

Social Housing Access in Ireland: politics, policy and data interfaces, 2016-2022



Presentation to the Data Politics of Housing and Planning 2-3

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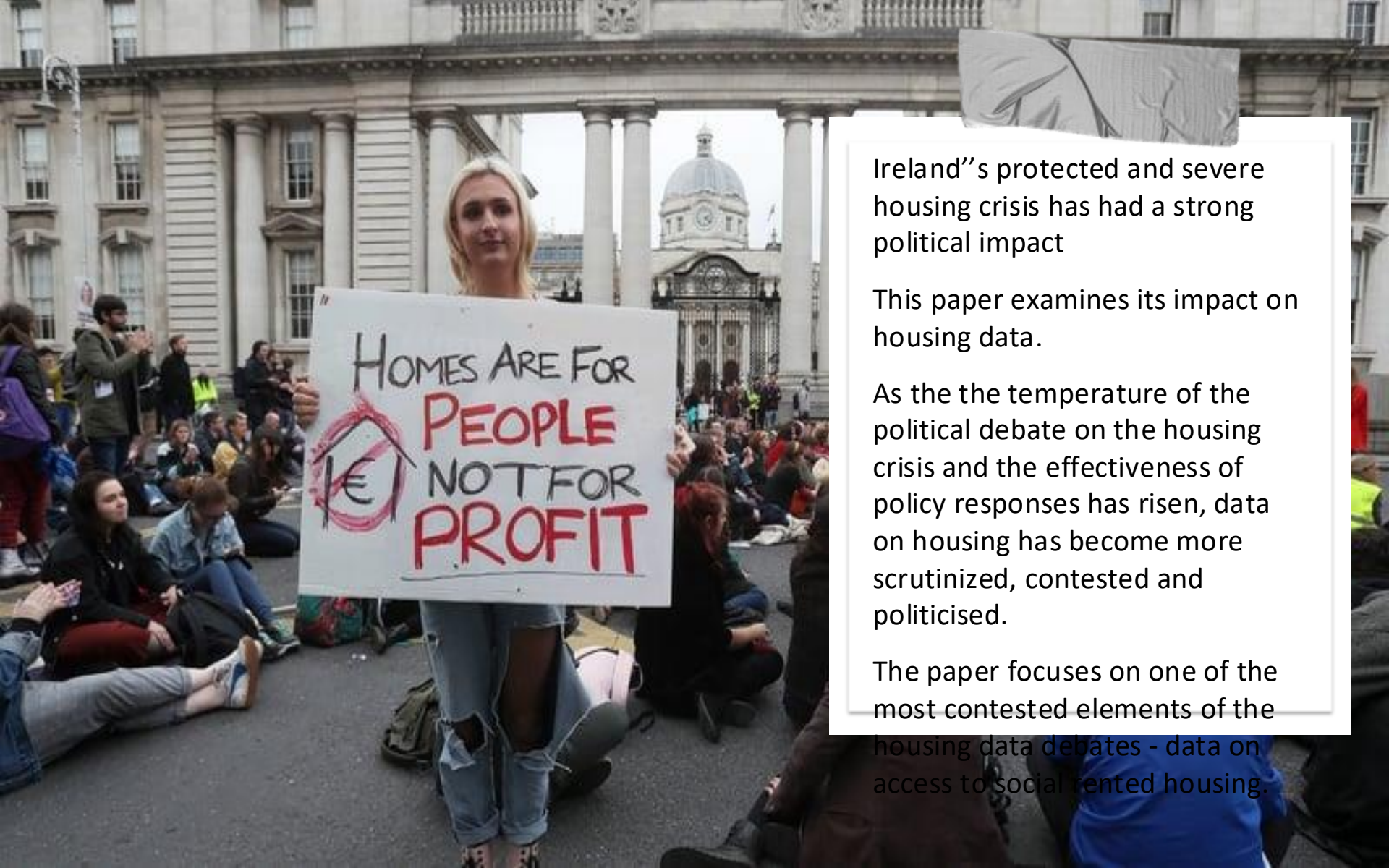
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Ireland's protected and severe housing crisis has had a strong political impact

This paper examines its impact on housing data.

As the the temperature of the political debate on the housing crisis and the effectiveness of policy responses has risen, data on housing has become more scrutinized, contested and politicised.

The paper focuses on one of the most contested elements of the housing data debates - data on access to social rented housing.

Social Housing Access: politics, policy and data interfaces

Housing Policy Change

Social housing in Ireland was traditionally:

- The main source of housing for low income households
- Supplied by local authorities and non profit housing associations (called AHBs)
- Lifetime tenancy and guaranteed affordability due income-related rents
- Supported by housing allowances (Rent Supplement) to subsidise private renters awaiting a social housing tenancy.
- This was generally a short term support, withdrawn if claimants secured employment

Significant changes were introduced after the GFC:

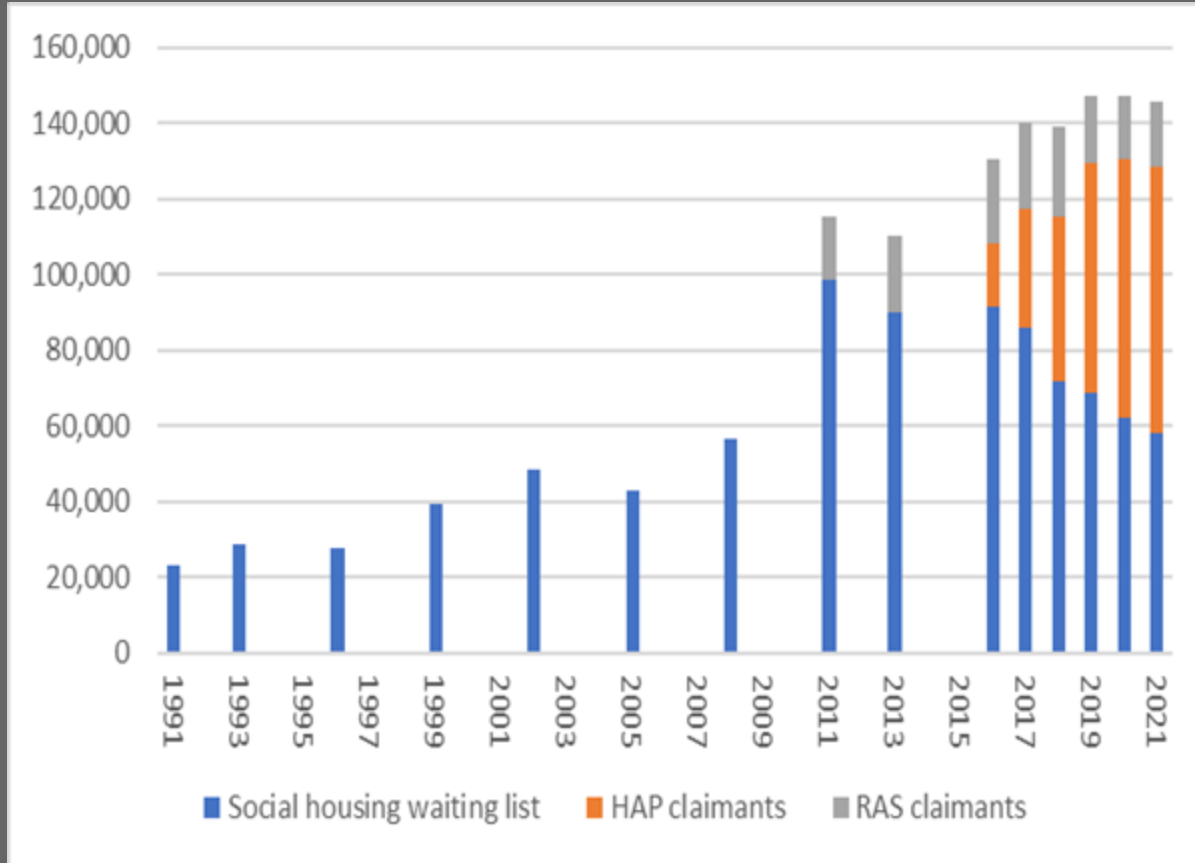
- Rent Supplement was replaced with Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)
- HAP was designed to be a long term support which claimants would continue to receive on entering employment
- Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Acts 2009 and 2014 defined HAP as 'social housing support'
- Meant in practice that HAP was legally equivalent to social housing, so HAP claimants' social housing need was deemed to have been met



Housing Data Change

- Rent Supplement recipients were required to apply for social housing and included on the published list 'waiting list' of applicants
- Social housing waiting lists compilation methods were consistently reviewed in the 1990s and 2000s as applicant numbers rose consistently
- 2009 and 2014 legislation resulted in the removal of HAP recipients from social housing waiting lists.
- Instead they were included on a 'transfer list' like social housing housing tenants who wish to move to another social home
- These are managed by each local authority and not published
- This has radically reduced the transparency of social housing waiting lists and access

Official and Unofficial Social Housing Need



A note on the data:

From 1991 to 2013 the social housing needs assessment was carried out every 3 years, since 2016 it has been carried out annually. This means that all applicants have to reapply each year,

The methodology used to conduct these assessments changed several times:

- From 1996 households on the waiting list of more than one local authority were counted only once in the assessment of social housing need.
- From 2011 Rental Accommodation Scheme claimants were not included
- From 2016 Housing Assistance Payment claimant households were excluded

In contrast once HAP claimants are deemed eligible for this support their claim is not reassessed unless they:

- Move to a new dwelling
- Their household size changes (eg. due to the birth of a child).

If their income rises they pay a higher contribution to their rent but their HAP claim is not terminated.

Our Analysis of Data on Official and Unofficial Housing Need

Data sources, size and timeframe:

- Annual assessment of social housing need (ie. social housing waiting lists)
 - Provided by all local authorities
 - Includes all 166,789 households on the waiting list at some time between 2016 and 2021s
- Households whose application for social housing was terminated:
 - Assembled by the Housing Agency from local authority data,
 - Includes 69,559 households whose social housing application ended between 2016 - 2019.
- Housing Assistance Payment Claimant Households
 - Provided by the HAP coordination agency
 - Includes 87,181. Households who claimed HAP at some stage between 2016 and 2021

Data Treatment:

- Data cleaning
- Data mining
- Data analysis - descriptive statistics - primarily due to difficulties in comparing datasets.

Data Weaknesses

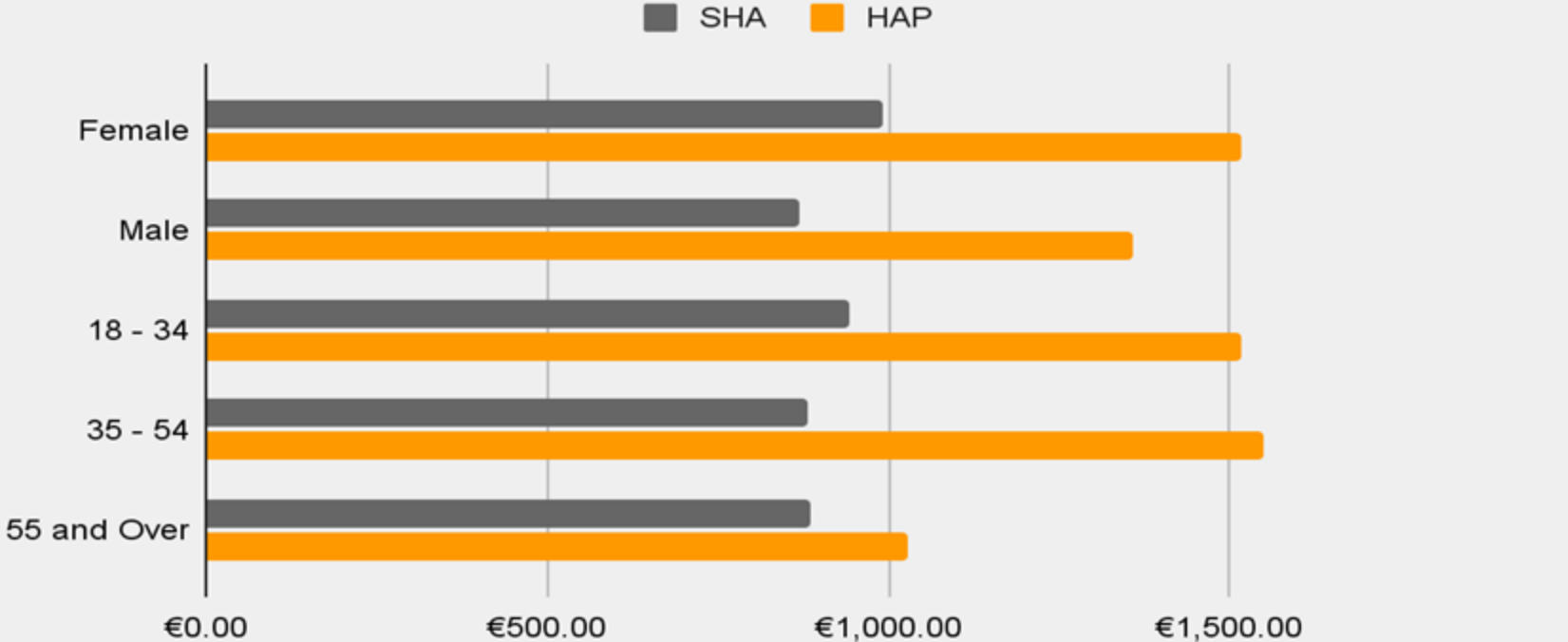
- Administrative data collected for another purpose but subject to strong validation checks
- Some issues are not included in all datasets - less information available on HAP claimants

Findings - Demographic Divergence

Household Composition	SHA 2017	HAP 2017	SHA 2019	HAP 2019	SHA 2021	HAP 2021
Single adult	42	30	47	28	55	29
Single adult + 1-2 children	24	34	23	35	20	38
Single + 3 or more children	3	7	3	7	3	6
Couple	4	4	4	4	4	4
Couple with 1 - 2 children	12	16	10	17	7	16
Couple with 3 + children	5	9	4	9	3	7
Other Household Type	10		8		8	
Female headed household	53	60	52	63	50	63
Household head aged 55+	13	11	15	11	17	11

Findings - Socio-Economic Divergence

Median Incomes of Social Housing Applicant (SHA) and HAP Claimant Households, 2016-2021



Findings - Spatial Divergence

Location	SHA 2016 %	All Social Renters 2016 %	All households 2016 %	SHA 2021 %	All Social Renters 2022 %	All households 2022 %
Rural	43	47	52	38	46	52
Urban	57	53	48	62	54	48
	HAP 2016 %	All Private Renters 2016 %		HAP 2021 %	All Private Renters 2022 %	
Rural	57	42	52	47	41	52
Urban	43	58	48	53	59	48

Diverging social housing outcomes

Between 2016 and 2019:

- Mean lifetime of all applications for social housing was 213.06 weeks.
- Mean lifetime prior to SHAs securing social housing was 286.81 weeks.
- Most applications were terminated due to reassessment - 36%
- 8-12% were terminated because applicants secured social housing.

Between 2016 and 2021:

- The lifetime of a HAP claim was 175.54 weeks for claims still active in February 2024 and 104.45 weeks for claims that ended prior to this time.
- Mean time prior to claimants securing social housing was 135.1 weeks.
- Most common reasons for the termination of a HAP claim were:
 - the claimant received a social tenancy (37%)
 - voluntary exit from HAP (21%)
 - the private landlord gave notice [of termination of tenancy] to the claimant (12%), and
 - the claimant gave the private landlord notice of their intention to end their tenancy (8%).

Analysis - demand versus supply

Data contradicts widespread perceptions regarding the impact of the 2009 and 2014 legislation.

HAP claimants do not appear to have been disadvantaged by their removal from the social housing waiting list

Rather the most significant reform was the introduction of annual reassessment of social housing applications in 2013

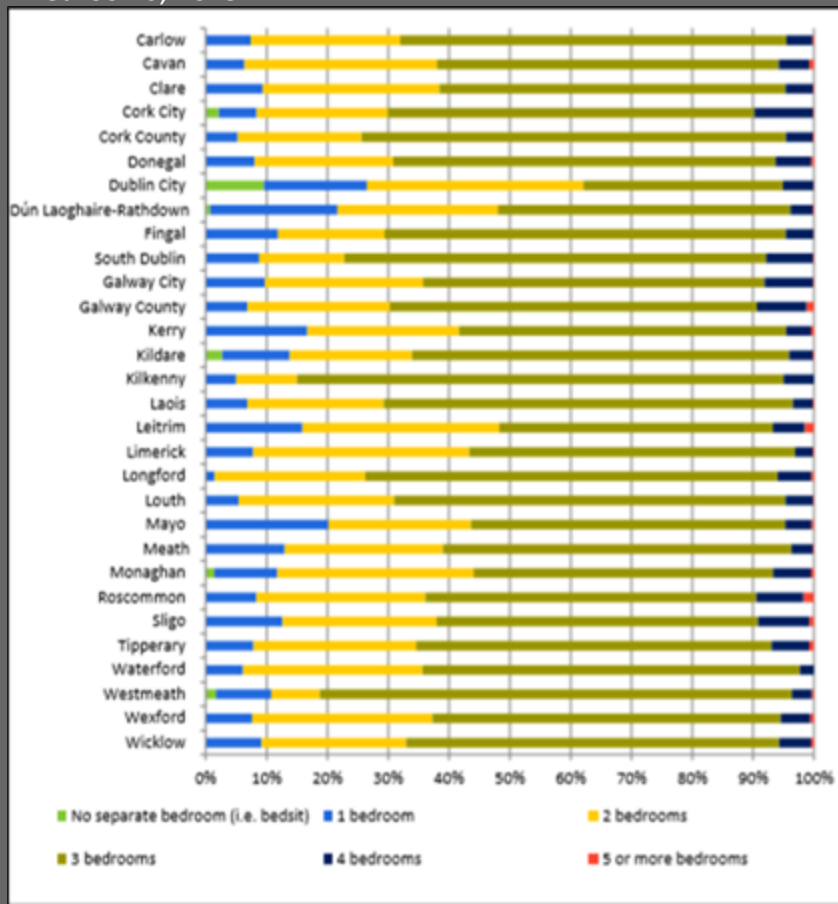
HAP claimants' higher and quicker rate securing social housing reflects their distinct:

- spatial distribution and
- household size and composition

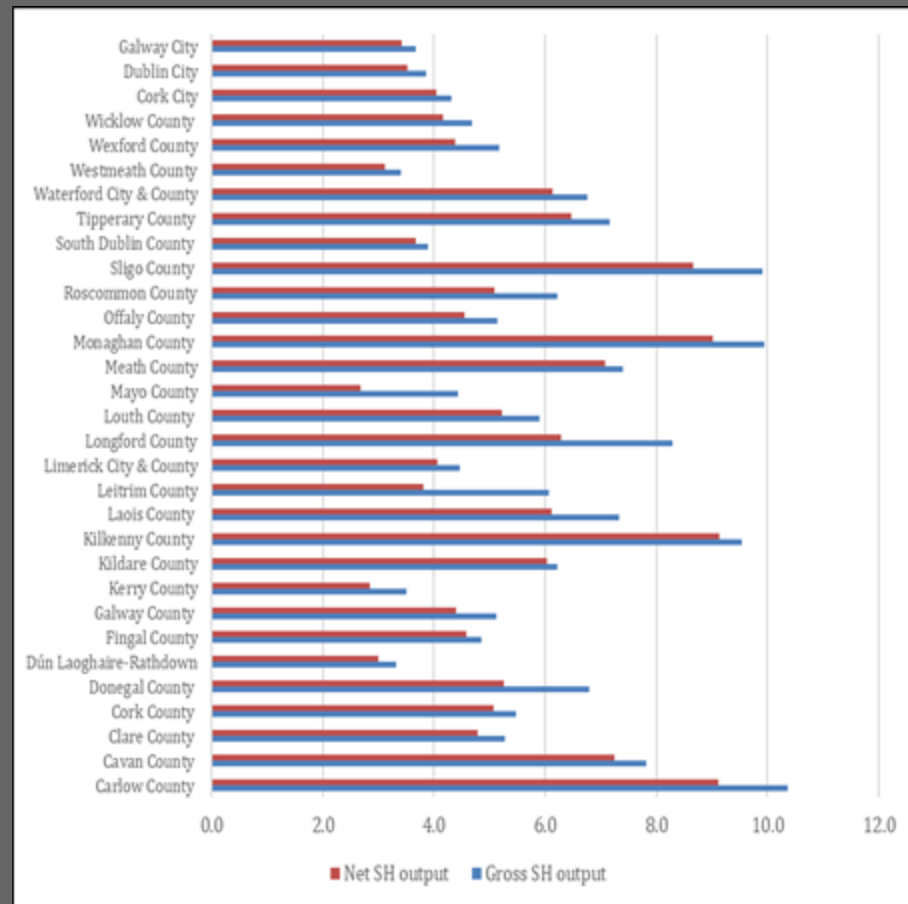
This profile better matches the size and location of the social housing stock than that of social housing applicants

Analysis - demand versus supply

Local Authority Social Housing Units by Number of Bedrooms, 2015



Gross and net social housing output as a % of need, 2011-2020



Analysis - politics, policy and data interfaces

Divergence between the characteristics of HAP claimants and social housing applicants and of their 'data status' on social housing waiting lists is likely to have a bigger impact over the long term

This is because of the distinctive legal and policy status of the social housing waiting lists in Ireland.

Local authorities' inclusionary zoning powers (Part V of the 2000 Planning Act) are by law underpinned by social housing waiting lists only.

Housing Needs and Demand Assessment (HNDAs) which underpin local authority development plans also draw on waiting list data,