POLICY BRIEF | JUNE 2026

COMHOM POLICY BRIEF
Report No 1

Simon Communities of Ireland

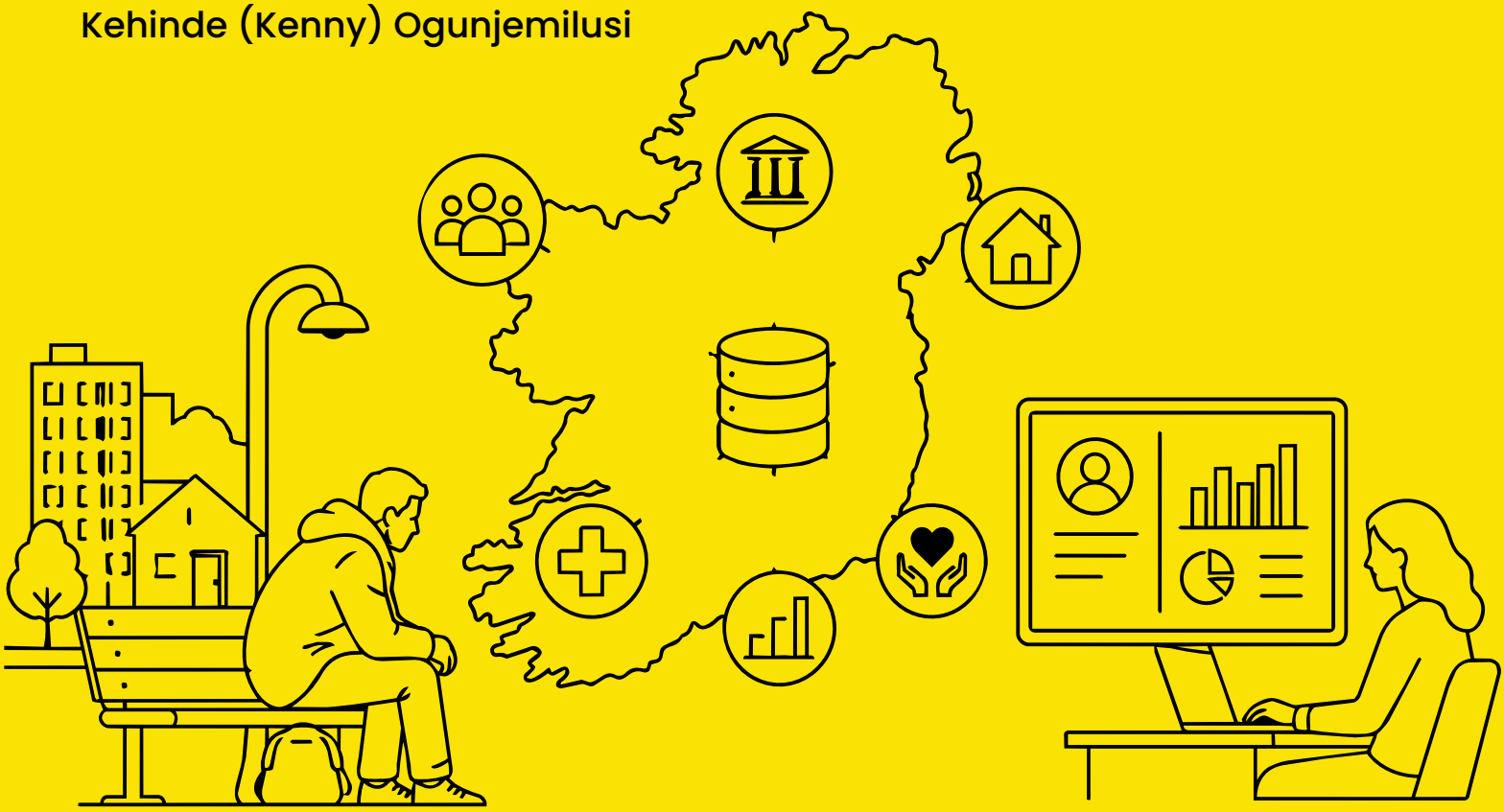
Simon Communities of Ireland

Strengthening Ireland's Response to Homelessness

The Case for Improving Digital Integration and Data Coordination in Ireland

A policy brief based on the Problem Phase of the COMHOM project on digital systems in homelessness services

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The research leading to these results has received funding from by the European social fund (ESF+) of the European union. (Grant no.101172624)

Produced as part of the COMHOM project, an EU-funded initiative

COMHOM COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO COMBATING HOMELESSNESS

Co-funded by the European Union

Simon Communities of Ireland

Acknowledgment

This policy brief has been developed as part of the COMHOM project, funded by the European Union under the European Social Fund (ESF+). Simon Communities of Ireland sincerely thanks all COMHOM project partners for their valuable support, guidance, and collaboration throughout the research process.

Special thanks are extended to all participants and stakeholders who generously gave their time to contribute to the COMHOM Project, as well as to the individuals and organisations who supported and facilitated the fieldwork.

Please cite this policy brief as: Ogunjemilusi, K (2026). Strengthening Ireland's Response to Homelessness: The Case for Reviewing Ireland's National Definition of Homelessness. A policy brief drawing on COMHOM Problem Phase findings on operational definitions of homelessness in Ireland. Simon Communities of Ireland. Available from: https://www.simon.ie/publication-type/comhom/

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The views expressed in this policy brief are based on findings from the COMHOM project and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of all participating organisations or funding bodies.

Executive Summary

This policy brief draws on findings from the Problem Phase Living Lab sessions conducted in Ireland as part of the continuing COMHOM project, an EU-funded initiative focused on improving responses to homelessness through digital transformation, data integration, and strengthened monitoring and evaluation systems. While the broader Living Lab explored multiple dimensions of homelessness, this brief specifically examines the digital practices of homelessness service providers.

Current monitoring systems primarily capture individuals accessing emergency accommodation funded by local authorities. As a result, significant segments of individuals experiencing homelessness remain underrepresented in official data, which limits the ability of policymakers and service providers to fully understand the scale and complexity of homelessness in Ireland. Findings from frontline service providers highlight persistent fragmentation in digital systems, inconsistent use of monitoring and evaluation practices, and limited interoperability between the national Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS) system and provider-level Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platforms. These challenges contribute to duplicated data entry, reduced data quality, and weakened coordination across services, ultimately constraining evidence-informed decision-making.

This policy brief argues that strengthening homelessness responses in Ireland requires a more integrated and coordinated digital infrastructure, supported by standardised approaches to data collection, monitoring and evaluation. A unified and interoperable system would enhance the accuracy and completeness of homelessness data, improve service coordination, and support more effective policy development.

Developing integrated digital systems and consistent monitoring frameworks would enable better identification of homelessness trends, strengthen prevention and intervention strategies, and support improved outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness in Ireland.

Key Messages Arising from this Research Include



Digital tools, including the national PASS system and CRM platforms, are widely used by homelessness service providers but remain fragmented and poorly integrated.



Limited interoperability and data-sharing restrictions hinder coordinated care and efficient service delivery.



Variability in monitoring and evaluation practices undermines consistent outcome tracking and evidence-informed decision-making.



There is strong demand among providers for a unified, interoperable digital platform to reduce duplication and improve data quality.



Service Providers seek access to comparative and outcome-focused data to inform service design and policy learning.



Insufficient training, IT support, and communication on system changes constrain providers' effective use of digital tools.

Background

Homelessness is a critical and growing social issue in Ireland. Under the Housing Act 1988[1], homelessness is defined as the absence of accommodation that a person can reasonably occupy or reliance on emergency or institutional accommodation due to a lack of alternatives. Official statistics are primarily derived from the national Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS)[2], which records individuals and families accessing local authority-funded emergency accommodation.

Despite sustained policy efforts, including the recent Government 'Delivering Homes, Building Communities: An Action Plan on Housing Supply and Targeting Homelessness' (2025-2030) housing strategy[3], homelessness has continued to rise. Over 17,500 people were recorded in emergency accommodation in April 2026[4], the highest level on record. However, these figures capture only part of the broader phenomenon. Many individuals experiencing "hidden homelessness", including those staying with friends or family or living in overcrowded or unstable housing, are not reflected in official data[5].

Research highlights that Ireland's homelessness statistics are shaped by definitional and methodological limitations. Studies such as The Politics of Counting Homelessness: The Case of Ireland[6] show that significant groups remain underrepresented in official counts, limiting the ability to fully understand the scale and composition of homelessness. At the European level, frameworks such as the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS)[7] highlight the broader spectrum of housing exclusion, including those in insecure, inadequate, or temporary living situations. However, many of these categories are not fully captured in national data systems, including in Ireland, limiting the ability to reflect the full scale and diversity of homelessness[8].

While Ireland benefits from a centralised data system through PASS, important challenges remain. Fragmentation across systems, including the use of multiple provider-level databases alongside PASS, as well as variations in data entry, access, and reporting practices, contribute to inconsistencies in monitoring and evaluation[9]. These limitations reduce the ability to track outcomes, evaluate interventions, and support coordinated service delivery[10].

These challenges are not unique to Ireland. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) highlights that differences in definitions, data sources, and methodologies across countries often result in an underestimation of homelessness and limit evidence-based policymaking[11]. Similarly, FEANTSA emphasises that existing data systems across Europe tend to capture only the most visible forms of homelessness, underrepresenting those in insecure or inadequate housing[12]. The Lisbon Declaration on Combatting Homelessness further underscores the need for reliable and harmonised data systems to support monitoring and policy coordination[13]. This policy brief focuses specifically on the digital practices of homelessness service providers in Ireland, examining how current data systems support or constrain effective monitoring, evaluation, and service coordination. Strengthening data integration, improving access, and harmonising monitoring frameworks are critical to enabling more effective, coordinated, and evidence-based homelessness policy in Ireland.

[1] FEANTSA is the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless.

The COMHOM Project

COMHOM is a three-year European project designed to strengthen homelessness responses through digitalisation, social innovation, and improved monitoring and evaluation practices. The project involves five participating countries: Finland, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain. Through a participatory Living Lab and soft systems approach, the project engages multiple stakeholders, including people with lived experience, service providers, policymakers, and researchers, to co-define problems and co-design digital solutions.

A key objective of COMHOM is to develop a standardised monitoring and evaluation framework supported by digital tools that enable harmonised data collection and secure information sharing across organisations. These tools aim to support practitioners, service managers, and policymakers by improving access to reliable data and enabling evidence-based decision-making.

Phase 1 of the project focused on defining the homelessness problem through stakeholder engagement. In Ireland, interviews were conducted with service providers, policymakers, and individuals with lived experience of homelessness. This policy brief focuses specifically on insights from frontline service providers, whose perspectives provide valuable understanding of how homelessness is managed operationally within the service system.
Phases 2 & 3 are continuing.

What did the research explore?

This brief draws on findings from the Problem Phase of the COMHOM project in Ireland, based on engagement with twenty-eight homelessness service agencies through working sessions and interviews. The analysis focuses specifically on the perspectives of frontline homelessness service providers and their use of digital tools in service delivery.

What were the main findings?

Service providers highlight duplication of effort due to fragmented digital tools (PASS vs their CRM system), reflecting inefficiencies across case management and reporting systems.



Service providers note that monitoring and evaluation practices vary widely, making it difficult to compare outcomes or assess long-term effectiveness.



Limited access to digital systems is identified as a barrier to collaboration, restricting timely decision-making and coordinated care.



Staff emphasise the need for digital training and IT support, citing gaps in skills and system knowledge that impact data accuracy and reporting.



Service providers point to under-recording of hidden homelessness, noting that people in temporary or insecure housing often remain invisible in official data.



Service providers report increasing pressures due to rising homelessness, which strain existing systems and workflows.



Challenges remain in tracking individuals after exit, volume of interventions, and quality of life post-homelessness.



Policy Implications

Policy Area / Factor	Implication for Homelessness Services
Fragmented digital systems (PASS and CRM platforms)	Leads to duplication of data entry, inefficiencies in case management, and reduced coordination across services.
Limited interoperability between systems	Constrains seamless information sharing, resulting in fragmented service delivery and reduced continuity of care for service users.
Inconsistent monitoring and evaluation practices	Weakens the ability to track outcomes consistently and limits evidence-informed decision-making across services.
Limited data sharing and access across agencies	Hinders timely coordination between service providers and reduces the effectiveness of multi-agency responses.
Insufficient digital skills, training, and IT support	Reduces the accuracy of data entry, consistency of reporting, and effective use of digital systems in practice.
High administrative and service demand pressures	Increases workload on staff and exacerbates challenges in maintaining accurate and timely digital records.
Lack of standardised data definitions and reporting practices	Leads to inconsistencies in data quality, making comparison and aggregation across services difficult.

The Bottom Line

Although digital tools such as PASS and provider-level CRM systems are widely used in homelessness services in Ireland, fragmentation and limited interoperability reduce their effectiveness. As a result, data is often duplicated, inconsistently recorded, and not fully used to support coordinated service delivery or decision-making.

As such, there is a need to move beyond simply using digital systems towards ensuring they are better integrated, consistently applied, and supported by adequate training and organisational capacity. Without this, gaps in data quality, monitoring, and coordination will continue to limit service effectiveness.

Furthermore, if policymakers and service providers have a clearer understanding of how digital systems are being used in practice and where gaps exist, they will be better positioned to target investment, improve system design, and support more effective and evidence-informed homelessness services.

Policy Recommendations

- The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), in collaboration with Local Authorities and the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) should mandate the consistent use of the national PASS system across all publicly funded homelessness service providers, with compliance embedded in service level agreements.
- Investment should be prioritised to develop an integrated digital infrastructure that enables interoperability between PASS and provider-level CRM systems, supported by a "single point of data entry" approach to reduce duplication and administrative burden.
- A mandatory digital induction training programme, supported by dedicated IT support structures, should be introduced for all frontline homelessness service staff to ensure consistent system use, data quality, and technical capacity.
- Data governance and inter-agency data sharing should be strengthened through clear protocols aligned with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), enabling secure and consistent information exchange across stakeholders.
- A national monitoring and evaluation framework should be implemented to assess both system performance and service delivery outcomes, using defined indicators and aggregated data from PASS and related systems.
- Homelessness service providers should strengthen the use of digital systems (PASS/CRM) to systematically monitor and evaluate individual client outcomes, including housing progress, service engagement, and support effectiveness, to improve case management and enable evidence-based decision-making.
- Access to aggregated and comparative service-level data should be enabled across the sector to support service improvement, coordination, and evidence-informed policy development.

Proposed Implementation Roadmap

Phase 1

Workforce Capacity and System Use

Implementation Stage

Short-Term Actions

Priority Actions

Improve staff capability and consistency in system use

Key Activities:

- Deliver standardised PASS induction training for all frontline staff
- Provide annual refresher sessions
- Provider accessible regional IT support for services using PASS and provider CRM systems

Lead Stakeholders

DHLGH; DRHE; Local Authorities; Service Providers

Intended Outcome

Improved staff confidence, more consistent system use, and reduced data entry errors

Phase 1

System Usability and Administrative Burden

Implementation Stage

Short-Term Actions

Priority Actions

Reduce duplication and improve day-to-day system usability

Key Activities

- Review current duplicate reporting requirements across PASS and provider systems
- Simplify repetitive manual data entry processes where feasible
- Consult frontline staff on workflow and usability issues

Lead Stakeholders

DHLGH; DRHE; PASS Support Teams; Providers

Intended Outcome

Reduced administrative burden and improved staff engagement

Proposed Implementation Roadmap

Phase 1

Data Quality and Standardisation

Implementation Stage

Short-Term Actions

Priority Actions

Improve consistency and completeness of homelessness data

Key Activities:

- Develop standard guidance for recording presentations, exits, support needs, and housing outcomes.
- Introduce periodic data quality checks and feedback processes for providers

Lead Stakeholders

DHLGH; DRHE; Local Authorities

Intended Outcome

More reliable, complete, and comparable homelessness data nationally

Phase 1

Service Oversight and Reporting

Implementation Stage

Short-Term to Medium-Term Actions

Priority Actions

Strengthen data and reporting standards

Key Activities

- Introduce agreed minimum data quality and reporting expectations within Service Level Agreements (SLAs)
- Phase implementat ion over time to reflect provider capacity

Lead Stakeholders

DHLGH; Local Authorities; DRHE

Intended Outcome

More consistent reporting practices across homelessness services

Proposed Implementation Roadmap

Phase 2

Shared Learning and Sector Coordination

Implementation Stage

Medium-term Actions

Priority Actions

Improve access to comparative and service-level data

Key Activities:

- Produce quarterly aggregated performance reports
- Share anonymised regional trends and outcomes data with providers and Local Authorities

Lead Stakeholders

DHLGH; DRHE

Intended Outcome

Improved sector coordination and evidence-informed service improvement

Phase 2

Data Governance and Information Sharing

Implementation Stage

Medium-term Actions

Priority Actions

Strengthen governance arrangements for data sharing

Key Activities

- Develop template consent processes and information-sharing protocols aligned with GDPR
- Provide practical GDPR guidance for frontline services to support proportionate and secure information sharing across services

Lead Stakeholders

DHLGH; DRHE; Data Protection Officers

Intended Outcome

More secure and consistent legally compliant information sharing

Proposed Implementation Roadmap

Phase 2

Monitoring and Evaluation

Implementation Stage

Medium-Term to Long-Term Actions

Priority Actions

Strengthen the monitoring of homelessness service outcomes

Key Activities:

- Develop nationally agreed homelessness outcome indicators (e.g. tenancy sustainment, repeat presentations, and housing progression outcomes) alongside standardised guidance and training to support consistent recording practices across services.

Lead Stakeholders

DHLGH; DRHE; Research Bodies

Intended Outcome

Improved monitoring, evaluation, and understanding of homelessness service outcomes

Phase 2

Client Outcomes and Case Management

Implementation Stage

Medium-Term to Long-Term Actions

Priority Actions

Improve the use of digital systems to support case management

Key Activities

- Support providers to use PASS and provider CRM systems to monitor client engagement, support needs, referrals, and housing progression over time

Lead Stakeholders

Homelessness Service Providers; DRHE; Local Authorities

Intended Outcome

Stronger case management and more evidence-informed service delivery

Proposed Implementation Roadmap

Phase 3

Interoperability Development

Implementation Stage

Long -Term Actions

Priority Actions

Explore practical approaches to system interoperability

Key Activities:

- Pilot data-sharing and system integration approaches between PASS and selected provider CRM systems before considering wider implementation

Lead Stakeholders

DHLGH; PASS Teams; CRM Providers

Intended Outcome

Evidence-based approach to future interoperability

Phase 3

Long-Term Digital Reform

Implementation Stage

Long -Term Actions

Priority Actions

Support sustainable and phased digital development

Key Activities

- Conduct phased reviews of system performance, provider capacity, and resource requirements before introducing further integration measures

Lead Stakeholders

DHLGH; DRHE; Local Authorities

Intended Outcome

More realistic and sustainable digital reform pathway

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COMHOM Policy Brief 2: The Case for Reviewing Ireland's National Definition of Homelessness

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About Simon Communities of Ireland

We lead campaigns advocating for effective policies and legislation to tackle homelessness, drawing on evidence, best practices, and the lived experiences of people accessing services. Our work spans local, national, and European levels, focusing on practical, sustainable solutions to address homelessness directly.

Our mission is to end homelessness across Ireland.

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Registration Number: 74038
Charity Number: 8273

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