



Minister Darragh O'Brien TD,  
Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage,  
Custom House, D1,  
D01 W6X0

October 9, 2020

Re: Budget 2021

Dear Minister O'Brien

The **Raise the Roof** campaign group believes that the coming Budget represents a major opportunity to reshape housing policy in Ireland for the benefit of the vast majority of its people, most especially that very substantial number for whom the promise of affordable, secure and quality accommodation remains but an illusion.

**Raise the Roof** is the largest housing campaign group in the country and is comprised of a broad alliance of trade unions, housing and homeless agencies, women's groups, political parties, representatives of older people, children's advocacy groups, community organisations, students' unions, Traveller groups, housing academics and experts (see below).

It is our view that the housing market in Ireland is now entirely dysfunctional and utterly disconnected from its core social purpose, with housing the 'commodity of choice' for speculative investment, thereby ensuring that the market primarily serves the interests of large institutional investors, developers and land speculators.

These interests now completely override the interests and the needs of the large majority of people, who struggle daily to cope with what is the longest running and most severe housing crisis in the country's history.

The housing policy of successive governments has failed to deliver on affordable, secure and quality accommodation for hundreds of thousands of working families, young people, women, students, Travellers, older people, those with a disability and many others.

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**Raise the Roof** • c/o 32 Parnell Square, Dublin 1

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Over recent years this failure has been painfully evident in: record waiting lists; the serious depletion of public housing stock; lack of security for tenants; record rent increases; the almost total absence of affordable homes to purchase and the highest numbers of homeless people in the history of the State.

Indeed, in your previous position as Fianna Fáil spokesperson on housing you consistently drew attention to these very failings.

**Raise the Roof** believes that Budget 2021 presents the Government with a major opportunity to make a clear and decisive break with the failed policies of the past by intervening very directly in the housing market, in order to reshape it in the interests of the citizens.

This can be achieved by establishing a major, State-led programme of public housing on public land that would deliver up to 100,000 new homes over the lifetime of the Government. These would be a mix of public housing and affordable homes to purchase and rent.

Indeed, the current public health emergency adds urgency to the situation, with the ESRI confirming that it will almost certainly result in a worsening of the 'affordability crisis' in housing and stating that direct State intervention in the failed housing market is the only tenable way to deal with the crisis.

A State-led public housing programme makes social and economic sense as it will help drive a post-pandemic recovery, tackle unemployment, stimulate job creation and growth and help boost living standards through a reduction in housing costs.

With the cost of borrowing at an historic low it makes sense to invest now to fix our broken housing system. Funding can also be sourced from the Strategic Investment Fund and the European Investment Bank.

The State-led programme will help generate savings through use of public land and, over the longer-term, by reducing the subsidies currently paid to private landlords along with the policy of purchasing social housing units from private developers.

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The **Raise the Roof** campaign group therefore calls on the Government in Budget 2021 to:

- Immediately establish a major State-led housing programme that would work with local authorities to build up to 20,000 public homes annually on public land, over the lifetime of the government;
- Commit to reserving public land solely for public housing;
- Reinstate the moratorium on evictions and rent rises for at least the duration of the Covid 19 emergency;
- Initiate a complete overhaul of tenancy legislation to deliver security of tenure and rent certainty for tenants;
- While the Programme for Government commits to a 'referendum on housing' the Government should now explicitly commit to the holding of a referendum on the Right to Housing.

Our housing system is profoundly broken and in need of major repair, a process that requires the State to intervene decisively in the market to ensure it can begin to meet the housing needs of its citizens. In order to deliver on housing, it is now clear that Budget 2021 must mark a significant new departure in government policy.

Yours sincerely,

Macdara Doyle, Irish Congress of Trade Unions/ Raise the Roof

Signed and supported by:

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions and key affiliates, including: Siptu, Fórsa, Mandate, the Dublin Council of Trade Unions;

Sinn Féin, Social Democrats, The Labour Party, People before Profit/ Solidarity;

Focus Ireland, Inner City Helping Homeless, Simon Community, Home for Good, National Homeless & Housing Coalition;

National Women's Council of Ireland, Union of Students in Ireland, Irish Traveller Movement, Children's Rights Alliance, Age Action;

Dr Rory Hearne, Mel Reynolds, Fr Peter McVerry.

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