families under the Rental Accommodation Scheme**

Families have additional needs if their accommodation is to provide a good home for raising children; in particular, where accommodation is to provide a family home on a long-term basis, features such as adequate storage, study and play space must be incorporated.

Increasingly in major urban areas, one-parent families live in apartments or flats, where inadequate space can often be an issue. A report recently prepared for a D/EHLG Steering Review Group on internal space standards for apartments recommends substantial increases in floor area standards to avoid 'undue disparity between house dwellers and apartment dwellers in overall terms of a sustainable quality of life' (Ó Muire, 2006). While the report focuses on new-build, its conclusions on space requirements and apartment facilities provide useful guidance in relation to the RAS. Requirements for a Floor Area Compliance Certificate also provide useful standards to which local authorities can refer when inspecting properties.

Our research shows that maintenance of appliances is the subject of much tension between landlords and tenants. Appliance failure is common, and the cause can often be difficult to identify, making problems almost inevitable. The prevalence of short-term tenancies in the private rented sector has made appliance provision by landlords the norm, and RAS contracts of four years or less are likely to reflect standard practice. However, with longer-term RAS arrangements, different approaches can be considered. For example, were tenants supported financially to purchase their own 'white goods', they would be responsible for maintenance, limiting landlords' maintenance responsibilities to basic appliances such as the boiler.

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<sup>25</sup> This would nullify the escape offered under Section 12 (3) of the *Residential Tenancies Act 2004*.

Another issue clearly particular to families is access to secure outdoor play areas for children; especially in the context of increasing recognition of the importance of physical activity for children. This must be considered an important criterion in the allocation of accommodation to families. Another consideration of particular importance for families is geographical location, in terms of where children are in childcare arrangements, school or other activities, as well as being close to extended family and friends who can provide often critical family support. Local authorities must be cognisant of these needs in making allocations to families, including responding to a situation where the family is residing in sub-standard accommodation, or where their landlord does not want to be part of the RAS. Local authorities should be guided by the family's wishes in these situations. It must also be noted that families' needs change and evolve over time, as size and composition evolves.

**Recommendation 5**

Accommodation approved for inclusion in the RAS intake process must be appropriate for households' needs; households' situation and needs should be reviewed regularly, at least every four years. An independent appeal procedure should be available and advertised to tenants.

**Recommendation 6**

For families accommodated under the RAS, parents should not be required to share bedrooms with their children.

**Recommendation 7**

Families with young children should be housed in locations with or close to safe play areas.

**Recommendation 8**

RAS contracts should require landlords to undertake annual inspections of appliances, security and safety devices, and maintain them in good working order.

Landlords with five or more units in the RAS should be required to have a nominated contact point for tenants regarding repairs with appropriate maintenance personnel on retainer.

**Recommendation 9**

*The Private Residential Tenancies Board* should publicise cases that illustrate landlords' and tenants' respective rights and responsibilities.

**Recommendation 10**

Local authorities should ensure that tenants transferring to the RAS are fully advised of their rights and their obligations to the landlord and to the local authority. At a minimum this should be provided in a booklet; this could also usefully include simply explained maintenance advice and the guides for the heating, cooking and other appliances. Consideration should be given by the *Dept. of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government* to commissioning a video/DVD on the RAS for tenants; this format would be more accessible for those with literacy difficulties. Where practicable, *Local Authorities* should consider holding information seminars for tenants prior to the commencement of their RAS tenancy.

**Recommendation 11**

All family accommodation under the RAS should comply with the following:

- A cooker, fridge/freezer and access to a washing machine within the property (at least for contracts of 4 years or less; see Recommendation 13).
- A bathroom (for the sole use of the tenants) with a water-tight shower facility<sup>26</sup>
- All windows, with the exception of those in the kitchen and bathroom, should open and close properly, be lockable and accessible for ventilation (and for cleaning unless alternative arrangements are included in the management contract).
- The kitchen and bathroom require adequate rapid mechanised ventilation where no natural ventilation is available.
- Central heating or fixed heating appliances (e.g. storage heaters, convector heaters) in all habitable rooms, and the capacity to control the temperature (i.e. thermostatic and time-controlled).
- National Fire Safety Council recommendations for smoke detectors both inside the unit and in communal areas, and a fire extinguisher and blanket in or near the kitchen.
- Kitchen sink and draining board and adequate working counter space; space for appliances, adequate storage facilities for food and non-food items including clothes, toys, and domestic appliances such as ironing boards and vacuum cleaners.
- Space and layout to allow for quiet study, either in the bedroom area or in a separated communal area.

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<sup>26</sup> A watertight shower unit is defined as having tiling all around the bath with either a shower curtain or door.

- Space and furnishings to allow the family and one guest to sit at a table and share a meal.
- Appropriate refuse facilities.
- Intercom for multiple unit properties of three storeys or more.

### **Recommendation 12**

Where RAS contracts are renewed or long-term contracts are negotiated, the following additional features should be included:

- Central heating (i.e. not storage) and insulation to achieve adequate thermal value
- Access to an on-site automatic clothes dryer or to protected clothes drying facilities outside the dwelling
- In all multiple unit properties, heat and smoke detectors connected to the power supply plus battery back-up
- Storage space for buggies, cycles or other bulky items
- Adequate storage for recycling purposes
- Adequate number and distribution of electrical sockets
- Adequate insulation against external noise, as appropriate
- All dwellings in multiple unit properties, whether or not covered by the Building Control Act, 1990, should have fire doors in place as recommended in the Dept. of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government's 1999 *Guide to Fire Safety in Flats*.
- Dwellings should comply with the specifications set out in the Dept. of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government's *Explanatory Memorandum: Floor Area Compliance Certificate (FACC)*, unless there are compelling reasons for making an exception.<sup>27</sup>

### **Recommendation 13**

For longer term RAS contracts, consideration might be given to the tenant supplying 'white goods', e.g. cooker, fridge/freezer, washing machine, once appropriate space for installation

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<sup>27</sup> The FACC is required to enable the purchaser of the property to obtain stamp duty exemption. The specifications are based on Building Regulations 1991 (*Building Control Act 1990*) and subsequent amendments. The regulations do not apply to properties built or converted prior to 1991.

is provided, and advice and funding provided to tenants to allow purchase of appropriate goods.

### **6.3 *The Rental Accommodation Scheme – A Real Solution for Families?***

While the RAS may address many of the problems of families revealed by this research, its potential in providing long-term solutions to families' needs may be limited. The over-supply of housing at present means that local authorities are likely to face fewer challenges in the future in sourcing accommodation, but it is imperative that families accommodated through the scheme are allocated dwellings of appropriate size, configuration and location. This may still prove a challenge considering that much of the rental stock produced in recent years consists of apartment blocks which were not designed with the needs of families in mind. Although this study has been primarily concerned with standards it is important to note that the issue of security of tenure is not meaningfully addressed by the RAS scheme. Contracts of four years or less do not provide adequate security to plan and make provision for a family's needs, e.g. in relation to schooling. Social housing offers tenants greater security of tenure and in many cases an existing social support infrastructure of extended family and friends that is rarely available in the private rented sector.

Implementation of the RAS has proved slow, largely due to the difficulty of sourcing appropriate accommodation and agreeing terms with landlords. This slow pace means that eligible one-parent families have not had access to the limited benefits of the scheme – in particular the more employment friendly rent assessment arrangements which would allow those affected a greater opportunity to escape poverty and achieve financial independence.

Clearly, it would not be appropriate to include poor quality dwellings in the RAS, but this should not preclude the extension of some of the benefits of the scheme – such as differential rent assessment – to eligible tenants as an interim solution. In addition, efforts to acquire new properties under public or non-profit ownership, in addition to the private ownership, should be accelerated.

#### **Recommendation 14**

Given the severity of the Rent Supplement unemployment trap, and the slow pace of RAS implementation, a transitional arrangement is needed to afford the approximately 9,000 lone parents caught in this unemployment trap the opportunity to secure paid employment.

The differential rent assessment used by the RAS should be used by the Dept of Social and Family Affairs for those who are eligible for the RAS but awaiting transfer to the scheme.<sup>28</sup>

As part of this change, households where an individual is working more than 30 hours a week should be eligible for rent subsidy, where they meet the income criteria.

### **Recommendation 15**

Local authorities, supported and resourced by the Dept. of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Dept. of Finance, should accelerate investment in social housing as proposed by the NESC and in the new partnership agreement *Towards 2016*. Accommodation for smaller-sized households should be a priority, in line with assessments of housing need.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The rent paid by tenants housed under the Rental Accommodation Scheme is usually determined using the same (or similar) assessment to that used for local authority tenants. These generally have a much lower assessment rate of earnings (e.g. 15 per cent in Dublin City Council) than applies under SWA Rent Supplement (where a rate of 75 per cent currently applies). While tenants can be deemed eligible for the RAS by their local authority, they may have to wait some time for accommodation to become available. Therefore it is recommended that the more 'employment friendly' means assessment available under the RAS be applied during this waiting period.

<sup>29</sup> 80 per cent of those on the 2005 Assessment of Housing Need require no larger than two-bedroom accommodation.

## Appendix 1 About OPEN and Threshold

### OPEN

OPEN (One Parent Exchange and Network), the national network of local lone parent self-help groups, represents the diversity of interests of lone parents, particularly those living in or at risk of living in poverty, and promotes their inclusion and progression within wider society.

OPEN was founded in 1994. The need for a national network of lone parent self help groups was identified when, in the early 1990s, lone parents in many parts of the country began forming groups to provide mutual support, advice and information about issues relevant to their type of family.

The common bond of all groups in the network is self help – lone parents themselves recognising their own ability to deliver information and advice services and to pool their experiences to campaign for more inclusive social and economic policies and structures. OPEN's groups are made up of all types of lone parents, men and women: never married; previously married and those with partners who are institutionalised or otherwise unavailable to fulfil their parenting role.

From a core number of 8 groups, OPEN now has over 85 member groups throughout the country. Our 'Group Kit' is available since 1999 to lone parent groups who are starting out and has been well received by other types of community groups. As well as supporting the ongoing work of our member groups, we also enable new lone parent groups to develop in rural and urban areas. In 2001 we established a small Policy Unit and we publish research about one-parent families and the issues which affect them; all of our research is 'proofed' by lone parent members of our groups. Members also receive a bi-monthly Newsletter to which they contribute. In 2002 OPEN became formally regionalised and has seven regions, which are supported by our member groups on a voluntary basis and by dedicated staff members from the core national team. In 2003 we initiated the 'Your Vote, Your Voice' programme which aims to increase the numbers of lone parents who vote. It is entirely politically independent and has been rolled out throughout our regions by lone parent trainers. In May 2005 we published a unique piece of research on lone parents and debt, *Do the Poor Pay More?*, and with the Money Advice & Budgeting Service (MABS), we are involved in progressing some of its recommendations. OPEN has developed a unique training programme for lone parents, 'The Future is OPEN', which has been piloted in the North East region and in North Dublin. It is now being rolled out across OPEN's 7 regions.

In early 2006 OPEN re-located to a new national centre in the centre of Dublin city. The premises are served by the LUAS Red Line, making it accessible by mainline rail and regional buses. There are two seminar spaces available free to our member groups.

In the past twelve years, OPEN has emerged as a national voice of lone parents and has been involved in policy influencing and development at the highest level. OPEN is also the Irish member of the European Network of one-parent Families.

### ***Threshold***

Threshold is a national not-for-profit organisation established in 1978. Our mission is to solve people's housing problems and to campaign for a better housing system. We focus on those who are in greatest need of our support – the marginalised and those suffering from poverty and inequality.

Over the past 27 years, Threshold has helped more than 500,000 people move from inadequate housing and homelessness to become successful members of sustainable communities. We influence housing policy in Ireland and provide an independent voice on housing issues. We contributed significantly to the introduction of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004, which provides increased protections for tenants and landlords in the private rented sector.

Threshold provides independent advice and advocacy services through our regional centres in Dublin, Cork and Galway, and via outreach clinics in outlying areas. Through these services, Threshold offers support to people experiencing housing problems. We help people who are homeless, as well as those who are living in private rented accommodation and social housing. Homeowners and landlords who are experiencing problems are also welcome to consult Threshold's advice centres.

We offer unique accommodation placement services to homeless people seeking housing in the private rented sector. Threshold's Access Housing Unit in Dublin, sponsored by the Homeless Agency, and our regional placement services based in Galway and Cork help people to move out of homeless hostels and shelters by linking landlords with suitable homeless tenants. We also provide follow-up support to ensure that tenants are managing in their new home. We plan to expand these services to other local authority areas around the country.

Threshold's advice centres run education programmes in secondary schools and third-level colleges, with an emphasis on students in disadvantaged areas. We offer information and training to community groups, while at the same time informing landlords and other housing providers on the provisions of housing legislation.

By campaigning for appropriate housing as a right, Threshold promotes the vision that everyone in Ireland has access to an affordable, secure and suitable home. We campaign for policies that develop vibrant neighbourhoods and sustainable communities that promote an inclusive society.

In carrying out research through our Housing Research Unit, and presenting our findings at local and national levels, Threshold makes the case for housing reform. Our report *Opportunity Knocks: Institutional Investment in the Private Rented Sector in Ireland*, supported by the Irish Bankers Federation, looked at ways of encouraging Irish financial institutions to directly invest in the private rented property market, especially at the end of the market providing for households on modest or low incomes. Reports under completion in 2006 include an investigation of how the government's tenant purchase schemes have worked in Dublin and a joint research report with OPEN (One Parent Exchange and Network) looking at accommodation standards required for lone parent families living long-term in the private rented sector.

Threshold works with other organisations in the social, community and voluntary sector and has carried out joint research and lobbying work with Focus Ireland, the Simon Communities of Ireland and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. We also participate in Homeless Fora and the Community Platform, sit on the Private Residential Tenancies Board and work with Citizens' Information Services. We work with FÁS and employ 39 people on Community Employment and Job Initiative schemes. We are members of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), which campaigns at European level to end poverty and social exclusion.

Threshold creates new housing models, particularly the Gilabbey Court Housing Project in Cork city. Established in 1985, this project helps couples and families with limited financial means to save towards buying a new home.

## Appendix 2 Policies and Practices for Dwelling Standards

Minimum requirements with respect to dwelling units may refer to the existing housing stock, to all new additions to the stock or to specific types of stock or additions such as social housing units. This section looks at the minimum standards applied in continental northern European countries and in the UK.

### *Housing stock*

In Nordic countries and western Germany, long-standing building regulations for new construction, a more inclusive approach to social housing (where low and middle income households mix within buildings) and incentive-based subsidies appear to have resulted in satisfactory dwelling standards for almost all rental accommodation. Also, greater income equality than exists in Ireland; generous welfare provision and less expansionary demand for housing has enabled households in those countries to reject inadequate accommodation.

It proved impossible to find out much about minimum dwelling standards in the continental states that fulfil the role of Ireland's 1993 regulations or social housing design guidance. For example, a report on Dutch building control notes that existing buildings are covered as well as new construction, but few details are provided about the content (Heijden, 2006). At the same time, the available housing literature for the Netherlands and the Nordic countries is replete with studies about how to enhance household well-being through housing and environmental interventions. By contrast, in the RIAI's *The New Housing*, the current Chairman, James Pike, comments, 'The last body of well-researched recommendations on the real needs of families in housing in this part of the world was *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* published by the British Ministry for Housing and Local Government in 1962' (Pike, 2002).

The available comparative literature in the English language is mainly about building codes. Jonathan Healy (2003), for example, refers to stringent building regulations in Norway that aim to enhance the energy efficiency of homes. Norris (2004) provides information on recent developments in housing quality regulations across Europe. She reports that energy efficiency, especially thermal insulation, has been the main focus of building regulations but noise reduction and disabled access also feature. Although no details are provided, she states, 'A number of countries are also implementing measures to ensure that the refurbishment and maintenance of existing housing stock incorporates their most recent building regulations' (p.115).

Two different international studies, one sponsored by the UK government (Sheridan,1999), and another more recent study by the Technische Universiteit Delft, both concluded that comparing building standards codes across countries was for the most part impossible. According to Dr Visscher from TUD, although construction materials tended to be comparable due to the incentive for trade, that was not the case even for such basics as fire safety standards.

A feature of dwellings that has received particular attention in the literature is energy efficiency. Jonathan Healy's comparative study of fuel poverty concluded, 'Households living in multi-family dwellings are found to suffer disproportionately from fuel poverty across much of the EU, particularly in Ireland ... Fuel poverty is found to be heavily concentrated among certain social groups in Ireland, to a far greater extent than in other European countries ... An extensive programme [of retrofitting] is required to deal with the unsatisfactory and below par energy efficiency standards in Irish housing'.<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere the author notes, 'Landlords could be required to provide minimum heating standards and/or specify the thermal characteristics of the residence to potential tenants.'<sup>31</sup> Some tightening on insulation and heating standards has occurred in Ireland but only for new build.<sup>32</sup>

Since the Irish and UK regulatory systems remain similar it is possible to compare practices. All jurisdictions in the UK have long had basic fitness standards for dwelling stock and regular monitoring of the stock against the standards.<sup>33</sup> The Scottish version, the Tolerable Standard, was revised slightly in 2004. In England an elaborate 'housing health and safety rating system' of inspection has begun to be implemented (ODPM, Quick Guide). It focuses on faults that are likely to cause harm, and for implementation depends on a well-resourced local authority system. It does not consider features that would affect the quality of the occupants' life, other than those related to health and safety.

The 'decent homes' standard which social housing landlords in England must achieve by 2010 is being tentatively introduced into the private rented sector as well. It is summarised below.

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<sup>30</sup> (2003) *Fuel Poverty and Policy in Ireland and the European Union* Dublin: Policy Institute/CPA, page xvii-xix.

<sup>31</sup> *Op.cit*, p.74.

<sup>32</sup> Amendments are being made eventually to make energy efficiency information mandatory at time of sale.

<sup>33</sup> The monitoring shows the private rented sector having the highest incidence of substandard accommodation. In Northern Ireland, for example, it had the highest rate of dwelling unfitness in the occupied housing stock, at nearly 9 per cent compared with 3 per cent overall. (NIHE, 2001)

***A Decent Home***

- Meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing
- Is in a reasonable state of repair
- Has reasonably modern facilities and services, e.g. a kitchen less than 20 years old
- Has a kitchen with adequate space and layout
- Has a bathroom less than 30 years old
- Bathroom is appropriately located
- Has adequate insulation against external noise (where a problem)
- Adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats
- Reasonable degree of thermal comfort

(UK Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, February 2004)

A report commissioned by Sheffield City Council and Sheffield's Primary Care Trusts on a health impact assessment of the city's Decent Homes Programme concluded that significant positive health outcomes could be expected (Gilbertson et al, 2006). The study predicted fewer accidents, better respiratory health and mental health and well-being. Another on-going UK study identifying and analysing resilient, although disadvantaged, communities finds that housing policy is a vital factor. A member of the research team, Dr Richard Mitchell of Edinburgh University, stated that 'it was important for local authorities to make sure housing was maintained in good condition not only in council estates but also in the private sector'. (*Financial Times*, 10 September 2006)

The Scottish Housing Quality Standard is similar to the English Decent Home Standard but there appear to be no plans to extend the initiative into the private sector, other than on a voluntary basis (Scottish Executive 2004). The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has commissioned research into the establishment of a decent home standard as well.

**Scottish Housing Quality Standard**

- Compliant with the tolerable (general minimum) standard
- Free from serious disrepair
- Energy efficient e.g. a full house central heating system that has an acceptable efficiency rating, or similarly efficient heating system that is developed in the future; 100 mm loft insulation where appropriate
- Modern facilities and services e.g. adequate kitchen storage to current building standards where practical and sufficient power outlets (6 or more sockets)
- Healty e.g. adequate noise insulation where there are problems with external noise; mechanical ventilation in the kitchen and bathroom where this is required to tackle persistent problems of condensation dampness and mould growth
- Safe e.g. a smoke detector; safe electrical systems, oil and gas systems and appliances
- Secure e.g. secure front and rear access doors; front door entry systems and secure rear access to enclosed common areas

*Scottish Executive, Development Department, 4 February 2004 and 28 July 2004*

**Social housing design**

Public provision of family housing has been a strong tradition in Ireland and the UK. Ireland has in place comprehensive, detailed and prescriptive guidance for the construction of social housing. Although these standards are not statutory, the government's capital funding arrangements give them force. The current 'Design Guidelines' was published in 1999 and is formulated with estates and entire building projects in mind. With regard to individual dwellings it covers layout and space provision, sustainability and energy efficiency, access and circulation, safety and security, kitchen and bathroom facilities and layout, space heating and hot water, electrical and other services and storage facilities. The Guide is under review at the D/EHLG, but is nonetheless still helpful in indicating the features that experts considered important for dwellings to serve as long-term family homes.

The Housing Corporation in Britain also applies guidance to the design of social housing although the approach is mainly performance based rather than setting detailed specifications. The Scheme Development Standards covers the internal environment of dwellings in a general prescriptive manner. The tests of compliance consist of a series of questions. Examples:

- Space for a small worktop or similar in single bedroom?
- Individual tenant control of room temperature?
- Whole house heating or equivalent low energy super-insulated building solution?
- Space for a pram or pushchair (family units)?
- Space for hanging outdoor clothes?
- Enclosed storage: brooms and tall equipment?

The Housing Corporation also endorses the National Housing Federation's *Standards and Quality in Development: A Good Practice Guide*. Northern Ireland has design requirements for Housing Associations developed at the Building Research Establishment. Again the requirements are given in rather general terms.<sup>34</sup>

There are non-statutory standards used in Britain that incorporate lifetime housing and disability access features, such as Habinteg's Design Guide.<sup>35</sup> In addition the implications of higher density rental accommodation have received some attention. For example, in a report prepared for Communities Scotland on *Issues in developing urban housing in Edinburgh to meet the needs of a range of households*, 'A high quality approach to design and specification, with detail design issues such as space standards flexibility (i.e. the denser the development the greater the space per unit and appropriate levels of storage space), adaptability, sound insulation and security [are] identified as crucial.'<sup>36</sup>

## Summary

Applying minimum standards to ensure good quality housing for families on low incomes has rarely been the primary policy instrument employed by European governments. But in countries such as Britain where significant numbers of older properties had not been maintained, whether due to price controls, economic depression or other reasons, standards are an important part of the policy package.

The role of standards regulation for achieving good quality housing stock is difficult to measure, especially if landlords are not provided with financial incentives (whether positive or negative). For example, a study about fuel poverty pointed out, 'Landlords could be required to provide minimum heating standards and/or specify the thermal characteristics of the residence to potential tenants' (Healy, 2003). In practice the study found that enforcement of

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<sup>34</sup> NI Department of Social Development, *Housing Association Guide 2005/06*

<sup>35</sup> [www.habinteg.org.uk](http://www.habinteg.org.uk)

<sup>36</sup> Communities Scotland Precis No 69

standards necessitating refurbishment typically were accompanied by subsidy incentives. Even in England financing refurbishment to meet the decent standard has been promoted by the sale of local authority housing to non-profit landlords, backed by a subsidy scheme that allows economic rents to be collected.

There is evidence of housing targeted to families on low incomes being subject to additional standards. Through social housing design guidance both the UK and Ireland have identified features of a dwelling necessary for a sustainable family home. The emergence of the private rented sector as a source of long-term accommodation for people in poverty has not yet led to much change in the standards expected although the subsidy systems that apply could introduce differential treatment within the private rented sector.

### Appendix 3 Rent Supplement

The Supplementary Welfare Allowance was introduced to ensure a basic minimum income for all Irish citizens. If a person's weekly income is below the Supplementary Welfare Allowance rate for his/her family size, a payment may be made by Social Welfare to bring the income in line with the appropriate SWA rate. If a person's income is too low to meet certain basic needs including a housing need that person may qualify for a weekly payment such as Rent Supplement. Community Welfare Officers administer the payment on a discretionary basis.

*The purpose of Rent Supplement is to provide short term income support to assist with reasonable accommodation costs of eligible persons living in private rented accommodation who cannot provide for the cost of that accommodation from their own resources and who do not have alternative accommodation available to them ([www.welfare.ie/foi/swa\\_rentmort](http://www.welfare.ie/foi/swa_rentmort)).*

The Rent Supplement payment was introduced in 1977 as a short-term support for low income households (Comhairle, 2002). While the majority of recipients move in and move out of the Rent Supplement system within a 12-month period, initial research by OPEN suggests that for some lone parent households the payment is a long-term solution to housing need in the absence of more permanent and stable housing options. Some lone parents in receipt of Rent Supplement surveyed by OPEN have been in the system for between 3 and 6 years. The introduction of the new Rental Accommodation Scheme is an acknowledgement on the part of government of the long-term nature of the payment for some households.

While 'Rent Supplement is widely regarded as having added an important component to social housing conditions for low-income households' (Comhairle, 2002:11), the administration of the payment has many deficiencies, including inconsistency among CWOs applying the qualifying criteria and the unrealistic ceiling on payments. These deficiencies have implications for low-income households, including one-parent families.

Recipients of Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) Rent Supplement payment may encounter additional challenges and obstacles when sourcing rented accommodation due to financial constraints and reluctance on the part of some private landlords to rent to households whose sole income is derived from social welfare payments, as highlighted above in relation to the Comhairle Social Policy Report (2002).

A study of recipients of Rent Supplement undertaken by Guerin (1999) revealed that 42 per cent of respondents described their accommodation as 'all that was available' at the time, while a further 17 per cent chose the accommodation because it was 'the cheapest available'. A staggering 66 per cent of respondents reported difficulties in accessing

accommodation from a landlord willing to accept Rent Supplement as a payment. 'Rent Supplement recipients struggle to find suitable affordable accommodation because they are excluded from most of the private rented sector' (Threshold, 2005:15).

In the Threshold (2005) survey carried out in Cork City nearly 25 per cent of those who took part in the survey spoke of having to make at least ten phone calls to potential landlords about available accommodation before they found one who was willing to accept rent allowance. A review of the local paper suggested that 'only 30 per cent of advertised lets are actually open to applicants on Rent Supplement ... Of landlords contacted almost 70 per cent either refused to accept Rent Supplement payments or their property was above Health Services Executive, Southern Area rent levels' (Threshold, 2005:15).

Often landlords who accept Rent Supplement recipients as tenants charge rents in excess of the ceilings on Rent Supplement payments set for each area by the Health Services Executive. '[T]here is evidence to suggest that in some situations Rent Supplement is being paid on a long-term basis in respect of sub-standard accommodation' (Comhairle, 2002: 34). The ceilings on payments have failed to keep pace with rising rents, particularly in urban area and are not, therefore, an accurate reflection of current rental charges. In order to overcome this obstacle lone parents in receipt of Rent Supplement may collude with landlords to get the maximum amount of Rent Supplement from Community Welfare Officers, while 'topping up' the deficit from their one-parent family payment or child benefit payment. 'As such, limited access to the PRS and exploitation make this sub set of lone parents vulnerable to disadvantage. Further exclusion arises in situations where lone parents cannot afford to move off the one-parent Family payment and hence become trapped and dependent on welfare benefits' (National Women's Council, 2002: 43).

In a study of Dublin inner city landlords Comhairle (2002) found that some landlords refused to rent to tenants on Rent Supplement but especially those with children. This has major implications for the housing choices of one-parent households in receipt of Rent Supplement. Comhairle's social policy report on Rent Supplement (2002) reported that almost 75 per cent of landlords questioned said they would prefer to rent to tenants who were in employment. The report also suggested that landlords who accepted Rent Supplement were more likely to own houses of 'multiple occupation' such as flats and bedsits. Landlords of apartments were more likely to refuse Rent Supplement recipients. 'This finding raises issues relating to the age, quality and condition of the accommodation rented by those on Rent Supplement' (Comhairle, 2002:18).

## Appendix 4 Household Composition and Dwelling Size

In addition to the issue of the quality of a dwelling is the matter of its appropriate size given the household that is occupying it. Adults, including lone parents, should have a private space for intimate relationships. In particular, a lone parent with one child, irrespective of the child's age, ought to have a two-bedroom dwelling. Those on Rent Supplement, having to compete for accommodation, will not always be able to obtain a dwelling of appropriate size. Eligibility for RAS opens the possibility of more suitable accommodation.

Through desk research information was obtained from several authorities regarding their overcrowding measures and allocation practices.

### Irish policies and practices

The D/EHLG's *Guidance for Local Authorities in relation to Assessing Accommodation for Rental Accommodation Scheme* points out, 'Local authorities should not take on accommodation, even where it otherwise meets building standards, where the tenancy involves overcrowding ... Housing authorities have powers and functions in relation to the elimination and prevention of overcrowding. Under Section 63 of the Housing Act 1966 a house is deemed to be overcrowded if the number of persons sleeping and the number of rooms in it are such that:

- any two people over the age of 10 years of the opposite sex who are not living together as husband and wife must sleep in the same room, or
- the free air space in any room used for sleeping is less than 400 cubic feet per person.

The 1966 test would not reject a one-bedroom apartment even for a family of one female parent and one male child over ten years, as one person could sleep in the living room.

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (D/EHLG) *Social Housing Design Guidelines* (1999) and Circular N6/02 do not appear to contemplate a two-person household having more than a one-bedroom unit although the minimum aggregate space proposed is almost as great as for a three-person unit (20m<sup>2</sup> versus 24m<sup>2</sup>).

Dublin City Council's *Revised Scheme of Letting Priorities 2002* explains its measure of overcrowding in terms of a bedroom shortage. For a 'Lone Parent/Couple with 1 or 2 children under 9 years' the minimum is 2 bedrooms.<sup>37</sup> Applicants whose accommodation fails this standard are awarded 16 points for each. To find out what happens in practice, Dublin, Cork,

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<sup>37</sup> The Scheme adds, 'Private rented applicants in two-roomed flats are regarded as having one room and those in one-roomed flats are regarded as having no rooms.' Also 'Rooms less than 400 cubic feet are not counted for the purpose of assessing points.'

Galway and Limerick City Councils were asked what size of accommodation would be offered when allocating social housing to a lone parent with one child.

- According to the Dublin City Council officer a two-bedroom would routinely be offered if the child was seven or older. If the child was younger and the applicant interested, a one bedroom would be an option.
- Cork City Council's Housing Allocations Department replied that a lone parent with one child (regardless of age) would be considered for a two-bedroom unit, not a one-bedroom unit.
- Similarly Galway City Council wrote that a lone parent with a child would be considered for a two-bed unit regardless of the age of the child.
- The allocations officer in Limerick City Council stated that even in a high demand area a lone parent with one child would get a two-bedroom unit.

### **England and Scotland**

The English House Condition Survey's bedroom standard would not appear to approve a two-bedroom unit for a lone parent aged less than 22 years who has one child. It states, 'under this concept one bedroom is allowed for each cohabitating couple in the household and for each unattached adult over the age of 21. Those aged 10-21 (unless they are part of a couple) may share with one other person in this age group of the same gender or with a child under 10 of the same gender. Children under 10 years of age may share a room with another child under 10 of either gender. A separate room is allowed for unpaired children or other persons under age 21.'<sup>38</sup>

Two local authorities, Camden County Council in London and Edinburgh Council, both high demand areas, were contacted to learn their allocation practices. Camden's bedroom standard involves one bedroom for each person aged 14 or over who is not part of a couple and one bedroom for every two children of the same sex under 14. The officer from Camden explained that an applicant not on the homeless priority list would get a two-bedroom unit but a homeless lone parent with a child under five might be allocated a one-bedroom unit. The officer in Edinburgh said that the size of unit depended on the individual circumstances including the age of the child but that normally a two-bedroom unit would be allocated to a lone parent with one child.

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<sup>38</sup> Vincentian Partnership for Justice (2004) *Low Cost but Acceptable Budgets for Three Households*, p.32.

## Australia and Canada

According to the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *The Canadian National Occupancy Standard* is the one mostly used in Australia. [It] states that:

- No more than two people shall share a bedroom
- Parents or couples may share a bedroom
- Children under 5 years, either of the same sex or opposite sex, may share a bedroom
- Children under 18 years of the same sex may share a bedroom
- A child aged 5 to 17 years should not share a bedroom with a child under 5 of the opposite sex
- Single adults aged 18 years and over and any unpaired children require a separate bedroom<sup>39</sup>

The Canadian standards therefore allow a two-bedroom unit for all one-parent with one child if the parent is at least 18 years old.

## European Union

A recent comparative study for the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions states, 'In Europe, it is commonly accepted that a decent living space requires a separate room, of at least 20 square metres, for each household member' (Domanski, 2006). While it does not look into the issue of appropriate bedroom space, the report finds that households in the lowest income quartile across the EU15 countries had on average 1.6 rooms per person while the lowest income Irish households had 1.8 rooms (excluding kitchen, bathrooms).

## Conclusion

This varied evidence indicates that in the social housing sector in Ireland a lone parent with one child normally can expect a two-bedroom unit.<sup>40</sup> And basic standards in similar countries would stipulate a two-bedroom unit for an adult parent and one child.

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<sup>39</sup> AIHW (2005) *Indigenous Housing Needs 2005 – A Multi-Measure Needs Model*. [www.aihw.gov.au](http://www.aihw.gov.au)

<sup>40</sup> Local authorities differ regarding their allocation rules for a lone parent with two children of opposite sex, ranging from automatic allocation of three bedrooms to allocation of three bedrooms only if the children are older than ten.

**Appendix 5 Survey Questionnaire*****Questionnaire on minimum standards in private rental accommodation in Cork*****Date and time of interview** .....**Place of interview** .....**Name of interviewer** .....**Questionnaire number** .....

This joint research project which is being undertaken between OPEN and Threshold will explore the issues of standards in private rental accommodation for lone parents. This survey should be completed by lone parents who are living in private rental accommodation and in receipt of **Rent Allowance** only. The project is funded by the Combat Poverty Agency as part of their Poverty Research Initiative. All responses gathered as part of this research will remain **private and confidential** and will only be used as part of this research process.

**Section A: Background information on dwelling****1. Which best describes your current home? (Tick one)**

- Bungalow or two storey house built before 1980 approx. 01
- Bungalow or two storey house less than 26 years old 02
- Flat in a converted house/building 03
- Flat in a purpose-built apartment building built before 1991 approx. 04
- Flat in a purpose-built apartment building built after 1991 05
- Other (please specify) 06

**2. Is the dwelling furnished by the landlord?**

- Fully furnished 01
- Partly furnished 02
- Unfurnished 03

Other (please specify) 04

**3. What area is the dwelling located in?**

.....  
.....

**4. How long have you been living in your current home? (Tick one)**

Less than 6 months 01

6 months to one year 02

More than a year 03

Unknown 04

If more than a year please specify approximately how long 05

.....

**5. How long have you been receiving Rent Supplement for this tenancy?**

Less than 3 months 01

Less than 6 months 02

Less than 12 months 03

Less than 18 months 04

More than 18 months 05

If you received Rent Supplement for a previous tenancy please state for how long

.....

**6. Is the present tenancy registered with the Private Residential Tenancies Board?**

Yes 01

No 02

Don't Know 03

**7. Why did you choose to rent this dwelling? (Tick more than one if desired)**

- Best available within the Rent Supplement limit in this area 01
- Located close to family / friends 02
- Located close to preferred school 03
- Nothing else available at the time in my preferred area 04
- It was close to amenities 05
- Actual dwelling suites the family 06
- Rent was reasonable 07
- Area was well known to me 08
- Other (please specify) 09

.....

**8. Please describe the members of your household (including yourself and persons cohabiting).**

- Number of female adults aged 18 or older 8a
- Number of male adults aged 18 or older 8b
- Number girls aged 6 up to 18 years 8c
- Number of boys aged 6 up to 18 years 8d
- Number of girls aged less than 6 years 8e
- Number of boys aged less than 6 years 8f
- Total number of persons living in the household 8g

**Section B: Suitability of layout and size of dwelling**

**9. How suitable is your dwelling for your family’s needs? (for example: size, layout, number of rooms)**

Please rate suitability (i.e. how comfortable and appropriate to your needs) on a scale of 1 to 5 – 5 being extremely suitable for the needs of your family and 1 being extremely unsuitable for the needs of your family .....

**10. Overall do you feel that your accommodation is:**

- Too big 01
- Too small 02
- Sufficient size 03

*Bedrooms*

**11. How many bedrooms has the dwelling?**

**12. For each of the bedrooms in your house please rate their suitability in terms of size:**

**Main bedroom**

- Too big 01
- Too small 02
- Sufficient size 03

**Bedroom 2**

- Too big 01
- Too small 02
- Sufficient size 03
- Not applicable 98

**Bedroom 3**

- Too big 01
- Too small 02
- Sufficient size 03
- Not applicable 98

**Bedroom 4**

- Too big 01
- Too small 02
- Sufficient size 03
- Not applicable 98

**13. What type of bedroom sharing arrangements are required in your accommodation?**

- Any adult plus child aged more than one year 01
- Any child of six or older having to share with another child of the opposite sex 02
- Any non-cohabiting adults (18 years or older) having to share 03
- More than three persons over one year old sharing one room 04
- No problem with adequacy of bedrooms 05
- Other sleep arrangement problems please specify 06

.....

*Kitchen and dining space*

**14. Is there a table around which all the household can sit to eat together?**

- Yes 01
- No 02

**15. Is there enough room for your family to entertain guest for dinner?**Yes 01No 02*Bathrooms, WC***16. How many bathrooms are there in total?**One shared with another household 01One 02More than one 03*Communal areas***17. Do household members who wish to read or study have a comfortable and suitable place to do so away from the family television and communal life (i.e. bedroom where there is room for desk or kitchen / spare room enclosed by door)?**Yes 01No 02**18. Is there enough space for your children to play inside on rainy days?**Yes 01No 02**19. If you have pre-school children is there an outdoor play space that you can oversee?**Yes 01No 02Not relevant 03

**Section C: Storage space, appliances & facilities**

**20. Is there adequate kitchen storage space?**

Yes 01

No 02

**21. Is there adequate kitchen counter space?**

Yes 01

No 02

**22a. What appliances in the kitchen are provided by the landlord? (Tick as many are appropriate).**

Cooker / Oven 01

Fridge 02

Freezer included in fridge 03

Separate Freezer 04

Washing machine 05

Dryer 06

Washer / dryer 07

Dish washer 08

Other (please specify) 09

.....

**22b. What appliances in the kitchen are provided by you? (Tick as many as appropriate).**

Cooker / Oven 01

Fridge 02

Freezer included in fridge 03

Separate Freezer 04

Washing machine	<input type="checkbox"/> 05
Dryer	<input type="checkbox"/> 06
Washer / dryer	<input type="checkbox"/> 07
Dish washer	<input type="checkbox"/> 08
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> 09

.....

**23. If you supplied any of the above appliances, how did you pay for them? (Tick as appropriate)**

Hire purchase from shop selling appliance	<input type="checkbox"/> 01
Loan from bank/building society or Credit Union	<input type="checkbox"/> 02
Loan from family or friend	<input type="checkbox"/> 03
Loan from other source	<input type="checkbox"/> 04
Savings	<input type="checkbox"/> 05
House warming present / gift	<input type="checkbox"/> 06
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> 07

.....

**24. Are there suitable clothes drying facilities for your own use?**

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> 01
No	<input type="checkbox"/> 02

**25. How are clothes dried? (Tick as appropriate)**

Automatic clothes dryer	<input type="checkbox"/> 01
Washer dryer	<input type="checkbox"/> 02
Airing cupboard / hot press	<input type="checkbox"/> 03
Clothes line on balcony or communal area	<input type="checkbox"/> 04
Clothes racks	<input type="checkbox"/> 05

Radiators 06

Other (please specify) 07

.....

**26. Does the main bathroom have hot and cold running water?**

Yes 01

No 02

**27. What washing facilities are in the bathroom? Tick more than one if appropriate.**

Sink 01

Bath 02

Shower in bath (must have tiling/curtain/shower door) 03

Free standing shower unit 04

Other please specify 05

.....

**28. Is there enough storage space in the dwelling for non food items including vacuum cleaner, clothes and toys?**

Yes 01

No 02

**29. Is there a secure place to put items such as buggies / bicycles etc? (for example, a shed, locker at ground floor?).**

Yes 01

No 02

**30. What type of additional storage if any would you like?**

Storage for clothing 01

Storage for toys and children's possessions 02

- Storage for vacuum cleaner and other implements 03
- Storage for bikes/buggy 04
- Parking for a car 05
- Nothing more needed 06
- Other (please specify) 07
- .....

### **Section D: Heating**

#### **31. What type of heating exists in your home?**

- Gas central heating 01
- Oil fired central heating 02
- Storage heating 03
- Individual electric radiators 04
- Solid fuel appliance (e.g. wood burning stove) 05
- Open fire 06
- Other (please specify) 07
- .....

#### **32. Can heating be controlled by you to give a comfortable temperature at different times of day?**

- Yes 01
- No 02

#### **33. How do you heat your hot water?**

- Water is heated through central heating / solid fuel appliance 01
- Water is heated through an immersion 02
- Electric shower in house 03

- Other 04
- 34. Do you pay the costs of heating the dwelling?**
- Yes 01
- Yes it is included in the rent 02
- No 03
- 35. Is your home well insulated against cold temperatures outside?**
- Yes 01
- No 02
- 36. Have you noticed any damp patches or mould around the windows or on any walls?**
- Yes 01
- No 02
- 37. Are all rooms in the house ventilated properly?**
- Yes 01
- No 02
- 38. Is there mechanical ventilation in the kitchen?**
- Yes 01
- No 02
- Don't Know 03
- 39. Is there mechanical ventilation in the bathroom (e.g. extractor fan)?**
- Yes 01
- No 02

Don't Know 03

**40. If rooms are not ventilated properly please tick appropriate difficulties?**

Windows in one or more rooms don't open / shut 01

Opening window creates serious security risk (e.g. intruder) 02

Fans not functioning 03

Windowless room (s) 04

Other (please specify) 05

.....

**Section E: Physical condition of dwelling**

**41. How would you rate the physical quality of the dwelling overall? (for example, in terms of state of repair, condition of the building and furnishings).**

Please rate physical quality on a scale of 1 to 5 – 5 being of excellent quality and 1 being very poor quality .....

**42. Please indicate if any of the following are in a poor state of repair or of very poor quality? (Tick as many are in a poor state).**

Kitchen appliances 01

Clothes washer and drying facilities 02

Toilet, sink, shower / bath fixtures 03

Availability of hot water 04

Flooring and carpets 05

Sofas, chairs, tables 06

Beds 07

Wardrobe, storage for clothes 08

Doors and windows (including locks) 09

Garden 10

Artificial lighting 11

Handrails on stairs 12

Heating appliance 13

Other (please specify) 14

.....

**43. Do you need to use extension leads for electrical items?**

Yes 01

No 02

**44. Do you have a problem with noise?**

Yes 01

No 02

If yes, please give details of problem

.....

.....

.....

**Section F: Safety**

**45. If in a house, are there fire alarms that work in your house?**

Yes 01

No 02

**46. If in a flat, are there fire alarms –**

In your unit and in communal hall/landing 01

Just in your unit 02

Just in communal hall / landing 03

None at all  04

**47. Is your dwelling secure against intruders?**

Yes (Go to question 49)  01

No (Go to question 48)  02

**48. If no, please indicate what improvement is needed?**

.....  
.....  
.....

**49. Are there any aspects of the dwelling that make you concerned about fire safety?**

Yes (Go to question 50)  01

No (Go to question 51)  02

**50. If yes, what are these concerns?**

.....  
.....  
.....

**Section G: Health of occupants in the dwelling**

**51. Do any of the children in your home have health problems? (Tick as appropriate)**

Asthma  01

Frequent colds  02

Allergies  03

- Headaches 04
- Anxiety attacks 05
- Chest infections 06
- No health problems at all 07
- Other (please specify) 08

.....

**52. Do you think the conditions in your house further worsen these health problems?**

.....  
.....  
.....

**53. Do any adults in your household have health problems?**

- Yes 01
- No 02

**54. Do you think the conditions in your house further worsen these health problems?**

- Yes 01
- (please specify) ..... 02
- No 03

**Section H: Miscellaneous**

**55. What is the greatest problem in your home?**

.....  
.....

**56. Is anyone in your home a regular cigarette smoker?**

Yes 01

No 02

**57. Has there been water leaking from ceilings or around doors or windows?**

Yes 01

No 02

**58. Have you ever had a problem with insects or rodents?**

Yes 01

No 02

**If yes, please give details of problem**

.....  
.....  
.....

**59. How would you rate the suitability of waste storage facilities in your dwelling?**

Please rate suitability of waste storage on a scale of 1 to 5 – 5 being **very suitable** and 1 being **very unsuitable** .....

**60. Does your accommodation have a facility for storing recyclable materials?**

Yes (Go to question 64) 01

No (Go to question 65) 02

**61. If yes, how would you rate the suitability of this facility?**

Please rate suitability of waste storage on a scale of 1 to 5 – 5 being **very suitable** and 1 being **very unsuitable** .....

**62. Before moving into your present home, where were you living?**

- I rented another private rented dwelling on my own 01
- I rented another private rented dwelling together with other people / partner 02
- I rented social housing (e.g. Corporation house) myself 03
- I rented social housing (e.g. Corporation house) with other people / partner 04
- I lived in parental home (social housing) 05
- I lived in parental home (private rented) 06
- I lived in parental home (owner-occupied) 07
- I owned my home 08
- I lived outside Ireland 09
- Other (please specify) ..... 10

**63. What age group do you belong to?**

- Under 18 years 01
- 18 to 21 years 02
- 22 to 30 years 03
- 31 to 49 years 04
- Over 50 years 05

**NOTE: Re-iterate confidentiality of research.**

**64. Does your rent allowance sufficiently cover the cost of the rent?**

- Yes 01
- No 02

If no, please give details

.....

.....

.....

**65. Where do you think you will be living in twelve months time?**

- Local authority 01
- Social Housing 02
- Other private rented place 03
- Owner occupied house 04
- Same place 05
- Other (please specify 06

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