



Irish National Survey of Housing Quality

2001-2002

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Quality

Executive Summary

Background

The Economic and Social Research Institute was commissioned by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to carry out the Irish National Survey of Housing Quality (NSHQ) in 2001-2002. The survey obtained detailed information from a representative sample of over 40,000 householders on characteristics and problems of the dwelling, and on the household members. Information was collected on:

- the basic type of dwelling, its age and location
- the number of rooms of different types available to the household
- rent and mortgage payments, and other indicators of affordability
- services such as water, sewage, electricity and gas
- main method of heating the dwelling and fuel used
- presence of insulation and other energy-saving measures
- problems with the accommodation and major works carried out in the last five years
- household characteristics – household type and age structure, economic status of household members and household income.

The information is relevant in the areas of house planning, regional development and energy policy. The large sample size allows detailed tables to be provided to Local Authorities for planning purposes. The present report provides an overview of the situation with regard to housing quality at a national level.

Comparability to the 1981 and 1991 Surveys

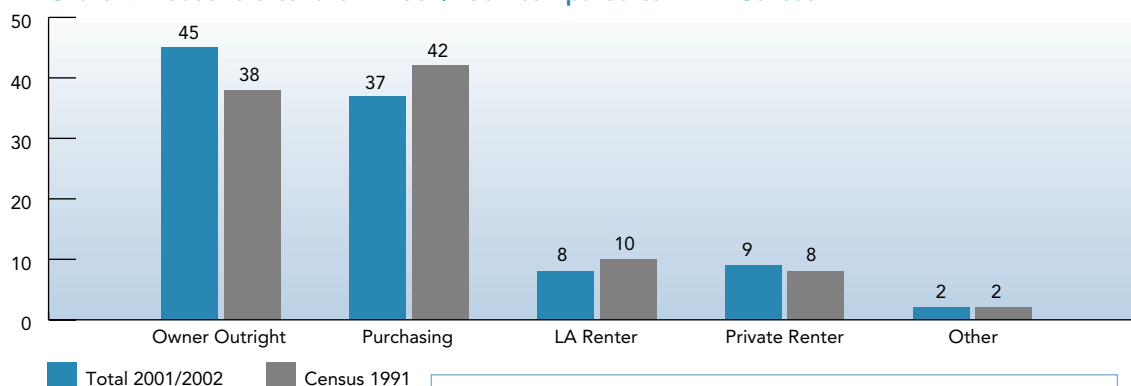
The NSHQ is different from the national house condition surveys undertaken in 1981 and 1991 in a number of important respects. Firstly, the earlier surveys were conducted separately by the Local Authorities with the results having been co-ordinated after the surveys were completed. In contrast, the methodology and procedures for the present survey have been completely centralised, ensuring a harmonised set of data across Local Authority areas. Secondly, the earlier surveys were of a technical nature, using the judgements of survey staff regarding the general condition of the accommodation. In the present 2001-2002 survey, the residents themselves make judgements regarding the extent and nature of problems with the dwelling. In a large number of areas, the NSHQ provides information that is comparable to that collected in 1981 and 1991, such as on the dwelling structure, number of rooms, dwelling age, number of persons of different ages in the dwelling, housing costs and so on. However, the comparability of the results is not as strong when it comes to judgements as to the extent and nature of problems in the dwelling.

A major strength of the present design, in addition to the assurance that harmonised protocols were used throughout the country, is the detailed information it collected in a number of new areas: on residents' satisfaction with aspects of their dwelling; on problems in the area where the dwelling is located; and on issues related to the affordability of the dwelling.

Key Findings

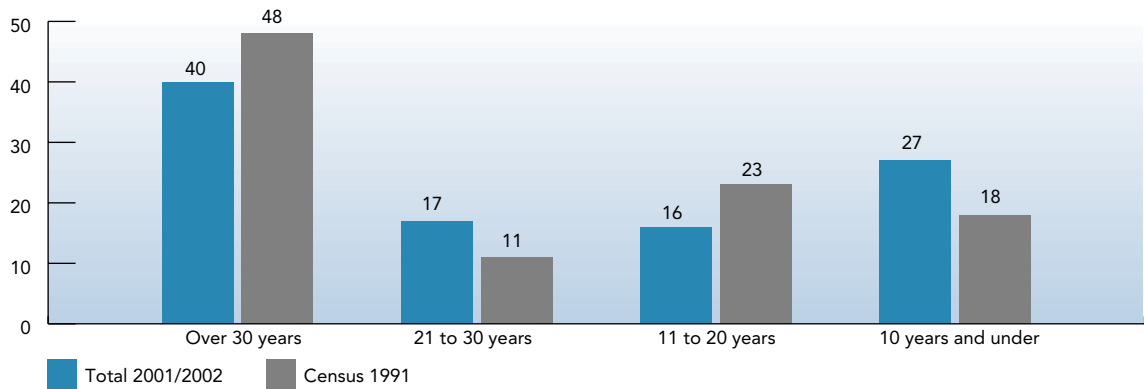
Dwelling type, location and age

Chart 1: Household tenure in 2001/2002 compared to 1991 Census



The age-profile of the Irish housing stock is relatively favourable by international standards, with 17 per cent of the stock having been built since 1996. The continuing dominance of home ownership accounts for the high proportion of households who have been at their address for 20 years or more. Despite the high rate of building of semi-detached housing in large urban areas in recent years, housing in Ireland continues to be dominated by detached housing. Close to one-third of the stock is made up of one-off housing, that is, detached housing in open countryside.

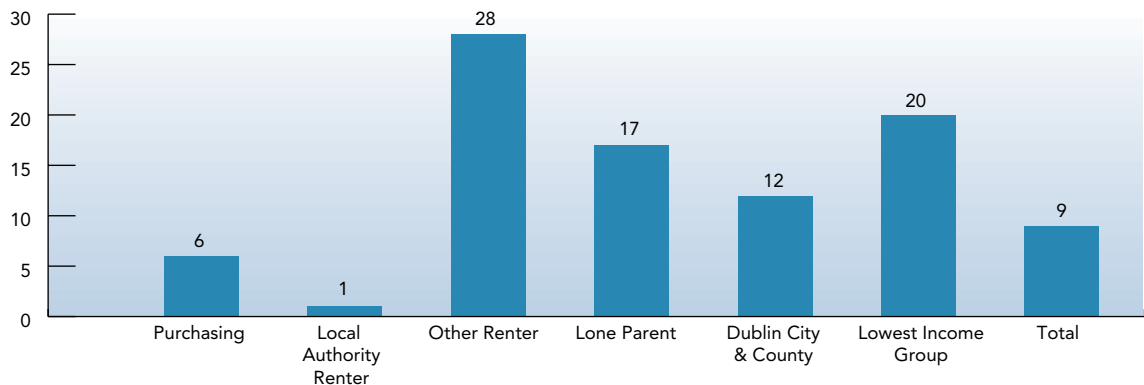
Chart 2: Dwelling age in 2001/2002 compared to 1991 Census



Housing Costs and Affordability

High rents relative to income are mainly a problem for those renting in the private sector, over one-quarter of whom spend more than a third of household income on rent. The problem of high mortgage repayments relative to income is not as prevalent among purchasers: overall about one in twenty spends more than a third of household income on mortgage payments, but this increases to about one in ten for recent purchasers. In terms of rent levels relative to income, Local Authority renters are in a much more favourable position: only 1 per cent of this group pay more than a third of household income on rent.

Chart 3: Per cent households spending more than one-third of income on rent or mortgage

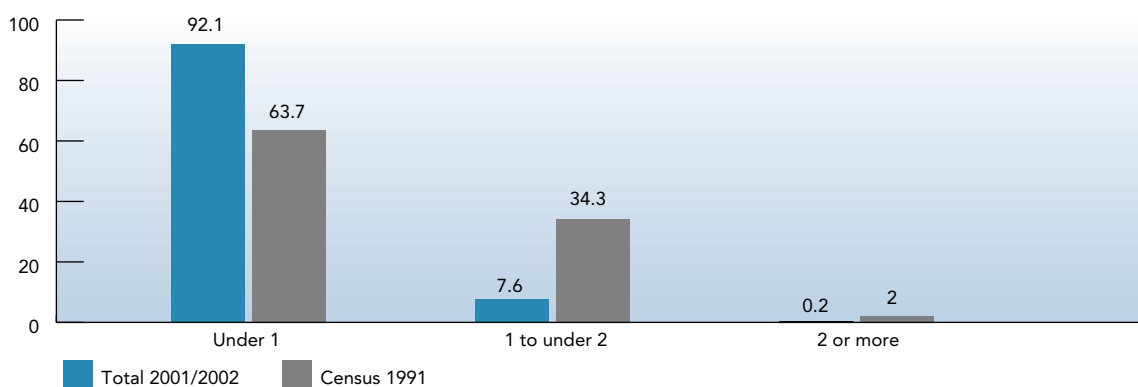


However, Local Authority renters emerged as most likely to experience problems on indicators of financial strain. They were more likely than other groups to lack household appliances or other goods and services because they could not afford them. One-third found housing costs a heavy burden; one-quarter had been in arrears in housing or utility bills and one-fifth had “great difficulty” in making ends meet. Other groups experiencing substantial problems in terms of housing affordability and financial strain were lone parents and households in the lowest income category.

Rooms Available

Compared to other European Union Member States, the average household size in Ireland is high at 3 persons. In the other European countries the figure ranges from a low of 2.1 in Germany to 2.8 in Greece and Portugal, with the UK and France both at about 2.4 persons (*Housing Statistics in the European Union, 2002*). There has been a considerable reduction in density of occupation since 1991. The number of persons per room (of any kind) has fallen from 0.6 to 0.5, and the percentage of households with less than one person per room has increased from 64 to 92 per cent. Moreover, 43 per cent of households have 2 or more bedrooms over the number needed given the household size and composition.

Chart 4: Number of persons per room in 1991 & 2001/2002



There is a clear association between housing tenure and the number of rooms available to the household. House purchasers are in the most favourable position and renters are the least advantaged, while those who own the dwelling outright occupy an intermediate position. However, since households who own the accommodation outright tend to have fewer persons, this group has the lowest number of persons per room and is most likely to have more bedrooms than are needed for the household size and composition. Local Authority renters still have the greatest number of persons per room and are most likely to have insufficient bedrooms. While private sector renters have the same average number of persons per room (of any kind) as house purchasers, they are more likely to have fewer bedrooms than are needed given household size and composition.

The relationship between household income and the number of rooms available is a mixed one. Lower-income households generally have fewer rooms available in the dwelling. However, because many of the households in the lowest income category are older people living alone, they are no more likely than average to have fewer bedrooms than are needed and are slightly more likely than average to view their accommodation as “too big” for their needs.

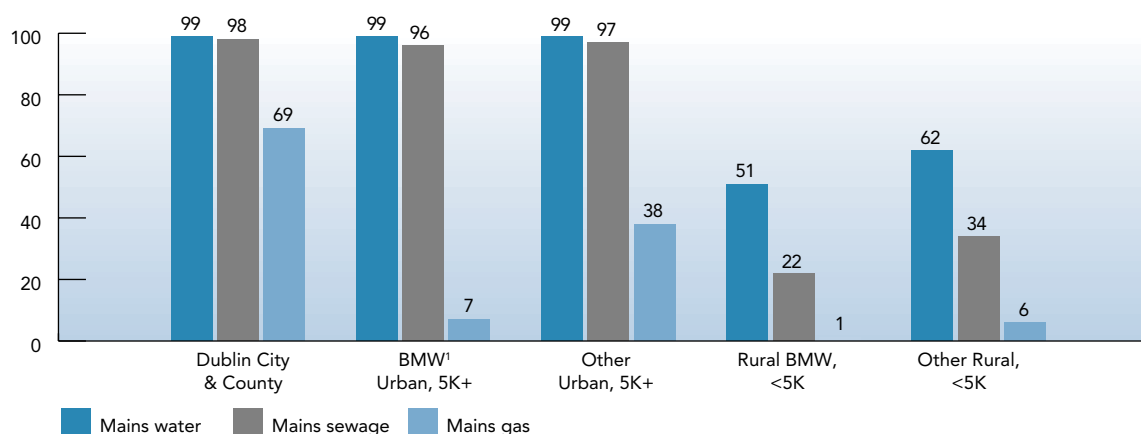
Services

Ireland's settlement pattern – with a relatively high proportion of households in rural one-off housing – has implications for the provision of services. A high proportion of households rely on a septic tank for sewage disposal and, to a lesser extent, on private water sources. Connection to mains gas is also concentrated in urban areas, particularly in the Dublin region. Connection to mains electricity, on the other hand, is virtually universal.

There are high levels of satisfaction with the reliability of the electricity supply and with the adequacy of the number of electrical sockets available. Satisfaction levels with water pressure, water quality and the reliability of the supply were highest among those with a private well, followed by those with a public mains connection. Those connected to a group scheme tended to be less satisfied, particularly with water quality.

Almost all households have hot running water in the kitchen and main bathroom. Those most likely to lack any hot running water in the accommodation were older adults living alone, residents of pre-1940 dwellings and those in the lowest income group, where about 5-6 per cent have no hot running water. It is clear that even among these groups the large majority of households have this facility in the dwelling.

Chart 5: Per cent with mains water, sewage disposal & gas by location



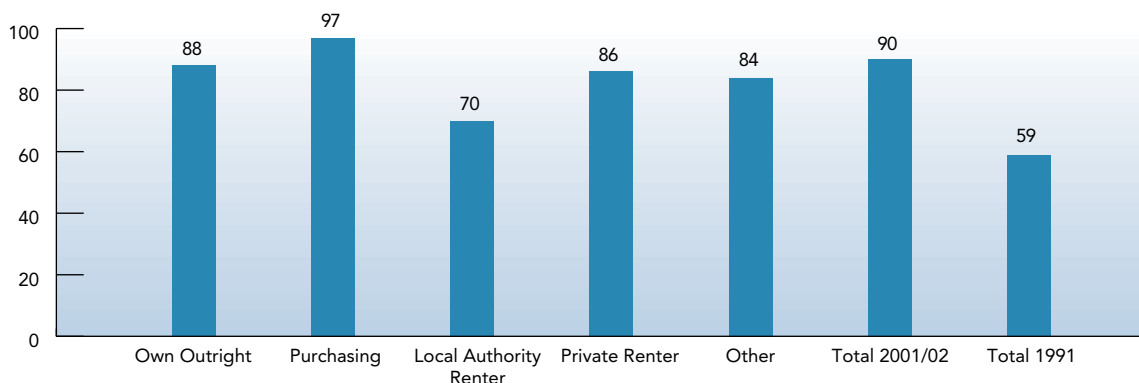
The dominant method of heating water was through the central heating system. Only a small number of households relied on a separate water heating boiler or immersion heater as the main method of heating water. Automatic time and temperature controls have the potential to increase the energy efficiency of water heating by reducing the extent to which water is heated at times when it is not being used and by ensuring that the temperature is appropriate to the household's needs. Over two-thirds of households had some automatic time control for water heating, but this was most often based on the same timer as the central heating. Nearly two-thirds of households had no convenient means of automatically controlling water temperature.

Heating

Since 1991, there has been a substantial increase in the proportion of households with central heating, increasing from 59 to 90 per cent. There has also been a shift in the fuel used for central heating away from solid fuel and towards oil and natural gas. Oil remains the dominant heating fuel: 38 per cent of households have oil central heating and a further 12 per cent have dual systems, most of which involve an oil boiler in combination with another heating source. Mains gas central heating is now found in over a quarter of households, rising to 62 per cent in the Dublin area. This move away from solid fuel, especially the use of open fires, is to be welcomed as it represents an improvement in the efficiency of heating systems.

¹ Border, Midlands and Western Region.

Chart 6: Per cent with central heating in 2001/2002 by tenure and in 1991



There are substantial differences between households in prevalence of central heating, with the lowest figures found for Local Authority renters (70 per cent), older householders living alone (75 per cent), dwellings built before 1941 (76 per cent) and households in the lowest income group (74 per cent). In contrast, over nine out of ten households in Dublin and dwellings built after 1970 have central heating.

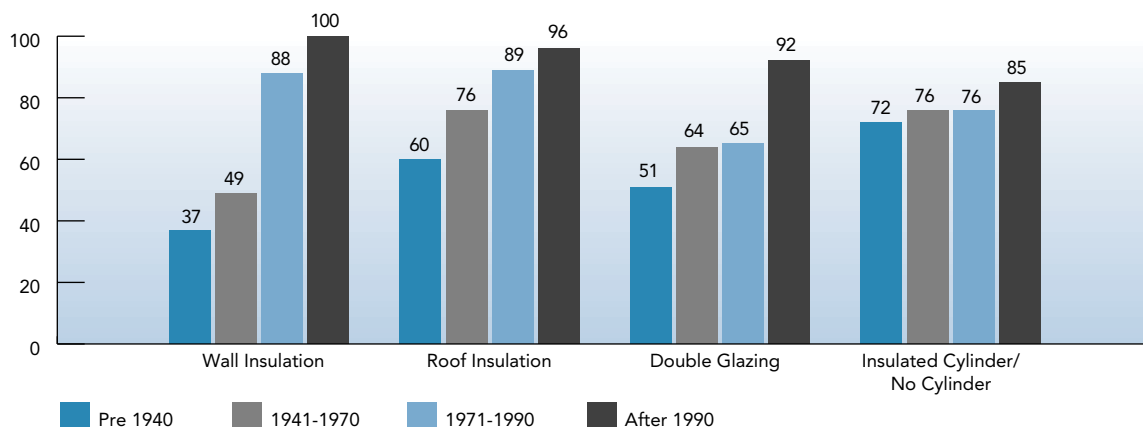
The majority of households with central heating (88 per cent) have an automatic time control on the system, but only 27 per cent have an automatic thermostat to control room temperatures. These controls are important in allowing householders to use their heating systems more efficiently.

As we might expect, households with central heating are more likely than those without it to be very satisfied with the type, ease of use, amount of heat available, control over the level of heat and running cost of the system. Those relying on an open fire or on stand-alone heaters are least likely to be very satisfied with these aspects of their heating system. Among those with central heating, levels of satisfaction are highest among those with heating based on mains gas.

Energy Efficiency and Energy Use

The energy efficiency of dwellings is strongly affected by dwelling age. In dwellings built before 1940, 63 per cent had no wall insulation compared to 24 per cent overall. Roof insulation was present in 82 per cent of dwellings overall, but in only 60 per cent of those built before 1940. Double glazing was also less likely to be present in pre-1940 dwellings, but the gap was narrower (51 per cent compared to 69 per cent overall).

Chart 7: Per cent with energy saving measures by dwelling age



There is evidence of a high level of energy-related home improvements in recent years. Among households who have been at their address for five years or more, 35 per cent have undertaken improvements in this area, with the most common being the replacement of windows (22 per cent) or external doors (19 per cent) or adding/replacing a central heating boiler (15 per cent). Only 2-3 per cent of households added wall insulation, however, and 7 per cent added roof insulation. The rate of improvement to Local Authority rented dwellings was somewhat higher than for households overall, but improvements to the pre-1940 dwellings, which are less energy-efficient, was not any greater than the rate across all households.

Chapter 7 also examines aspects of the dwelling related to increased energy use, such as having more bedrooms than are needed, presence of a bath but not a shower, electrical appliances such as a power shower, clothes dryer or dishwasher and heating based on an open fire. In general, the energy use items fell into two groups. Reliance on an open fire, having a bath but not a shower tended to characterise poorer households, older dwellings and older householders. The other indicators of energy use tended to be higher for higher-income households, younger householders and newer dwellings. More work is clearly needed in order to assess the net environmental impact of these energy-using items to the energy-savings associated with insulation and double glazing. This analysis will be needed in order to evaluate the distributional impact of carbon taxation and other measures designed to protect the environment.

It was clear from the analyses of home heating and energy efficiency that low-income households frequently live in poorly insulated, inefficiently and inadequately heated housing. The National Climate Change Strategy, in introducing measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, is committed to assessing the extent to which these measures will have an impact on such low-income households. In particular, schemes to upgrade the stock of Local Authority housing "will address energy efficiency and have a focus on alleviating fuel poverty where appropriate" (NCCS, 2000, p. 4).

Problems and Repairs

This report explores problems found in dwellings based on self-reports of the householders, and also major works and upgrades carried out in the last five years. Overall, Local Authority renters were most likely to report problems with the dwelling, but the incidence of major repairs in the last five years (not including conversions and extensions) was similar to the incidence for house purchasers.

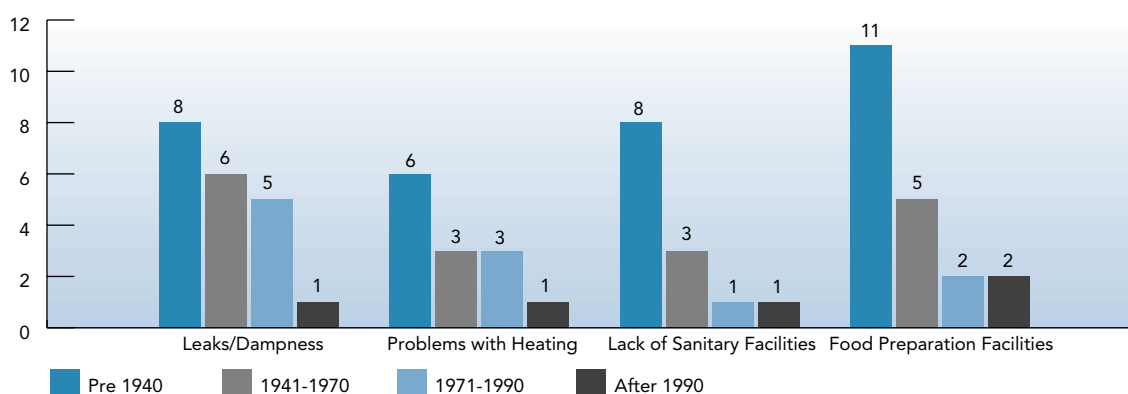
The final chapter of this report examines the overall condition of the dwelling under a number of broad headings. In this context, problems related to water ingress or dampness were most common: 5 per cent of households reported a major problem with a leaking roof, rising damp, water ingress through walls or doors/windows, condensation dampness or general dampness of unknown source. Four per cent of households lacked food preparation facilities (kitchen sink, cooking facilities, food storage, or worktop). Three per cent reported major problems in heating the accommodation; 3 per cent lacked sanitary facilities (internal water supply, waste treatment, WC); and 3 per cent had problems with ventilation (major problem with windows that do not open/close; bathroom lacks both opening window and extractor fan). About one household in eight reported at least one of these problems.

There were substantial variations in the levels of problems reported according to tenure, age of the dwelling and household income. Local Authority renters reported the highest incidence of problems (33 per cent), particularly those related to dampness (16 per cent). One-quarter of households in the lowest income group and in dwellings built before 1940 reported one of these problems with the accommodation.

Respondents were also asked how common a number of disorder problems were in their area or neighbourhood: graffiti, rubbish or litter lying about, homes and gardens in bad condition, vandalism and public drunkenness. Between 6 and 15 per cent of households overall reported these problems as being "fairly

common” or “very common”, with the higher figure for “rubbish and litter lying about”. The incidence of these neighbourhood problems was substantially higher for Local Authority residents than for other groups.

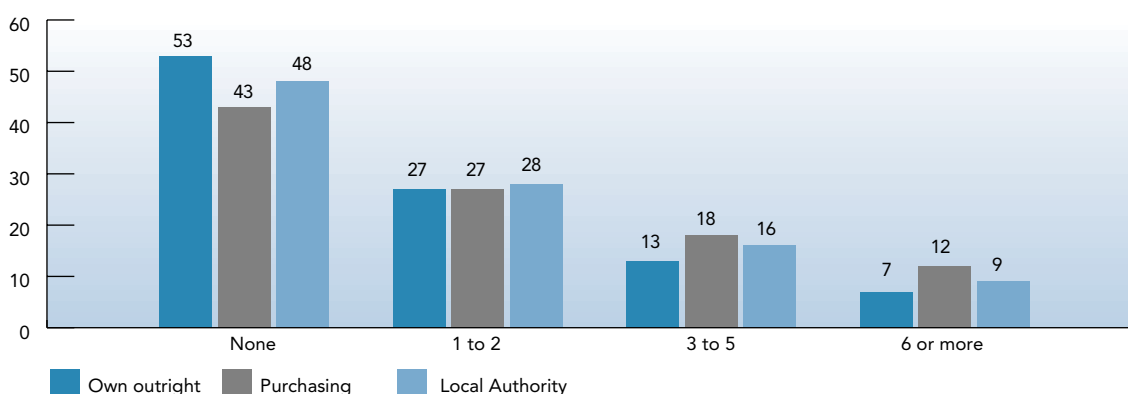
Chart 8: Per cent with reported problems with condition of dwelling by dwelling age



Major works and upgrades carried out in the last five years were examined for households who had resided at their address for five years or more. Repairs and upgrades were carried out in about half of these dwellings, with the most common being replacing windows (22 per cent), adding or refitting a kitchen (19 per cent) or bathroom (15 per cent) and replacing doors/adding a porch (18 per cent). It is significant that major works and upgrades were carried out about as often in Local Authority rented dwellings as in those being purchased on a mortgage.

Among owner-occupiers, the vast majority of repairs, upgrades and improvements were funded or carried out privately, by the householder or their family or friends. Among Local Authority renters, 62 per cent of improvements were funded by the householder, 46 per cent were funded or carried out by the Local Authority, and 6 per cent were funded by a grant¹.

Chart 9: Number of different types of upgrade in last 5 years by tenure



¹ Note that more than one funding source is possible.

Overall Housing Quality and Satisfaction

The final chapter of the report has drawn together the results of the more detailed analyses in earlier chapters to provide a broad overview of housing quality in Ireland. The household and dwelling characteristics which emerged as being most strongly related to housing quality were dwelling age, tenure and location. The key findings are summarised in the following paragraphs under each of these three headings.

Dwelling age

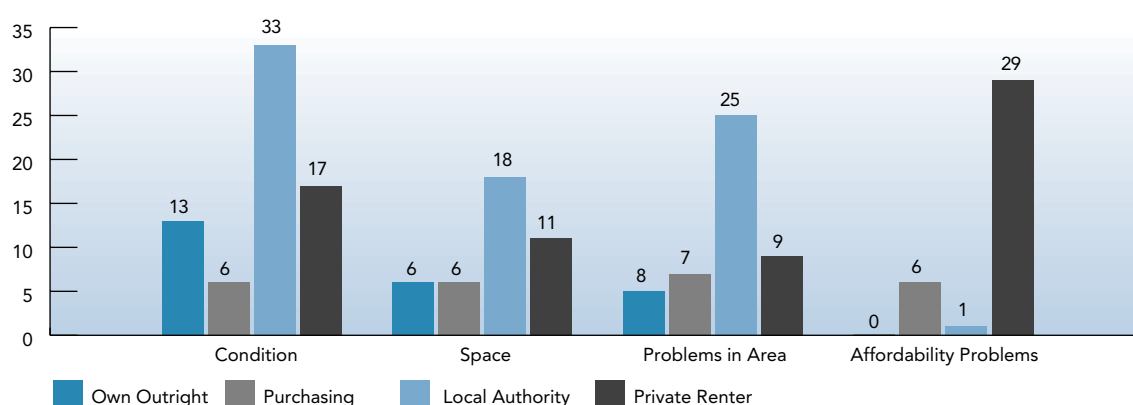
The link between dwelling age and problems with the accommodation is due in part to the fact that newer dwellings were built at a time of higher building standards in terms of insulation, damp-proofing and so on, and in part to the fact that poor maintenance in earlier years may have led to a deterioration in the dwelling fabric. To some extent, the problems are also linked to the fact that older dwellings are more often occupied by older householders on fixed incomes who are less able to afford repairs and upgrades.

Dwellings built before 1940 had a higher incidence of major problems with the condition of the accommodation, as reported by the householder. One-quarter had problems with the condition of the dwelling according to any of the five criteria examined: problems with leaks or dampness, heating, sanitary facilities, food preparation facilities and ventilation. Almost one-quarter lacked central heating and the dwellings are less likely to have wall or roof insulation than more modern buildings.

Local Authority tenure

One finding which has emerged clearly from the survey is that, across most measures of housing quality, Local Authority renters are in a less favourable position than other tenures. Two exceptions worth noting are direct housing costs and recent repairs and upgrades to the dwelling. Because of the differential rents system operated by Local Authorities, whereby rent levels are related to household income, and because Local Authority renters tend to have low incomes, Local Authority rents are low. The second respect in which Local Authority renters are not at a disadvantage is in terms of repairs and upgrades to the dwelling in recent years. In this respect, as discussed in Chapter 8, Local Authority renters fare at least as well as the other tenures.

Chart 10: Per cent with different dwelling quality problems by tenure



The reliance of the survey on judgements regarding the seriousness of problems in the accommodation is likely to affect comparisons across tenures. Renters have more of an incentive to emphasise the seriousness of the problem, in the hope of bringing about an improvement in their situation.

On the other hand, there are real reasons why we would expect to find differences in the distribution of problems across tenure types. Owners will generally have higher incomes (especially when compared to Local Authority renters) and be better able to afford to rectify problems which they regard as serious. Moreover,

maintenance, repairs and upgrades are their responsibility and they have an incentive to carry them out to reduce the risk of further deterioration to the dwelling. Renters are generally not responsible for major repairs and their incentive is very limited when it comes to costly upgrades that will enhance the value of the dwelling to the owner. Local Authority renters, in particular, are not in a strong position when it comes to problems with the dwelling. Almost by definition, they are resource-poor. With the exception of Local Authority apartments in Dublin and other cities, which have not been made available for sale by the Local Authorities, Local Authority renters whose income situation improves have traditionally purchased their accommodation and moved out of that tenure category. Moreover, they have a much more difficult time than private sector renters in “voting with their feet”: a move to the private rental sector would entail a large increase in rent paid, while there are typically long delays associated with applications to transfer to Local Authority dwellings that are considered more desirable.

Urban and rural location

The National Survey of Housing Quality, with over 40,000 cases, was designed to allow the results to be produced at the level of the Local Authority. Although this report has focused on the national situation and on broad regional patterns detailed tables are available at the Local Authority level as well. In terms of the broad regional issues, there were a number of areas where important differences were found with respect to overall house quality. Some of these will be due, in part, to the different distribution of tenures across regions. For example, Local Authority renters and private renters account for a higher proportion of all households in Dublin than in other parts of the country.

In most respects, at the national level, it was the urban or rural location of the dwelling rather than its regional location that emerged as being important. This is due to the fact that rural dwellings share common features: they tend to be detached and rural residents are more likely to own the dwelling outright and to have been at their address for longer periods than their urban counterparts.

A number of important differences between dwellings in rural and urban areas arise with respect to access to services. It was very clear, for example, that reliance on private methods of sewage disposal was almost exclusively a feature of households in the open countryside (see Chapter 5). While a greater proportion of households in the countryside had access to mains water supply, private wells and group schemes were the main source of internal water supply for over half of them. While connection to the mains electricity supply is virtually universal across both urban and rural areas, connection to the natural gas network is mainly confined to Dublin and, to a lesser extent, urban areas outside the Border, Midlands and Western region (BMW).

Differences between urban and rural areas in terms of the condition of the accommodation were relatively minor, largely because newer dwellings are found in both types of area: the rate of new house building in the open countryside has not declined substantially in the last decade. Nevertheless, rural dwellings are somewhat less likely than urban ones to have central heating and, where they do have central heating, to rely on solid fuel rather than gas or oil.

Differences in housing costs are evident in that the proportion of households paying more than one third of their income on rent or mortgage payments tends to be higher in urban than in rural areas. To some extent, this is also reflected in the fact that a higher proportion of rural dwellings has more than two bedrooms over the number required given the age and sex composition of the household.