



Summary

- **Declare a National Housing Emergency to release funds for local authority and affordable housing.**
- **Hold a referendum to insert a 'right to housing' clause into the Irish constitution.**
- **Create a national construction company to take control of building supply.**
- **Launch a five year programme to house 100,000 families and individuals in secure, permanent public housing.**
- **Identify current principles that prevent the provision of local authority housing including acquisition and buy back policies.**
- **Raise the income thresholds for public housing to €60,000 per annum.**
- **Reverse the scandal of self-certification of building works. Pursue developers for compensation due to shoddy building practices during the building boom.**
- **Ensure building standards that give proper facilities, functionality and space.**
- **Transfer 20,000 NAMA housing units to local authorities.**
- **Clamp down on short term letting for tourism or corporate rental in this time of the housing emergency.**
- **Stop the sell-off of public land to private developers at knock down prices.**
- **Impose a vacant dwelling levy to bring housing supply into use.**
- **Compulsory Purchase Orders to acquire land in the public interest.**
- **Support proper public consultation on planning policy where the public are meaningfully engaged at all stages.**
- **Encourage community interaction in the built environment.**
- **If feasible, explore policy of extensions to council houses to relieve overcrowding.**
- **Reduce rents through the establishment of a new Rental Board. Introduce rent controls linked to the Consumer Price Index.**
- **Increase HAP caps as an emergency measure and move away from landlord subsidies overtime.**
- **Introduce legal measures to outlaw discrimination: an end to "Rent Allowance not accepted".**
- **Establish an Independent Regulator for tenants in Local Authority Housing.**
- **Establish an Independent National Housing Agency to oversee the delivery of safe and culturally appropriate Traveller Accommodation.**
- **Ban evictions where there is genuine economic distress.**
- **Abolish bureaucratic measures which mean that homeless people can easily lose their social welfare payment.**
- **Increase supply of housing fitted for people with disabilities and special needs.**



- **Support the provision of suitable, affordable student-specific accommodation in areas around third-level institutions.**
- **End the scourge of Direct Provision.**

Introduction

For the vast majority a house is essential for human wellbeing. Most people see houses as a roof over their heads not an “asset” or a “commodity”. This is not the case for the global financiers, however. At the height of the last economic boom the buying and selling of homes reached dizzying proportions. In Ireland unprecedented numbers became home owners. This was mirrored across the globe, with people encouraged to take out one and even two mortgages.

Across the world, bankers went into overdrive, lending money and then selling loans on to other banks all over the world, creating the sub-prime mortgage crisis and the ensuing global meltdown.

Despite the hardship that was caused, no lessons have been learnt. In fact the very financiers that created the crisis went on to benefit from it. In Ireland, the collapse of the property market signalled massive pain for ordinary people, but real opportunities for Vulture Funds. As early as 2009, the US fund, Cerberus, was hiring key advisors in the property market and by 2013, ex NAMA officials were setting up investment vehicles like Hibernia REIT to make a killing. Roughly €200 billion of Irish property was sold to these investors for knock down prices. This left a major shortage for the rest of us and undermined any recovery for ordinary people. Currently, there are nearly 10,000 homeless people in the state, 3,000 of whom are children. Added to this are more than 100,000 people waiting on social housing and countless numbers paying over the odds for rent and mortgages.

Whether Fianna Fail, Fine Gael or Labour are in government, their policy has consistently been to open up opportunities for private investors. The current crisis has arisen from a confluence of four aspects of this policy.

- 1. Reduced Social Housing.** Since the 1990s, the policy of successive neoliberal governments has been to reduce the numbers of council houses being built in order to fuel a boom in private property. The first act of the current Fine Gael/Labour government was to abolish Social Housing as we have known it and to bring in ‘Social Housing Support’ which classified RAS, Rent Allowance and Leasing as equivalent to a council house. This effectively meant relying on the profit-driven private sector to deliver a vital social need.
- 2. Poorly Planned Supply.** The decision of successive governments to withdraw from planning the building of public housing meant that by the 1990s Celtic Tiger ‘boom’



developers were building houses in places nobody wanted to live or couldn't live because of a lack of jobs or services. This is part of the reason why there are now more than 270,000 empty properties all over the country, alongside a shortage of housing in other areas. The government's solution to this problem is to re-introduce tax-relief for builders and property speculators. This means the same profit-driven gamblers that helped wreck the Irish economy in the first place, can do it again. During the recession, they have sat on the side-lines waiting until the property market started to improve so they could come back and make another killing.

3. Mortgage Distress. Over 70,000 households are in mortgage distress, exacerbating the problem in homeless services. Families are losing their homes because they can't pay the mortgage or because their 'one-off' landlord is forced to sell their home to pay off the mortgage to the bank.

4. Rising Rents. After an initial fall in rents after the 2008 crash, rents have been rising consistently since 2013 with rents in Dublin and other cities rocketing. Rent increases have led to many people being thrown out of their accommodation and placed in homeless services. Landlords have also pulled out of the various leasing schemes.

Government Failure

Social Housing Strategy 2020 and **Rebuilding Ireland** continue with the same failed policies outlined above. Rebuilding Ireland promised 110,000 social houses over three years - at a cost of €3.8 billion. But 75,000 of these houses are to be delivered via the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), which is basically a new version of Rent Allowance (with the only advantage being that the tenant is allowed work). The other 35,000 houses promised are not council houses either. Instead these will be delivered through a "variety of funding models" including Leasing, Part V, Approved Housing Bodies and direct builds. Only the last category is capable of creating new public housing units, but it looks like 67% will be delivered via leasing, 13 percent will be from the refurbishment of existing housing, and 18 percent a mixture of Part V and Approved Housing Bodies.

The government are also introducing local authority mortgages to allow individuals or couples to buy their own houses. But this involves using public land for private developments. It is also vulnerable to creeping privatisation as local authority housing built on public land goes into the private sector without any increasing in housing for those on waiting lists.

None of this gets to the root of the problem. To solve what is an unprecedented crisis, People Before Profit would commence a major national public housing building programme which would construct 50,000 new public homes over the next 5 years. We



would also reduce housing costs by introducing real rent controls linked to the Consumer Price Index, and backdated to 2011.

Below we outline our key policy objectives

- **Declare a National Housing Emergency.** This would treat the housing crisis with the seriousness it deserves and release much needed funds for a major public and affordable house building programme.
- **Hold a referendum to insert a 'right to housing' clause into the Irish constitution.** Human rights do not just include political freedoms – the state should have a legal obligation to provide housing.
- **Create a national construction company.** There is no reason why the state cannot build houses. There is state owned land available and tens of thousands of construction workers either here or abroad who would be willing to work for decent wages. Encourage the return of emigrants with building construction skills. Provide incentives to recommence apprenticeships in building trades. Develop ongoing training facilities for construction trades. **Top BER Ratings a requirement for new housing units.**
- **Launch a five year programme to house 100,000 families and individuals in secure, permanent public housing.** This will cost €3 billion in the first year and a total of €14 billion over 5 years, but it will become self-financing by year 6 and into the future. This programme will also provide jobs in the construction sector and add to revenue receipts.
- **Identify current principles that prevent the provision of local authority housing including acquisition and buy back policies.**
- **Raise the income thresholds for public housing to €60,000 per annum.** People on modest incomes should be able to be housed through state provision.
- **Reverse the scandal of self-certification of building works.** Establish a national building control system managed by the local authorities, to inspect and certify building works at every stage of the building process. Conduct immediate audits for fire and safety. Pursue developers for compensation for residents of houses in poor condition due to shoddy building practices during the building boom.
- **Ensure building standards that give proper facilities, functionality and space.** This is particularly important in situations where apartment living may be more desirable. Facilities should include adequate storage, floor space, light and communal facilities such as laundry, parking and similar requirements.
- **Transfer 20,000 NAMA housing units to local authorities.** NAMA has failed the public –we need to change it mandate and take back housing units for those on waiting lists.



- **Clamp down on short term letting for tourism or corporate rental in this time of the housing emergency.** As of May 2018, there are 3,165 entire homes or apartments listed in Dublin alone, solely for the use of the short term lettings to holiday makers and corporate entities. (Source- 'Inside AirBnb'). Homes should be for people, not for profit. This practice further commodifies housing, forcing working class people to live further away from their places of work, Ireland is not alone in this new trend, but other countries have already begun to legislate for it.
- **Stop the sell-off of public land to private developers at knock down prices.** Fine Gael wants to sell off as much public land as cheaply as possible to their developer friends. This must be stopped. Public land should be used for council housing and community amenities.
- **Impose a vacant dwelling levy.** There are over 200,000 vacant properties in Ireland – even though thousands have no home. We need a 'use it or lose it policy' whereby private property owners will pay a special levy if their property is left empty for more than six months (except under particular circumstances such as probate).
- **Compulsory Purchase Orders.** In some cases a levy will not be enough. If the public good demands it, the state should be able to use a CPO to attain appropriate accommodation.
- **Support proper public consultation on planning policy where the public are meaningfully engaged at all stages.** This would mean public meetings with stakeholder groups at the pre-drafting stage of planning.
- **Encourage community interaction in the built environment.** Support for progressive ways of providing homes and using land that are structured on community and collective models of living.
- **If feasible, explore policy of extensions to council houses to relieve overcrowding.** Many families have had to take adult parents' home. This could be made more feasible if extensions were allowed.
- **Reduce rents through the establishment of a Rental Board.** Rents in high pressure areas are too high and this is leading to social cleansing. The poor are being pushed to the outer suburbs. Rents must be reduced to 2011 levels and only landlords who show clear evidence of improvement should be allowed to increase rents above this. Simultaneously, introduce efficient rent controls whereby, thereafter, rents are established through transparent criteria and rent increases are linked to the Consumer Price Index. Tenants will be given greater security of tenure.
- **Increase HAP caps as an emergency measure to stem the tide of homelessness.** As public housing becomes available phase out Rent Allowance, HAP, RAS and Long Term Leasing except as an emergency measure.



- **Open specific drug and drink free hostels so that those in recovery or at risk can still use homeless services in an emergency.**
- **Introduce legal measures to outlaw discrimination: an end to “Rent Allowance not accepted”.** Too many landlords discriminate against people on government led schemes. PBP would outlaw this practice.
- **Establish an Independent Regulator for tenants in Local Authority Housing.** Local authority tenants do not have an independent regulator. This needs to change so that tenants can vindicate their rights.
- **Establish an Independent National Housing Agency to oversee the delivery of safe and culturally appropriate Traveller Accommodation.** Support the completion and expansion of the **Traveller Accommodation Plan** so that all members of the travelling community are homed according to their needs and cultural preferences.
- **No evictions where there is genuine economic distress.** Give tenants security of tenure to protect them against vulture funds and predatory landlords.
- **Abolish bureaucratic measures which mean that homeless people can easily lose their social welfare payment.** Homeless people are not allowed on the housing list unless they use a homeless hostel and the government insist on people registering as homeless in the local authority area where they became homeless. This is an extra burden on vulnerable people and must change. Open specific drug and drink free hostels so that those in recovery or at risk can still use homeless services in an emergency.
- **Increase supply of housing fitted for people with disabilities and special needs.** In consultation with the disability representative bodies, increase the supply of social housing, specially adapted to suit people with a variety of disabilities and mobility issues, and fund the provision of disability adaptation grants according to need and not by means testing.
- **Support the provision of more suitable, affordable student-specific accommodation in areas around third-level institutions.** Students with less means are being crowded out of education – we need affordable accommodation to make education accessible for all.
- **End Direct Provision.** Direct Provision is a scourge on the Irish state. It has no place in a modern democracy and must be ended.