

IRELAND'S OFFSHORE ISLANDS: HOUSING NEEDS SURVEY



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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“As a young adult [there is] no housing available on the island that is my home”
(SURVEY RESPONDENT)

This report sets out the results of research conducted between September and December 2022 regarding the housing needs of Ireland’s offshore island communities. The research, funded by Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann, aimed to:

- understand the current housing situation and circumstances prevalent on Ireland’s offshore islands;
- document quantitative and qualitative data as to the nature of housing needs for island communities;
- explore perspectives on the barriers to housing and housing issues on the islands; and
- consider how housing needs and sustainability can be best met in the coming years.

1.1 Research Context: Housing in Ireland – Trends and Recent Data

This research was carried out in the context of public and political focus on housing policy and practice in Ireland generally and on the development of an Irish islands’ policy. While the survey was being conducted in late 2022 and during the data analysis stage throughout 2023, the Irish housing and homelessness crisis continued to generate considerable attention and debate as to its causes, impacts, and solutions. Data (including from the 2022 Census of Ireland), reports on housing issues across Ireland, and a new policy and action plan regarding Ireland’s islands (Government of Ireland 2023a; Government of Ireland 2023b) were also published (see Section 1.2 below).

The lack of available affordable housing is a key social and economic concern across many contemporary societies (Lee et al, 2022). This issue has been compounded in Ireland ‘due to the culmination of worsening affordability in both rental and house purchase markets as chronic supply shortages and rising prices have persisted’ (Slaymaker et al, 2022: 11). Ireland’s housing crisis has been the subject of debate and analysis, including research on the role of the Irish state in financing housing provision (Norris, 2016), the nature and

impact of policies that treat housing as an asset or commodity (Hearne, 2017), and the increasing housing precarity faced by people in the private rental market (Bobek et al, 2021; Waldron, 2021).

Housing tenure type in Ireland can be broadly categorised across owner-occupied (with/without a mortgage), renting from a private landlord (including with support from schemes such as the Housing Assistance Payment (‘HAP’), and renting from a local authority/Approved Housing Body. In 2021, the Irish Government published a housing plan that, in addition to targets for social housing, also included targets to build more affordable homes to purchase or rent (Government of Ireland, 2021).

Data from the 2022 Irish Census (CSO, 2023) indicate that:

- the home ownership rate in Ireland is decreasing;
- there is an increase in households in rental accommodation;¹
- the average weekly rent is €273 (37% higher than recorded in Census 2016);² and
- since 2016 there has been an 83% increase in the number of people aged 65 years and over renting from a private landlord.³

1.2 Recent Developments: Ireland’s Islands Policy and Action Plan

In June 2023, the Irish Government, through the Department of Rural and Community Development, published ‘Our Living Islands: National Islands Policy 2023-2033’ (Government of Ireland, 2023a). This includes, under Strategic Objective 1 (*Revitalise population levels on the islands*), policy initiatives informed by consultation and research⁴ regarding the housing needs and experience of island communities and the unique housing challenges faced by island communities. ‘Our Living Islands: Action Plan 2023-2026’ (Government of Ireland, 2023b) details policy measures, lead Government departments, stakeholders, and time frames to address the strategic objectives under National Islands Policy. In this respect, housing action plans (GoI, 2023b) include:

- Planning Guidelines for Rural Housing to acknowledge island challenges;
- Vacant Home Officers to identify and develop a reactivation programme for derelict properties the islands;
- Additional grant support for vacant housing on the islands (under Croí Cónaithe);
- A programme for delivery of new social homes on the islands;
- Examination of the potential for Approved Housing Bodies to address housing needs on the islands to support a community-led response (including gateway housing for essential workers and new residents).

1.3 Survey Design and Dissemination

An online Housing Needs Survey, developed by Comhar na nOileán in consultation with island communities, was carried out over a three-month period from 2 September to 2 December 2022. The survey sought information as to housing needs on Ireland’s offshore islands, across four regions (Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Cork).⁵

The survey was widely distributed by Comhar na nOileán through their networks. It was open to Ireland’s offshore islands residents (over the age of 18) as well as to previous residents on the islands and those who wish to move to the islands.

1 Slaymaker et al (2022) highlight that such reliance on the private rental sector is lasting for longer periods than experienced by previous generations.

2 Using figures based on 2019’s Eurostat Survey on Living Conditions (EU-SILC) data, Disch and Slaymaker (2023: viii) found that, on average, households in Ireland (both mortgage holders and renters) paid approximately 20% of their net incomes on their housing payment costs. They note the impact and availability of housing allowances and social housing on alleviating housing costs in some instances.

3 Slaymaker et al (2022: ix) draw attention to the financial risks as to how renting households will manage ongoing rent payments in the context of reduced income on retirement.

4 Including research on housing and sustaining communities on the West Cork Islands (O’Sullivan and Desmond, 2022).

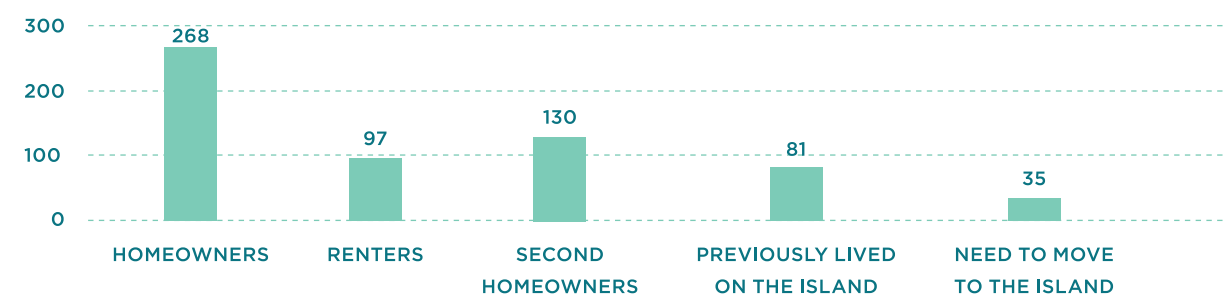
5 As the survey included people currently living on the islands as well as those wishing to return to/move to islands that may not be currently populated, the survey provided a list of named offshore islands for respondents to select and, where relevant, an opportunity to include an island name in open text (‘Other, Please Specify’). Regarding the term ‘offshore island’, the policy and action plan context (e.g. GoI, 2023a) refers to islands that are not connected to the mainland via a bridge or causeway.

Respondents selected their 'best description' category from a list provided as follows:

1. Full-time Resident (Homeowners) where their main place of residence is owned by them or their family. This category also includes adult children living in the family home;
2. Full-time Resident (Renters) where their place of residence is rented by them or their family. This category also includes adult children living in the family home;
3. Second Homeowners who do not live full-time on the islands;
4. People who previously lived on the islands;
5. People who have not previously lived on the island but would like to, or need to, move to the islands.

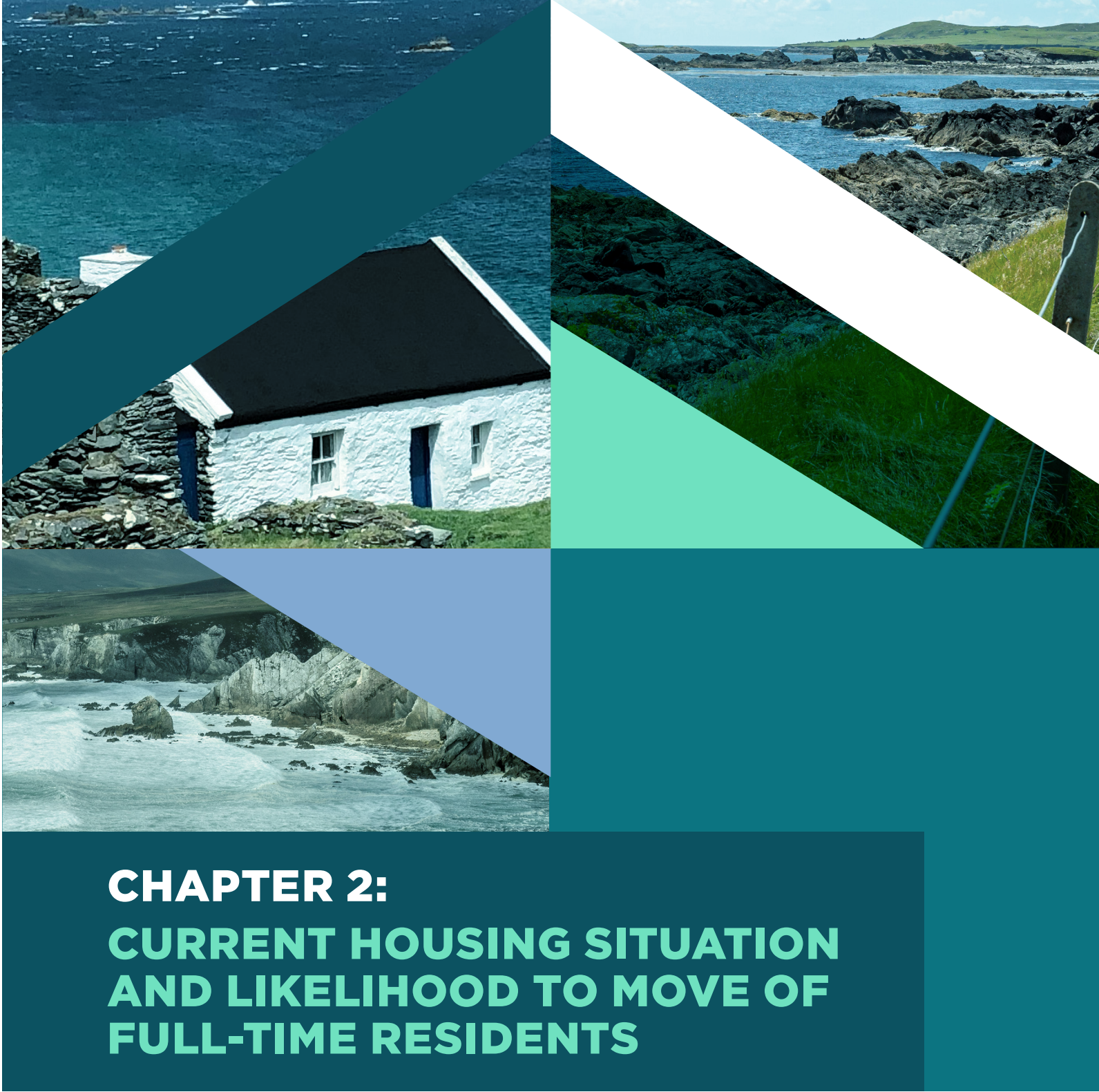
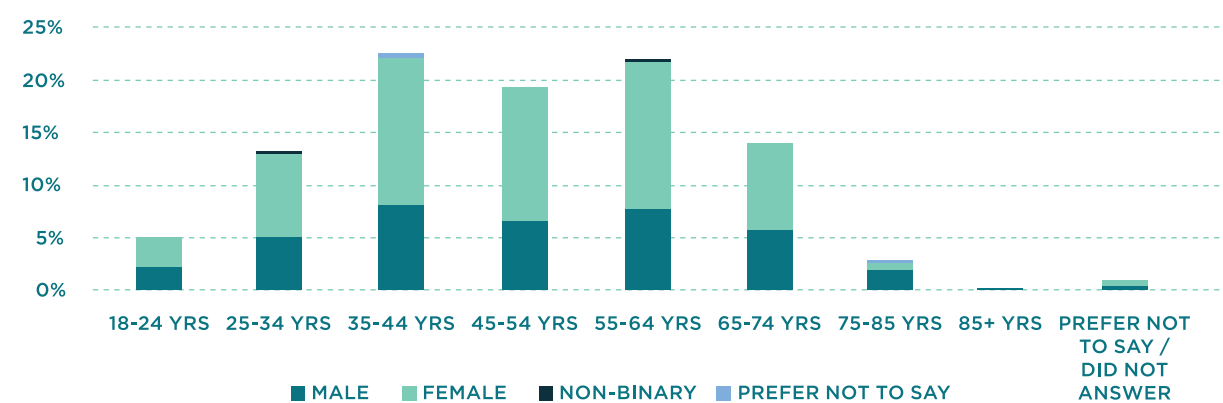
The data provided a volunteer sample insight, i.e. data relates to people who completed the survey, not a representative sample. In total, 611 people participated in the survey. As shown in Figure 1, 365 full-time residents of Ireland's offshore islands completed the survey, consisting of homeowners (n=268) and renters (n=97). This represents 60% of all survey respondents. 43 respondents within the homeowner category indicated that they were living in the family home with parent(s). 4 respondents within the renter category indicated living in the family home with parent(s) as their living situation. Second homeowners account for 21% (n=130) of total responses received. 81 respondents had previously lived on the islands, accounting for 13% of responses, and 35 respondents wish to/need to move to the islands, accounting for 6% of responses.

FIGURE 1: NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS ACROSS CATEGORY TYPES (ALL ISLAND REGIONS)



The Galway islands region accounted for 44% of responses, followed by Cork (31%), Donegal (14%) and Mayo (11%). Female respondents accounted for 61% of all respondents to the survey (n=372), 38% were male (n=234), 0.3% (n=2) non-binary, and 0.5% (n=3) preferred not to say. Most respondents were between the age of 35 and 64 as shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2: AGE AND GENDER OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS



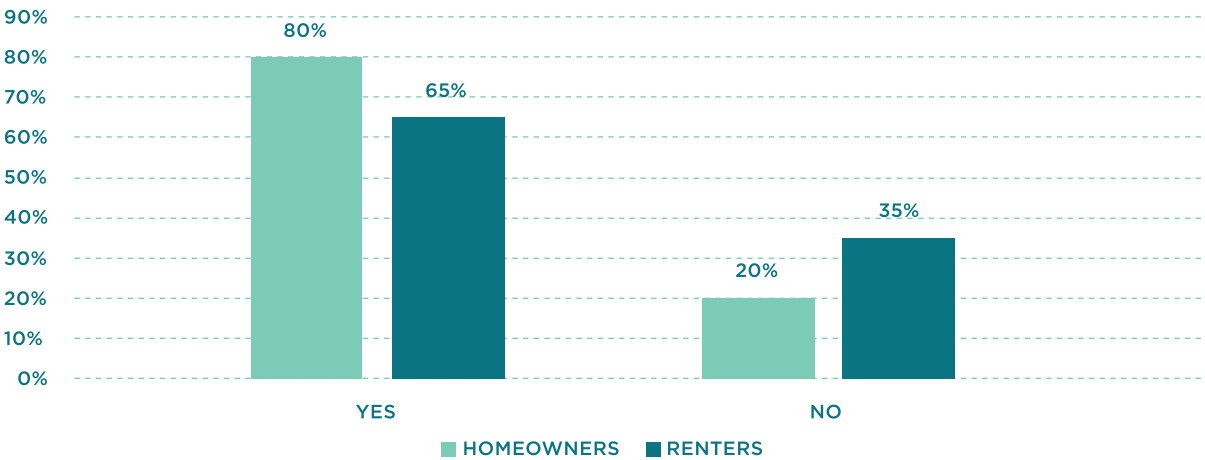
CHAPTER 2: CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION AND LIKELIHOOD TO MOVE OF FULL-TIME RESIDENTS

Key Points:

1. Fewer renters indicated that their current home was suitable to their needs (65%), compared to homeowners (80%).
2. A high percentage of renters stated that they are very likely/likely to move in the next 5 years (79%).
3. 'Reasons relating to the building/property' were the most-selected reason for likelihood to move by homeowners and renters.
4. Security of tenure and property sale were also key reasons for likelihood to move for renters, as were reasons relating to the state of repair of the property.

While 80% of respondent homeowners (n=214) indicated that their current home was suitable to their needs, 65% of respondent renters (n=63) indicated their current home was suitable to their needs (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: IS YOUR HOME SUITABLE TO YOUR NEEDS?



83% of full-time residents in the Donegal and Mayo island regions stated that their current home was suitable for the needs, compared to 76% in the Galway island region and 70% in the Cork island region.

Of the respondents across all island regions who indicated that their current home was not suitable for their needs, the main reasons related to the house being too small, the property not meeting basic requirements/facilities, and not enough bedrooms. Respondents also highlighted the condition of their home and the need for renovation, as shown in Figure 4, which were concerns noted by more renters than homeowners (see also Figure 7 in section 2.1 below).

- “Poor energy efficiency and high energy bills”
(RENTER RESPONDENT)
- “Old house that needs total upgrading, insulation etc”
(HOMEOWNER RESPONDENT)
- “Not suitable heating and dealing with damp”
(RENTER RESPONDENT)

Figure 4: Full-Time Resident Quotes – Why is your home not suitable to your needs?

81% (n=79) of renters stated that they were renting their home from a private landlord. This was followed by 8% renting from local authority, 6% from a voluntary or co-operative housing body, and 4% renting from a private landlord supported through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). In terms of affordability, almost half of renters (48%) stated that less than 30% of their monthly income goes towards rent. One third (33%) stated that 30% of their income goes towards rent, 12% stated that 40% of their income goes towards rent, and 6% stated that 50% of their incomes goes towards rent.⁶ While almost one third of renters (32%) identified the cost of rent as a factor impacting their renting on the islands, the most significant factor renters identified was lack of available housing for long-term rent (75%), followed by lack of suitable housing for long-term rent (52%), and security of tenure (46%).⁷

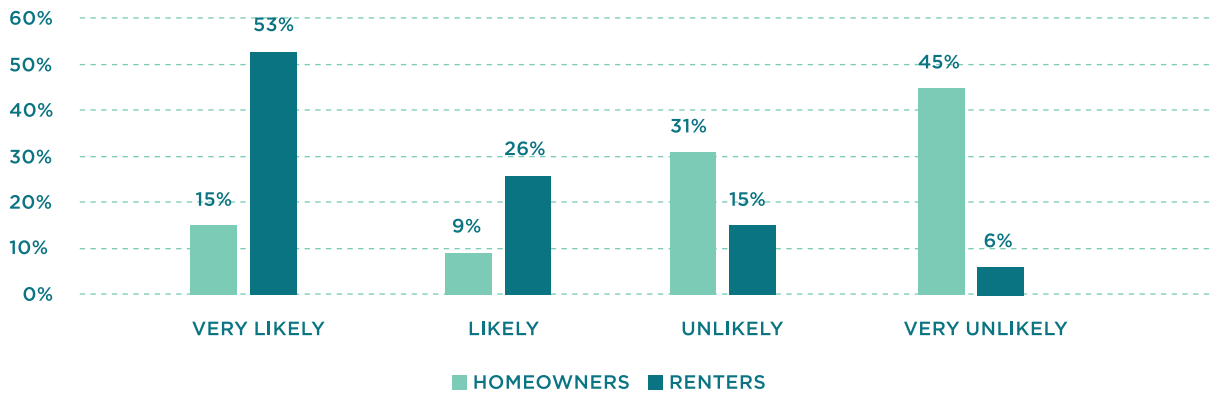
6 These are rounded figures for the purposes of reporting.
7 A number of survey questions offered a ‘select all that apply’ range of options. This means that some percentages add up to more 100% as respondents could select multiple options.

2.1 Likelihood to Move in the Next 5 Years and Reasons Why

- “Fuar & Tais, teach níos fadthearmaí uaim dá dtabhairfidh cead plaenála dhom!”
(HOMEOWNER RESPONDENT)
- “[The] landlord is thinking about selling”
(RENTER RESPONDENT)
- “Má bhíonn páistí againn, Beidh orainn áit feiliúnach a fháil”
(HOMEOWNER RESPONDENT)

Overall, 39% of full-time residents (n=142) stated they were very likely or likely to move home within the next 5 years. As Figure 5 shows, 79% of respondent renters (n=76)⁸ indicated that they were very likely/likely to move home within the next 5 years compared to 25%⁹ of respondent homeowners (n=66). Of the 66 homeowners likely to move, 27 are adult children living in the family home.

FIGURE 5: LIKELIHOOD TO MOVE IN NEXT 5 YEARS (FULL-TIME RESIDENTS)

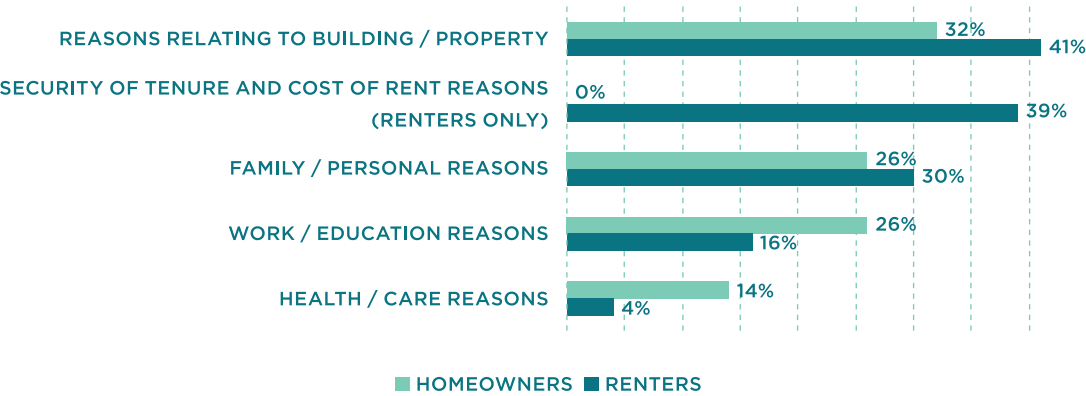


8 Not all respondents answered all questions. Unless otherwise indicated, ‘respondents’ refer to those who provided an answer to the question, rather than to the overall total of people who completed the survey.
9 Rounded up from 15.3% Very Likely and 9.3% Likely (24.6%)

46% of full-time residents in the Galway island region stated that they were very likely/likely to move home within the next 5 years, higher than Cork (36%), Donegal, (31%), and Mayo (25%) figures.

The reasons why full-time residents were likely to move are shown in Figure 6 and primarily centred on reasons relating to the building/property, family/personal reasons, and work/education reasons.

FIGURE 6: REASON FOR LIKELIHOOD TO MOVE WITHIN THE NEXT 5 YEARS (FULL-TIME RESIDENTS)



When asked for more detail as to the reasons for moving that related to the building/property, 60% of homeowners indicated a need to move to a larger home and 48% of renters indicated their need to build a new home. Compared to homeowners, a higher percentage of renters identified issues with the condition of their home and the need for retrofitting as described in Figure 7.

FIGURE 7: ISSUES WITH PROPERTY RELATED TO STATE OF REPAIR / RETROFITTING NEED

Reasons relating to the building/property	Homeowners	Renters
Home in Bad State of Repair	15%	29%
Home Requires Retrofitting	30%	42%

For renters, one of the predominant reasons for likelihood to move was security of tenure and costs of rent reasons (39%). Within this sub-category, 'landlord request to move out' (52%) and 'no all year round housing available' (45%) were the most-selected options.



CHAPTER 3: HOUSING NEED OF FULL-TIME RESIDENTS AND BARRIERS TO REMAINING ON THE ISLANDS

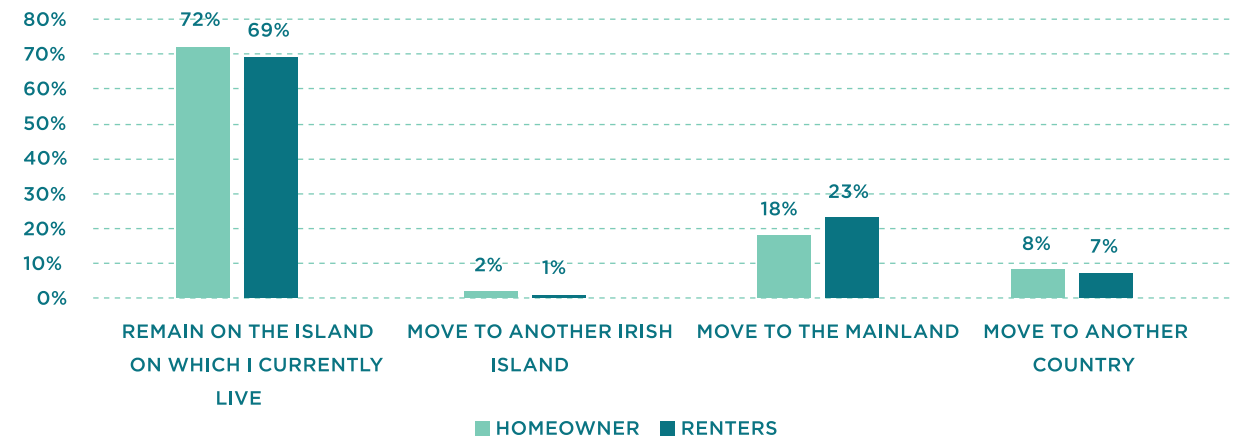
Key Points:

- 1. A majority of full-time residents that are likely to move from their current home within the next 5 years want to remain on the offshore islands.
- 2. For those respondents indicating they are likely to move away from the islands, the majority stated that their decision is influenced by the housing situation on the islands.
- 3. The housing barriers to remaining on the islands that respondents identified include availability of houses/property for sale and cost of houses/property for sale. Renters also identified lack of available rental accommodation. Affordability is a key issue emerging.
- 4. Similar percentages of both homeowners (51%) and renters (48%) also identified being unable to get planning permission as an issue that would prevent them from remaining on the islands.

3.1 Where full-time residents would like to live

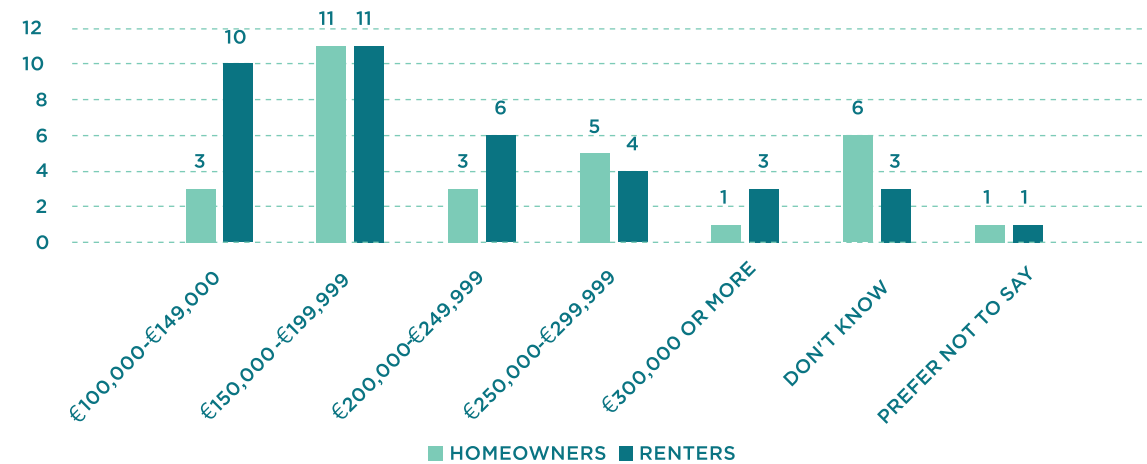
Of those full-time residents indicating that they are very likely/likely to move from their current home within the next 5 years (n=142), a significant majority totalling 72% (n=101) wish to remain living on the offshore islands. This entails 74% of respondent homeowners (n=48, which includes 19 adult children living in the family home), and 70% of respondent renters (n=53) as shown in Figure 8. 28% of respondents who stated they are likely to move indicated that they would move to the mainland or to another country (30% of renters, n=22, and 26% of homeowners, n=17).

FIGURE 8: IF LIKELY/VERY LIKELY TO MOVE, WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO?



Of those who wish to remain on the islands, a house owned outright or with a mortgage was the preferred property and tenure type (68% of respondents, n=68) with the price range of €150,000-€199,999 the most selected option (see Figure 9). It is also worth noting that 15% (n=7) of homeowners who stated they are likely to move indicated that their preferred type of housing would be sheltered housing. 25% (n=25) of respondents stated their preferred tenure type would be to rent, mainly in social housing from an Approved Housing Body (AHB) or local authority.

FIGURE 9: PRICE RANGE OF PURCHASE OF HOME (FULL-TIME RESIDENTS)



Renting from a private landlord is also a desirable option in the event respondents were not able to buy their next home. Of those respondents indicating a willingness to rent their next home (whether in the event of being unable to buy or a preferred option from the outset), the most selected rental costs respondents would be willing to pay ranged from €350 to €864 per month.

Of the 43 respondents within the homeowner category who live in the family home with parent(s), 27 stated that it was very likely/likely that they will move in the next 5 years. 19 wish to remain on the Irish islands. Of those 19 respondents, 1 indicated that they are on the Social Housing list and 9 stated that they require affordable housing. Of the 53 renters who indicated a likelihood to move in the next five years and a wish to remain on the Irish islands, 4 stated that they are on the social housing list and 27 indicated that they require affordable housing. Of those respondents providing information as to their needs for affordable housing (adult children living in the family home and renters indicating a need for affordable housing) 1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom properties were the most prevalent selections as to type of affordable housing needed.

3.2 Barriers to Remaining on the Islands

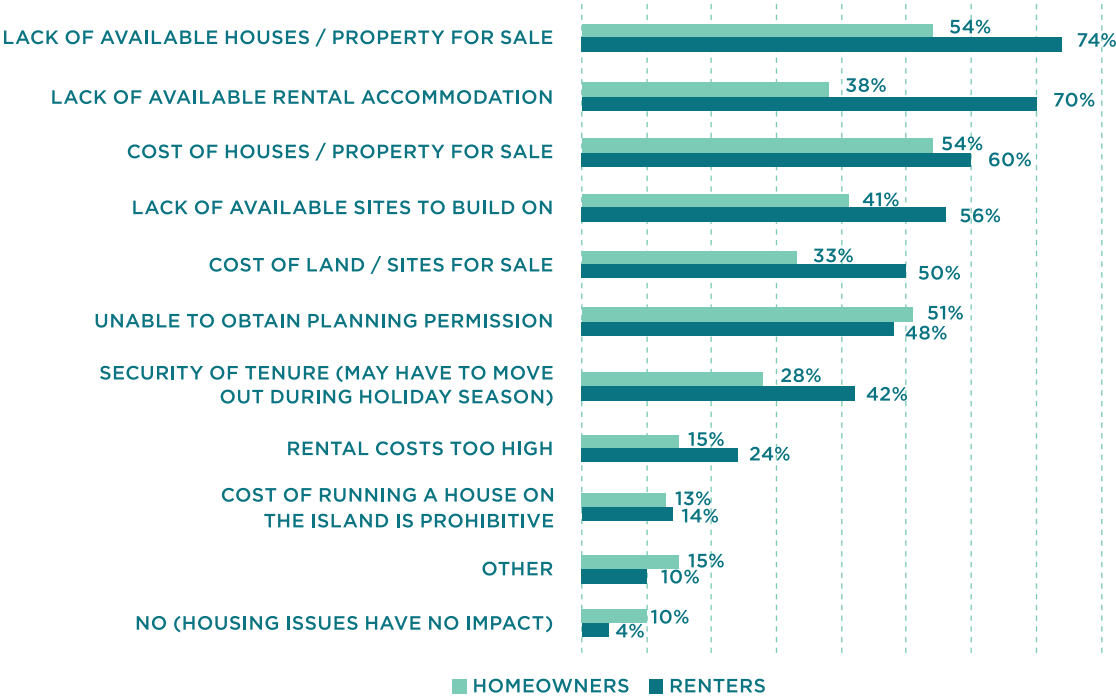
For those who wish to remain on the island on which they currently live or to move to another Irish island, several housing issues were identified that would prevent them from remaining. As shown in Figure 10, these include lack of available houses/property for sale (74% of renters, 54% of homeowners), lack of available rental accommodation (70% of renters) and cost of houses/property for sale (60% of renters, 54% of homeowners). A similar percentage of homeowners and renters referred to being unable to get planning permission as a housing issue that would prevent them from remaining on the islands (48% of renters, 51% of homeowners).

“[We] need to buy. If we can't find a suitable property to purchase, we will leave.”
(RENTER RESPONDENT)

“Most property is an air B&B or left to ruin.”
(RENTER RESPONDENT)

“Too many tourist accommodations and not enough to even cover staff to cater for said tourists!”
(RENTER RESPONDENT)

FIGURE 10: HOUSING ISSUES THAT WOULD PREVENT YOU FROM REMAINING ON THE ISLANDS



Of those respondents who indicated that they would move to the mainland or to another country (28%, n=39), housing issues also impacts that likelihood. In this respect, 72% of homeowners (n=10) and 82% of renters (n=18) who indicated that they would move away from the islands stated that they would remain if they could afford to rent, buy, or build a home on the island. Specific housing issues on the islands that impact their likelihood to remain are similar to those who do wish to remain on the islands and include lack of available houses/property for sale and for rental accommodation, cost of houses/property for sale, and planning permission. For renters, key concerns are security of tenure and lack of rental accommodation on the islands.



CHAPTER 4: LATENT HOUSING DEMAND

Key Points:

1. Respondents indicated other household members as having a housing need on the islands.
2. Housing issues impacting other household members reflect the housing issues noted above.
3. Improved infrastructure, services and access would influence second homeowners' decision to move to the islands permanently.
4. 'Lack of available houses/property for sale' and 'unable to obtain planning permission' are issues identified as potentially preventing former island residents from returning to live on the islands.
5. A house that is owned outright/owned with a mortgage was the most preferred property and tenure type for those wishing to return to the islands and those needing to move to the islands.

For most respondents, the 'other member of the household' related to their child and work/education was selected as the reason for likelihood to move by a majority of respondents (61% of homeowners, 41% of renters). Reasons relating to the size or facilities within the current property were also stated by 12% of homeowners and 32% of renters.

85% of homeowners and 86% of renters indicated that their other household members who are likely to need to move within the next 5 years wished to remain on the islands. However, respondents identified key housing issues that may prevent other household members from remaining, including lack of available rental accommodation, unable to obtain planning permission, security of tenure, lack of available houses/property for sale, lack of available sites on which to build, and cost of houses/property for sale.

“Cost of building a house on the island is prohibitive.”

(HOMEOWNER RESPONDENT)

“We have no land, and the cost of building here is so high, full-time work isn't available here. They wouldn't be able to afford to build and there are very few houses available to rent long term.”

(HOMEOWNER RESPONDENT)

“There are no houses available for any new families to rent on the island. [...] The school will close, and the island community will die if houses are not made available to rent long term on the island. Once the school closes it will not open again and it will be too late. It means my children will not be able to come home and raise their children here in the future.”

(HOMEOWNER RESPONDENT)

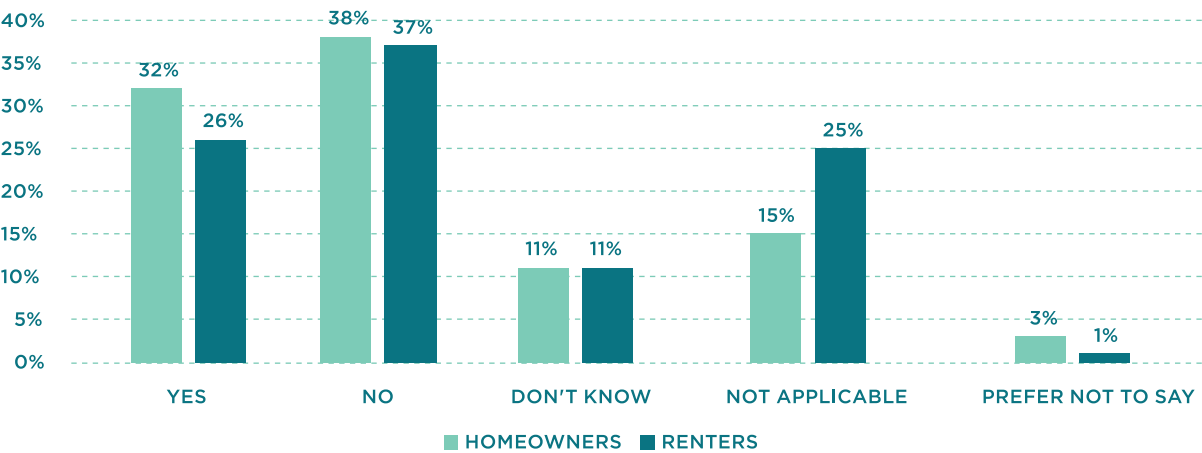
“Planning permission refused, no rental properties available, no security of tenure in the many holiday homes, [family member] is between a rock and a hard place!”

(RENTER RESPONDENT)

4.1 Other Household Members

Almost one third (32%, n=76) of homeowners and just over a quarter of renters (26%, n=23) who provided relevant information indicated that there are other members of their household who are likely to move within the next 5 years as shown in Figure 11.

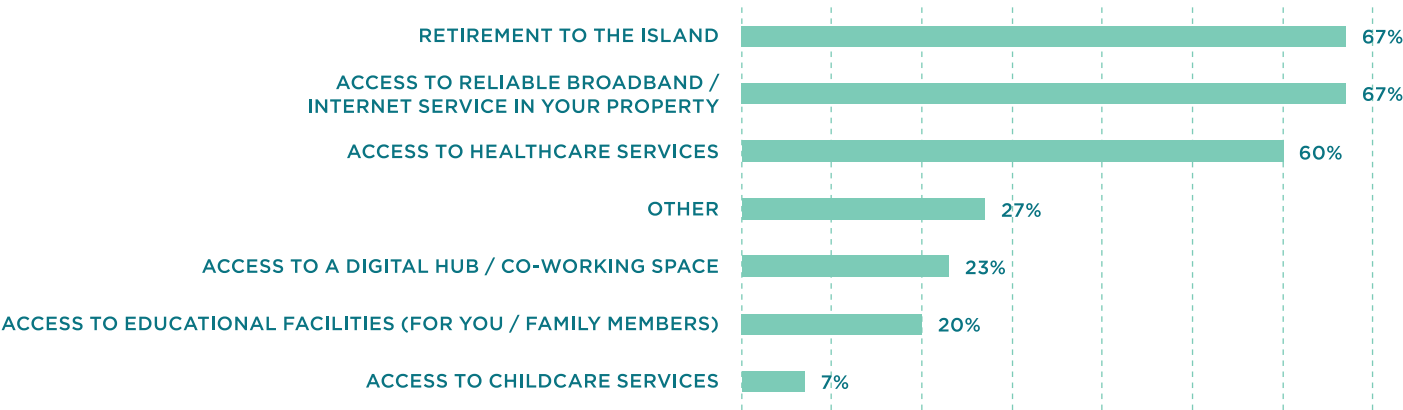
FIGURE 11: OTHER HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS, LIKELIHOOD TO MOVE WITHIN THE NEXT 5 YEARS



4.2 Second Homeowners who Wish to Live on the Islands Full-time

58% of respondent second homeowners (n=75) indicated that they would consider moving to the island (now or in the future). 28% (n=36) indicated that they were 'not sure', the remainder stating 'no'. Factors influencing the decision to move full-time to the island (of those who indicated yes and not sure) are shown in Figure 12. These include on retirement and access to services and infrastructure, in particular broadband and healthcare, as well as increased ferry services and pier upgrades documented in the 'other' category.

FIGURE 12: FACTORS THAT WOULD INFLUENCE SECOND HOMEOWNERS TO MOVE TO ISLANDS FULL-TIME



4.3 Respondents who Previously Lived on the Islands

Of those survey respondents who previously lived on the island (n=81), the main reasons for leaving the islands related to employment opportunities (73%), education purposes (56%), and limited housing availability (26%). Most of the respondents (61%) who previously lived on the islands were born on the islands, while 40% had family members currently living on the islands, and 31% had previously worked on the islands.¹⁰

78 respondents provided answers as to whether they wish to return to the islands to live: 55 (71%) indicated ‘yes’, 18 (23%) ‘maybe’ and 5 (6%) ‘no’. Of those respondents wishing to return to the islands to live, 93% (n=68) indicated a ‘house’ as the ideal type of property they would like to obtain on the island, with ‘owned outright’ (40%) and ‘owned with a mortgage’ (40%) emerging as the most selected tenure type. A range of €150,000-€199,000 was the most selected price range for a home on the island, as shown in Figure 13, with monthly mortgage costs of €520-€864 and €854-€1299 the most selected cost ranges.

FIGURE 13: PRICE RANGE OF PURCHASE OF HOME
(RESPONDENTS THAT PREVIOUSLY LIVED ON THE ISLANDS)



Renting from a private or local authority landlord (both 70%) or from an Approved Housing Body (65%) were signalled as desirable options in the event respondents would be unable to buy, and the most selected rental costs respondents would be willing to pay ranged from €350 to €864 per month. While just 1 respondent who previously lived on the islands and wishes to return to the islands to live indicated that they are currently on a social housing list, 18 respondents indicated a requirement for affordable housing.

The lack of available houses/property for sale was the most prevalent issue identified as impacting the respondents’ decision to move back to the islands, followed by obtaining planning permission, and the costs of houses/property for sale.

“Building costs are prohibitive; access to mortgage is another challenge.”
(PREVIOUSLY LIVED ON THE ISLANDS RESPONDENT)

4.4 Respondents who Need to Move to the Islands

35 survey respondents stated that they have not previously lived on the island but would like to, or need to, move to the islands. Most stated that the reason they would like to or need to move to the islands is because they have family members currently living on the island. It is of note that the second largest reason to move to the island among the respondents is for the language and culture on the islands. A smaller proportion stated that they need to work or wish to work on the islands.

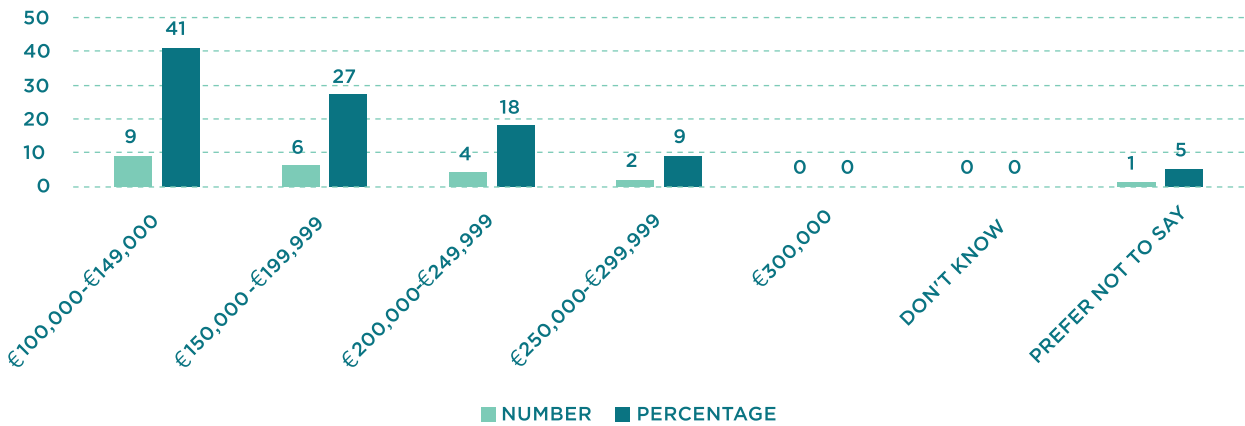
10 16% of respondents in this category included an ‘other’ response and 5% referred to ancestral connections to the islands.

“To immerse our young family in the Irish language and culture.”
(RESPONDENT - NEEDS TO/ WOULD LIKE TO MOVE TO THE ISLANDS)

“We would like to reconnect with our traditional Irish culture.”
(RESPONDENT - NEEDS TO/WOULD LIKE TO MOVE TO THE ISLANDS)

Most respondents (91%, n=30) selected ‘house’ as the type of property they would like to obtain on the islands. In terms of tenure, the preferences were for ‘owned outright’ (55%), ‘owned with a mortgage’ (15%) and renting (27%). Of those respondents who would like to own their home on the island, most selected the price range of €100,000-€149,000 (41%), followed by €150,000-€199,999 (27%) as shown in Figure 14, with monthly mortgage costs of €520-€864 and €854-€1299 the most selected cost ranges.

FIGURE 14: PRICE RANGE OF PURCHASE OF HOME
(RESPONDENTS WHO NEED TO MOVE TO THE ISLANDS)



Renting from a private or social landlord is also a desirable option in the event respondents would be unable to buy and the most selected rental costs respondents would be willing to pay ranged from €350 to €1,299 per month. No respondent who wishes to or needs to move to the islands indicated that they were currently on a social housing list. However, 9 respondents did indicate a requirement for affordable housing.

The most prevalent housing issues that would prevent these respondents from moving to the islands included lack of available houses/property for sale, the cost of houses/property for sale, and lack of available rental accommodation.



CHAPTER 5: VIEWS ON DERELICT PROPERTIES, PLANNING, AND HOUSING INITIATIVES

Key Points:

1. Derelict properties are viewed as a problem/major problem by survey respondents.
2. In the context of concerns over the lack of available housing for younger generations, derelict properties are seen as an underused option to address housing shortages on the islands.
3. Respondents would like schemes to be developed and expanded to ensure the renovation of derelict properties for use by permanent residents living on the islands.
4. Respondents also expressed frustration with planning permission processes, with a particular focus on communication, limited feedback, and lengthy time frames within the processes.
5. Respondents support a range of housing options, including community-owned/island-run housing schemes, and social housing.

5.1 Derelict Properties

Respondent homeowners, renters, second homeowners, and respondents who previously lived on the islands and would like to return to the islands to live were asked about their views on derelict properties on the islands.¹¹ The majority of respondents across these categories stated that derelict houses were somewhat of a problem/a major problem (64%, n=396).

Respondents that identified derelict properties as a problem were invited to put forward comments on this issue and how it can be tackled. While there were a variety of points put forward, respondents tended to point towards the asset/solution offered by a stock of derelict properties on the islands that could be renovated to provide housing. Respondents tended to prefer that such renovated properties be used for housing full-time residents, in particular families and young people.

¹¹ Respondents indicating a need/wish to move to the islands were not asked about derelict properties.



“There are a number of derelict houses [...] which appear structurally sound and could easily be restored, but if funding is available for this it should be stipulated that any such restoration is for permanent dwelling and not used for [short term lets].”

(HOMEOWNER RESPONDENT)

“Derelict houses should be refurbished and be made available for rent/affordable houses.”

(RENTER RESPONDENT)

“Tá fadhb le tideal ar an talamh mar nach raibh tiomna déanta”

(SECOND HOMEOWNER RESPONDENT)

“There should be [Compulsory Purchase Order] of derelict houses”

(SECOND HOMEOWNER RESPONDENT)

“They could be bought if possible and renovated for new families to move to the island.”

(HOMEOWNER RESPONDENT)

“Derelict houses are sold to the highest bidding tourist. Young islanders have no realistic chance of owning property.”

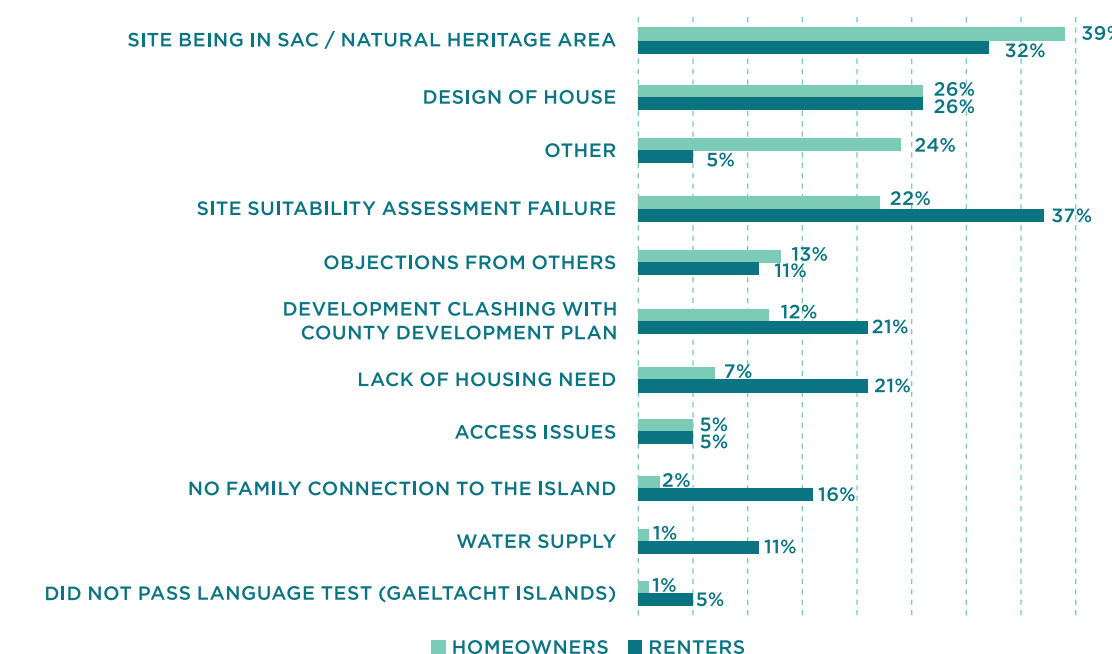
(PREVIOUSLY LIVED ON THE ISLANDS RESPONDENT)

Respondents identified difficulties in ascertaining legal title and ownership of such properties and the under-use of derelict properties by their owners. Respondents referred to the need for a compulsory purchase scheme for such properties and suggestions included compulsory purchase after specific time periods of dereliction. Taxation of derelict properties and grant aid for renovation were also recurring proposals.

5.2 Respondents' Experience With Planning

30% of full-time residents (n=108, n=89 of homeowners, n=19 of renters) stated that they experienced difficulties with the planning permission process including refusal for new build, renovation, or extension. 101 full-time residents provided details as to reasons for the refusal of planning permission. The most-selected reasons related to site being in a national heritage area, followed by site suitability assessment failure as shown in Figure 15.

FIGURE 15: SELF-REPORTED REASONS FOR PLANNING PERMISSION REFUSAL (FULL-TIME RESIDENTS)



In open text comments, full-time residents (homeowners and renters) noted difficulties related to the length of the process, difficulty getting feedback or consultation and clarity from the local authority, and the cost of the process. 44% of the full-time residents who stated that they experienced difficulties with planning permission processes, said that this could threaten their tenure on the island (n=34 of homeowners, n=14 of renters).



“Make it easier for families with children to get planning permission.”

(HOMEOWNER RESPONDENT)

“If my children are not allowed to build on family land when/if they plan on moving back to the island I would probably move to where they are located”

(HOMEOWNER RESPONDENT)

“moving home is a huge decision and people already have lots of doubts and concerns. They should be encouraging and incentivising people to move home.”

(PREVIOUSLY LIVED ON THE ISLAND RESPONDENT)

“It is frustrating, I am [young] and have the means to build a home here, but there are so many barriers put up that it’s almost off-putting, the islands are begging out for young people to move back home, I’m one that is able to but it’s not being made easy for me and I’ve not received any type of support.”

(HOMEOWNER CATEGORY RESPONDENT)

“An islands specific policy is needed as opposed to being under the same planning rules as the mainland.”

(RENTER RESPONDENT)

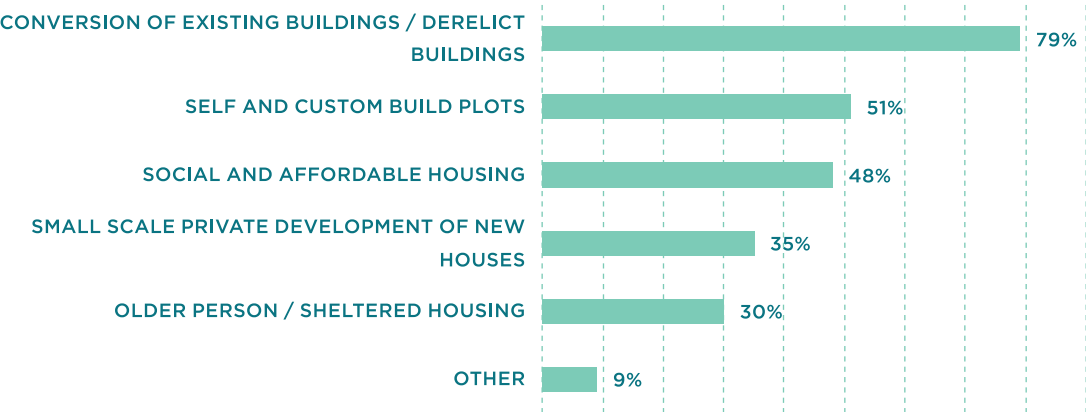
28% of other respondents (n=66) also stated that they experienced difficulties with the planning permission process relating to the islands, with 56% of those stating that this could threaten their tenure on the island (n=19 second homeowners, 16 respondents that want to return to the islands to live, and 2 that want/need to move to the islands).



5.3 Suggestions and Support for Housing Initiatives

Regarding the types of housing development respondents would like to see on the islands, as illustrated in Figure 16, conversion of existing/derelict buildings was the most selected option of all survey respondents (79%, n=419). This was followed by self and custom build plots (51%), and social and affordable housing (48%).

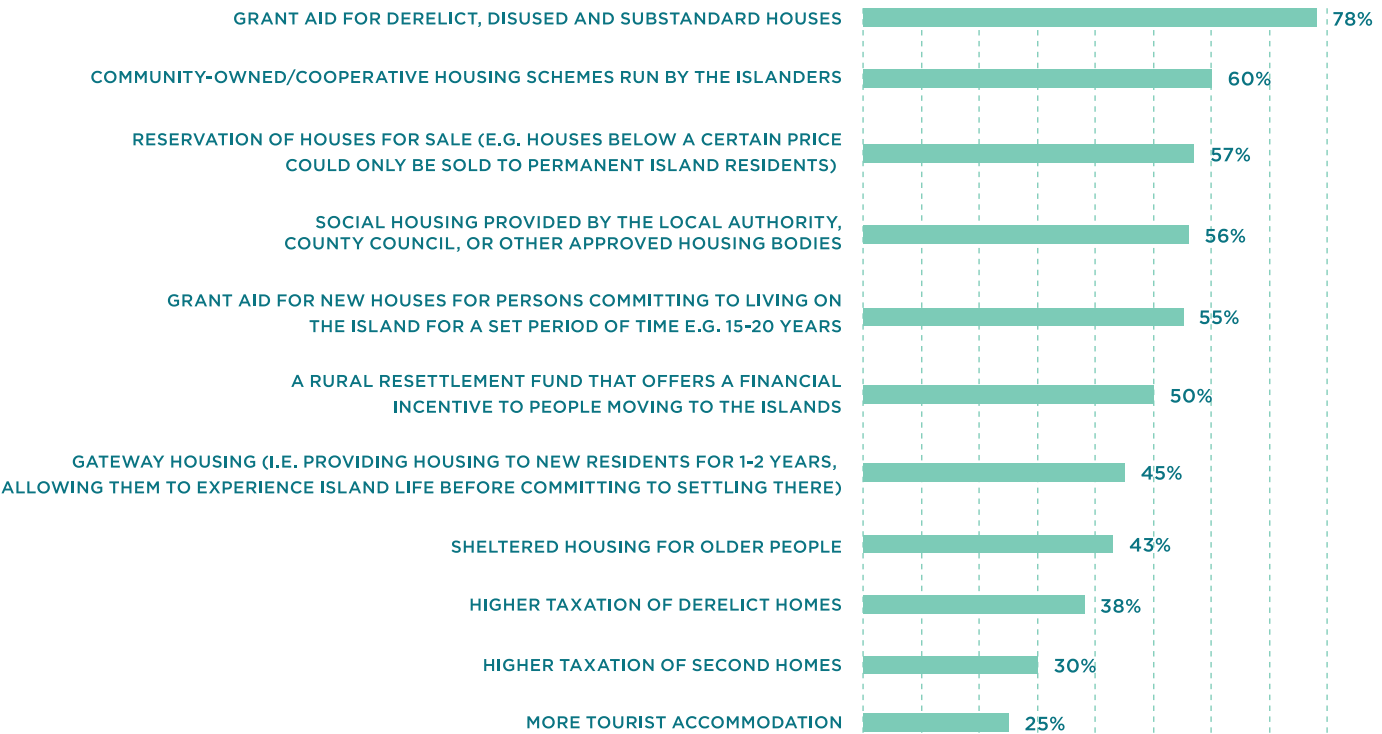
FIGURE 16: PREFERRED TYPES OF HOUSING DEVELOPMENT, ALL SURVEY RESPONDENTS



Conversion of existing / derelict buildings was particularly highly selected by respondents wishing to move to the islands (94%). It is also notable that social and affordable housing was selected by 66% of renters.

In relation to housing initiatives, as illustrated in Figure 17, grant aid for derelict and substandard houses also received considerable support across all respondent categories (78%, n=396). In the open text answers within the survey, respondents also frequently referred to the importance of grant aid for the conversion of derelict buildings. However, they also highlighted the higher costs of building on the islands and the practical challenges of transportation of material and availability of tradespeople for work on the islands.

FIGURE 17: SUPPORT FOR HOUSING OPTIONS, ALL SURVEY RESPONDENTS



Within the renter category specifically, it is of note that considerable support was given for community-owned/island-run housing schemes (78%) and social housing (71%). Renters also expressed high support (73%) for reservation of houses for sale (e.g., for permanent residents) and for taxation of second homes (55%) and taxation of derelict homes (55%).

Of those respondents needing to move to the islands to live support was also notably high for rural resettlement funding (81%), community-owned/island-run schemes (71%), and gateway housing (65%).



“Tá tithe inacmhainne ag teastáil go géar agus caithfear dul i ngleic le tithe saoire nó ní bheidh aon áitritheoirí anseo ach turasóirí agus tithe dorchá san nGeimhridh.”

(RENTER RESPONDENT)

“Local housing cooperatives for full time residents, including renters. Families who want to live here full time are being driven away.”

(HOMEOWNER RESPONDENT)

“There has to be some incentive put in place to enable younger residents to be able to acquire/build on the island and also for those already renting accommodation.”

(HOMEOWNER RESPONDENT)

“Housing association, managed in the island for long term rental which can never be bought or sold.”

(RENTER RESPONDENT)

“The island will not survive unless good standard housing is made possible for young families/young people.”

(SECOND HOMEOWNER RESPONDENT)

“Currently there are some Council built homes, certainly need another type of housing model for younger qualified adults, who now with a blended working schedule could live and sustain island life going forward”

(PREVIOUSLY LIVED ON THE ISLAND RESPONDENT)

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



“Urgent action is needed or else our islands will disappear.”

(PREVIOUSLY LIVED ON THE ISLAND RESPONDENT)

It is clear from this survey that housing is crucial for maintaining and expanding communities on Ireland's offshore islands. While the housing situation on the Irish islands is situated within the context of a wider housing crisis in Ireland, the needs, preferences, and experiences set out within this report indicate that a failure to address housing needs on the offshore islands represents an existential threat to the continuity of sustainable communities on the islands. The data offer a clear basis for actions and recommendations to address housing needs on Ireland's offshore islands.

6.1. Housing Needs and Issues Highlighted by Survey Respondents

Lack of Housing Availability and Affordability

The availability and affordability of housing are the most significant issues identified for respondents wishing to remain on, or move to, the islands. Full-time residents who wish to remain on the islands highlighted lack of available, affordable housing, and lack of available long-term rental accommodation as the main barriers to remaining.

A house owned outright or with a mortgage represents the most desirable housing option for those full-time residents wishing to remain on the islands and those respondents wishing to move to the islands to live. However, many of these respondents stated that their affordability range would be €200,000 or below, which presents a significant challenge given market prices. Many also highlighted the costs and difficulties of building or renovating on the islands and concerns with the planning process.

Addressing affordability on the islands for full-time residents is essential as the inability to purchase or build a home represents a key barrier to meeting islanders' housing needs, impacting the sustainability of island communities.

Precarity of Renters and Lack of Long-Term Sustainable Renting Options

The sustainability of island communities is also impacted by the particular type of housing precarity that renters on Ireland’s offshore islands are experiencing. Renters express concern about security of tenure, having to vacate their home due to sale/landlord request to leave, and having to move out of their home during the holiday season.

The lack of available long-term rental accommodation coupled with the lack of other permanent affordable housing options means that renters are locked out of secure housing. This issue is also impacting other respondents who stated that should they be unable to purchase a home, they would rent a property in order to remain on or move to the islands. However, long-term rental options are not available and tackling the precarity of renting is critical to sustaining island life.

Latent Housing Demand and the Impact of Housing on Potential Residents

In addition to the housing needs of those full-time residents wishing to remain on the islands but impacted by housing barriers identified above, there was strong interest expressed by respondents in moving to the islands full-time, including returning islanders, those wishing to move to the islands for the first time, and second homeowners. It is of note that the language and culture of islands are key factors identified by respondents wishing to move to the islands.

The lack of property for sale and inability to obtain planning permission are identified by former island residents as issues potentially impacting their ability to return to the islands to live.

Schemes / Initiatives that Enable Sustainable Communities

There is strong support for developing schemes and a range of housing options to enable younger generations and full-time residents to remain on the islands, including community-owned/island-run housing schemes, social housing, and reservation of housing for sale. Making planning permission more achievable and accessible is also highlighted by respondents. Support was also notable for initiatives to attract people to live long-term on the islands, including through a rural resettlement fund, grant aid for new houses, and gateway housing.

Open text responses regarding the sustainability of communities underline these points, with some respondents indicating an inability of older generations to remain living on the islands if younger generations leave.

The survey shows particularly strong support for grant aid to renovate derelict properties and initiatives that would help address legal title/ownership of such properties. Compulsory purchase, renovation, and taxation of unused properties are highlighted as initiatives in the survey (both in specific options selected and open text responses). Derelict properties are also viewed as a key resource that could be used to provide housing for people committed to living long-term on the islands.

6.2 Recommendations

The data and issues identified in this survey clearly indicate that island communities need to be involved in informing and advising on housing-related action plans and, where applicable, delivering housing in conjunction with other stakeholders. Therefore, the following recommendations seek to acknowledge the voices of survey respondents, engage with the 2023-2033 National Islands Policy (GoI, 2023a, 2023b), and drive community-led solutions to meeting housing needs on the islands:¹²

- 1. Island Specific Housing Task Force and Action Plan**
In light of the urgency of need to address housing on the islands, it is recommended that Comhar na nOileán/Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann seek the establishment of a housing task force for the islands to include representatives from Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann, Comhar na nOileán, relevant policy partners, local authorities, and community groups. It is recommended that this task force develop a housing action plan for Ireland’s offshore islands. This would be aligned with relevant housing initiatives in ‘Our Living Islands’ (GoI, 2023a, GoI, 2023b) where appropriate, but would add to these by identifying island-specific housing needs informed by issues identified in this survey and ongoing engagement with island communities (Recommendation 5). As part of this action plan, it is recommended that the task force establish a set of targets related to housing that are specific to individual islands and island regions.
- 2. Community-led Housing Association/Approved Housing Body**
The data from this survey underlines the urgent need and support for community-led and community-managed housing developments on the islands, that would address affordable, gateway, and sheltered

12 There was a welcome and valuable opportunity to present the draft findings and recommendations to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands on Friday 22nd September 2023. A link to the debate recording and transcript is available at: https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_social_protection_community_and_rural_development_and_the_islands/2023-09-22/.

housing options, including for full-time residents, new residents, and essential workers (with eligibility and affordability requirements calculated accordingly). It is therefore recommended that Comhar na nOileán/Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann consider establishing a community-led housing association/Approved Housing Body focused on the offshore islands. ‘Our Living Islands’ (GoI, 2023a) and related action plan (policy measure 1.11, GoI, 2023b: 5) include reference to the potential role of an islands focused AHB. Consultation, advice, and support from other AHBs, the Approved Housing Bodies Regulatory Authority, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Irish Council for Social Housing, the Housing Agency, and Local Authorities would be essential to establishing the viability, model, and structure of such an association. This AHB could also provide a point of contact and register of the specific housing requirements of island residents and potential residents. This would assist with the measurement of ongoing housing needs of full-time residents, as well as latent demand, and the nature of housing required to meet demand, as the recent policy highlights the importance of understanding ‘the quantum and mix of housing needed to meet corresponding island population targets’ (GoI, 2023a: 27).

- 3. Advisory/Input Role to National Policy Formation on Planning Guidelines and Liaison Role regarding Planning Processes and Statistics**
This survey indicates a clear need for community experience and voices to be heard as to the planning permission process and outcomes. The ‘Our Living Islands’ action plan includes a commitment that forthcoming planning guidelines ‘acknowledge the unique challenges and characteristics of offshore islands’ (policy measure 1.7, GoI, 2023b: 4). It is recommended that Comhar na nOileán/Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann seek to provide input to the planning guidelines updates to assist in developing an islands-specific approach that address concerns as to population and environment sustainability on the islands.¹³
- 4. Advisory/Input Role to National Policy Implementation on Vacant Homes**
It is also recommended that Comhar na nOileán/Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann work with Vacant Home Officers in Local Authorities to ensure the realisation of unused housing stock, including vacant and derelict properties (policy measure 1.8, GoI, 2023b: 4) by supporting the identification of such properties, highlighting the availability of schemes to residents and the provision of grant support, including increased support under Croí Cónaithe (policy measure 1.9, GoI, 2023b: 4). The islands focused Approved Housing Body (Recommendation 2) could also take a key role in supporting communities and local authorities with such a reactivation programme. It is further recommended that community groups and organisations are enabled to apply for support under the Croí Cónaithe scheme.
- 5. Ongoing Research and Community Engagement**
The success of an action plan (both government-level and community-based) is dependent on responsive and ongoing engagement with island communities. It is recommended that ongoing monitoring, research, and consultation is conducted to ensure action plans and targets are meeting island needs. This could include a detailed analysis of 2022 Census data, conducting a survey of island housing stock (including vacant and derelict housing), revisiting data in this survey on a periodic basis, and holding community forums and engagement at regular intervals.

6.3 Conclusion

The data presented in this survey and the 2023 ‘Our Living Islands’ National Islands Policy and Action Plan (GoI, 2023a, 2023b) offer a compelling opportunity to address island communities’ housing needs. The information provided by respondents to this survey also shows a clear wish by full-time residents to remain on the islands, a desire by those previously living on the islands to return, and a cohort of people wishing to move to the islands for the first time. In all these situations, access to affordable and suitable housing is crucial. Island communities cannot be sustained without a specific housing policy that recognises the particular challenges islands face. The creation of long-term secure, affordable, available housing (whether to buy or to rent), is essential to fulfilling people’s needs as identified in the survey, and to maintaining and building resilient, vibrant, and sustainable communities on Ireland’s offshore islands.

13 In relation to island-specific approaches in policy, a report of the Expert Group on the National Planning Framework (August 2023) referred to the potential for extending ‘priority area plans’ and ‘joint action plans’ to include non-urban areas that are disadvantaged due to remoteness and peripherality, including offshore islands.

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APPENDIX OF ISLAND REGIONS (INFORMATION SHEETS)

Information Sheet: Donegal

The Donegal island region accounted for 14% of responses to the survey, totalling 84 respondents. The survey involved categories that included people currently living on the islands as well as those wishing to return to/move to islands. The list of islands included Árainn Mhór, Inis Bó Finne, Inis Fraoigh, Island Roy, Inishirrer, Rutland, Inishkerragh, Toraigh, Gabhla and respondents could also select 'Prefer not to say' or specify another island name in open text ('Other, Please Specify') where relevant.

FIGURE D1: NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS ACROSS CATEGORY TYPES (DONEGAL ISLAND REGION)

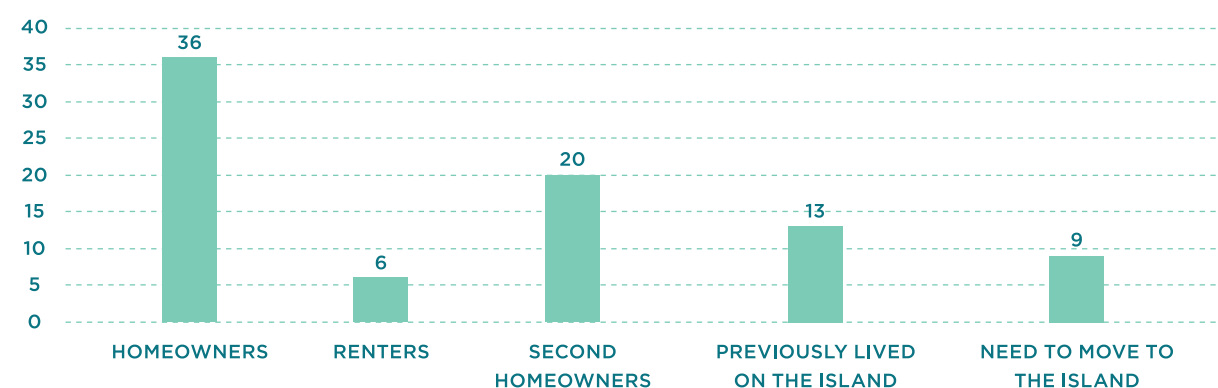
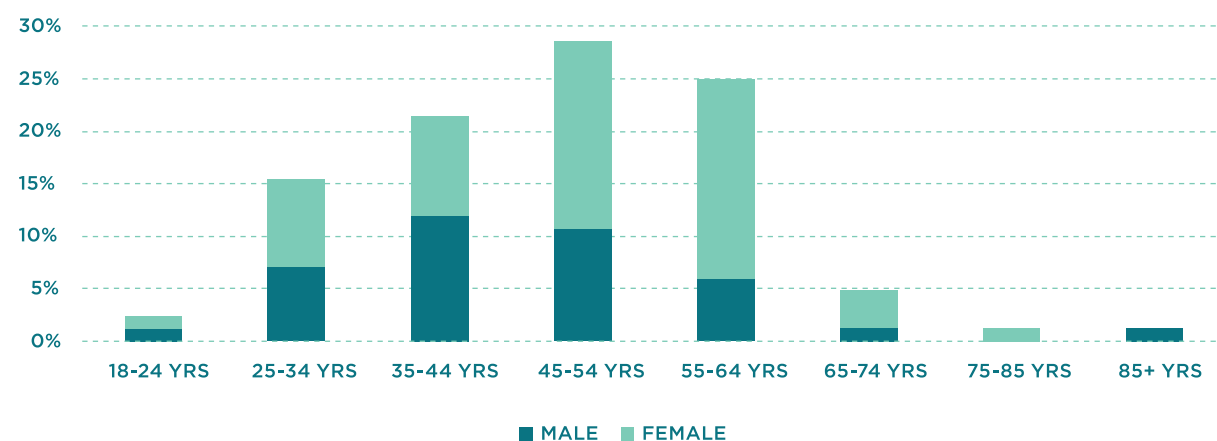


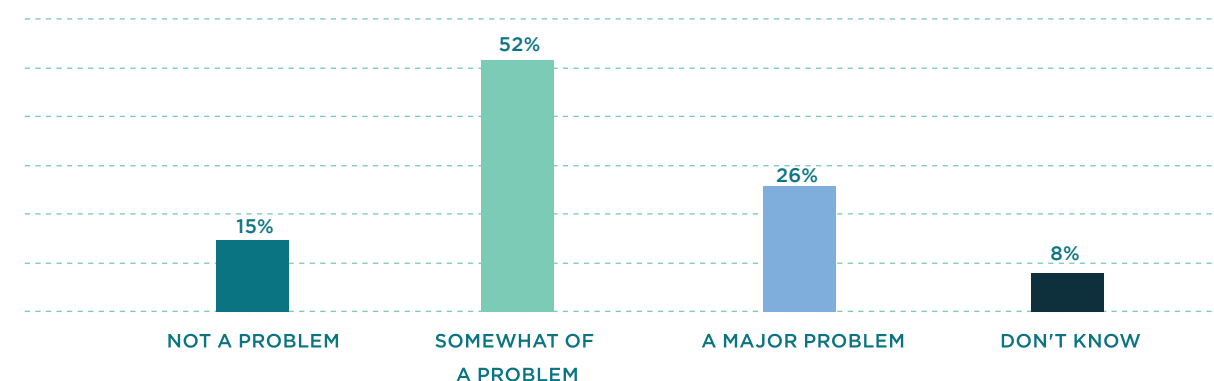
FIGURE D2: AGE AND GENDER OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS



Key Points

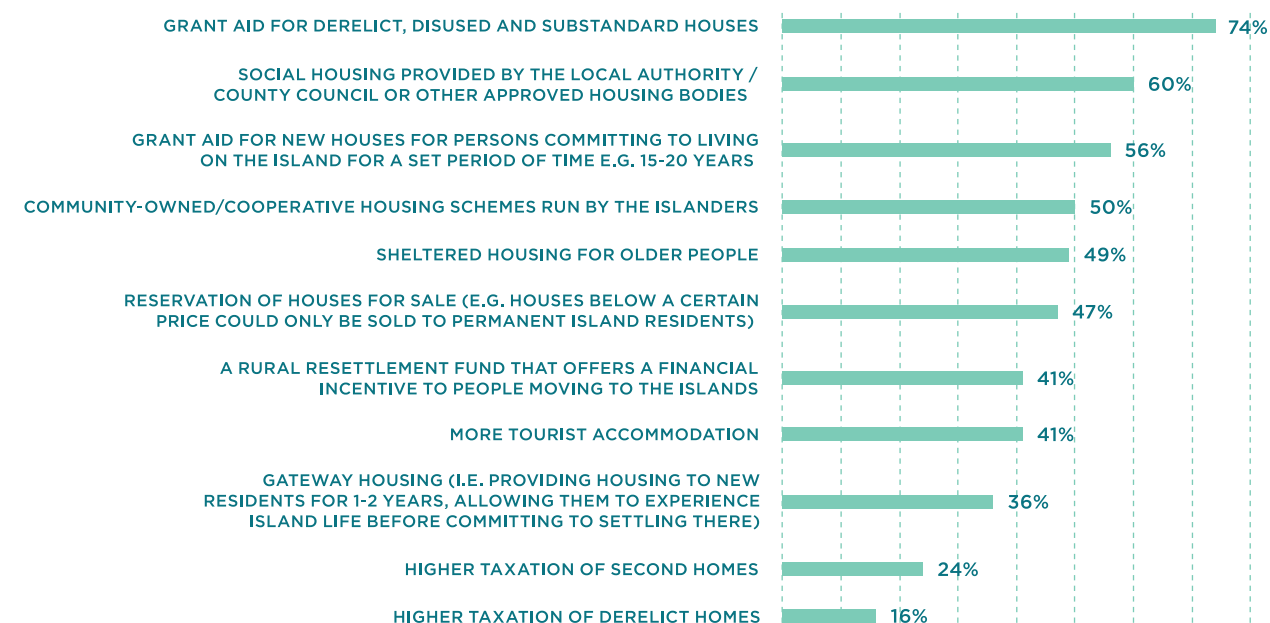
- 83% (n=35 of 42) of full-time residents indicated that their current home was suitable for their needs.
- 31% (n=13) of full-time residents stated that they were likely/very likely to move from their current home in the next 5 years, with 7 respondents referring to security of tenure and/or reasons related to the property as reasons for likelihood to move.
- 67% (n=8 of 12 recorded responses) of full-time residents that are likely/very likely to move from their current home in the next 5 years would like to remain on the island/s. Lack of available houses/property for sale, cost of houses/property for sale, and unable to obtain planning permission were identified as key housing issues on the Donegal islands that would prevent these respondents from remaining.
- 85% of second homeowners would consider moving to the island/s (now or in the future). 10% stated that they were 'not sure'.
- Of the respondents (across all categories) who answered the question regarding difficulties with the planning permission process, 32% (n=24 of 76) indicated that they **have** experienced difficulties (including refusal of planning for new build, renovation, extension).
- The majority of respondents (78%) stated that derelict houses were somewhat of a problem/a major problem (Figure D3).

FIGURE D3: DERELICT HOUSES (RESPONDENTS: FULL-TIME RESIDENTS, SECOND HOMEOWNERS, PREVIOUSLY LIVED ON ISLANDS)



In relation to housing initiatives, as illustrated in Figure D4, grant aid for derelict and substandard houses (74%), social housing (60%), and grant aid for new houses for persons committing to living on the island for a set period of time (56%) were the top options supported by respondents in the Donegal island region.

FIGURE D4: PERCENTAGE SUPPORT (ALL RESPONDENTS) HOUSING OPTIONS



Information Sheet: Mayo

The Mayo island region accounted for 11% of responses to the survey, totalling 65 respondents. The survey involved categories that included people currently living on the islands as well as those wishing to return to/move to islands. The list of islands included Clare Island, Inis Bigil, Inishcottle, Inishlyre, Inishturk, Clynish and respondents could also select 'Prefer not to say' or specify another island name in open text ('Other, Please Specify') where relevant.

FIGURE M1: NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS ACROSS CATEGORY TYPES (MAYO ISLAND REGION)

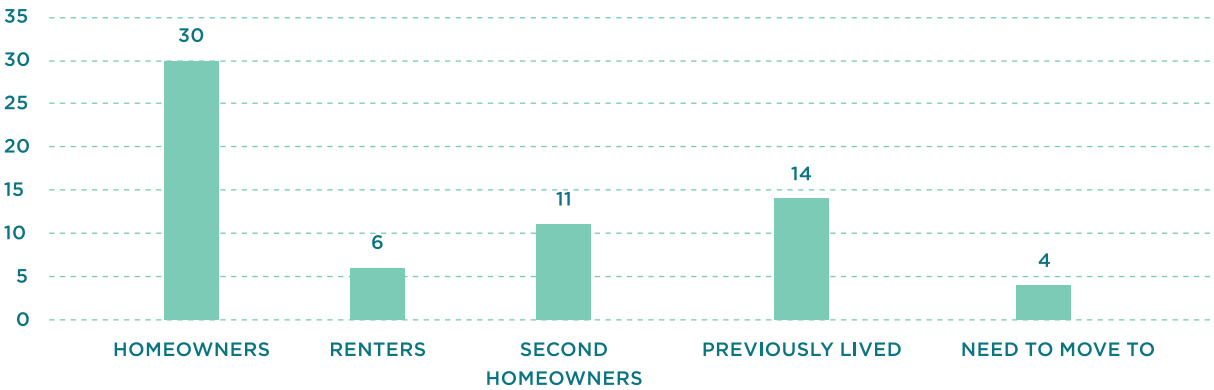
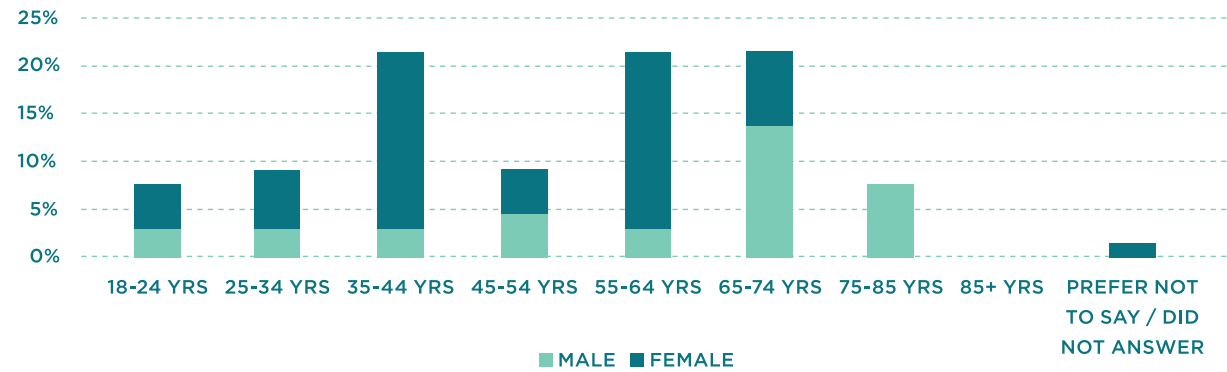


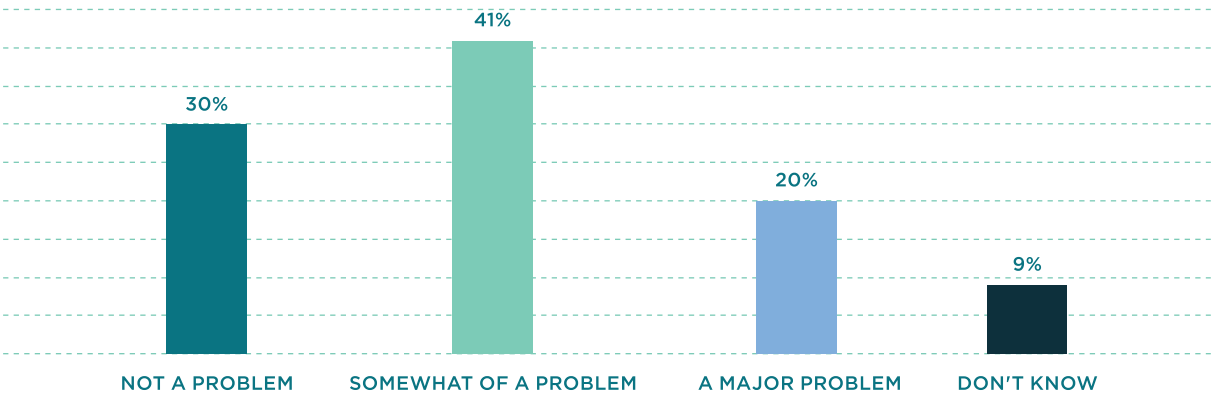
FIGURE M2: AGE AND GENDER OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS



Key Points:

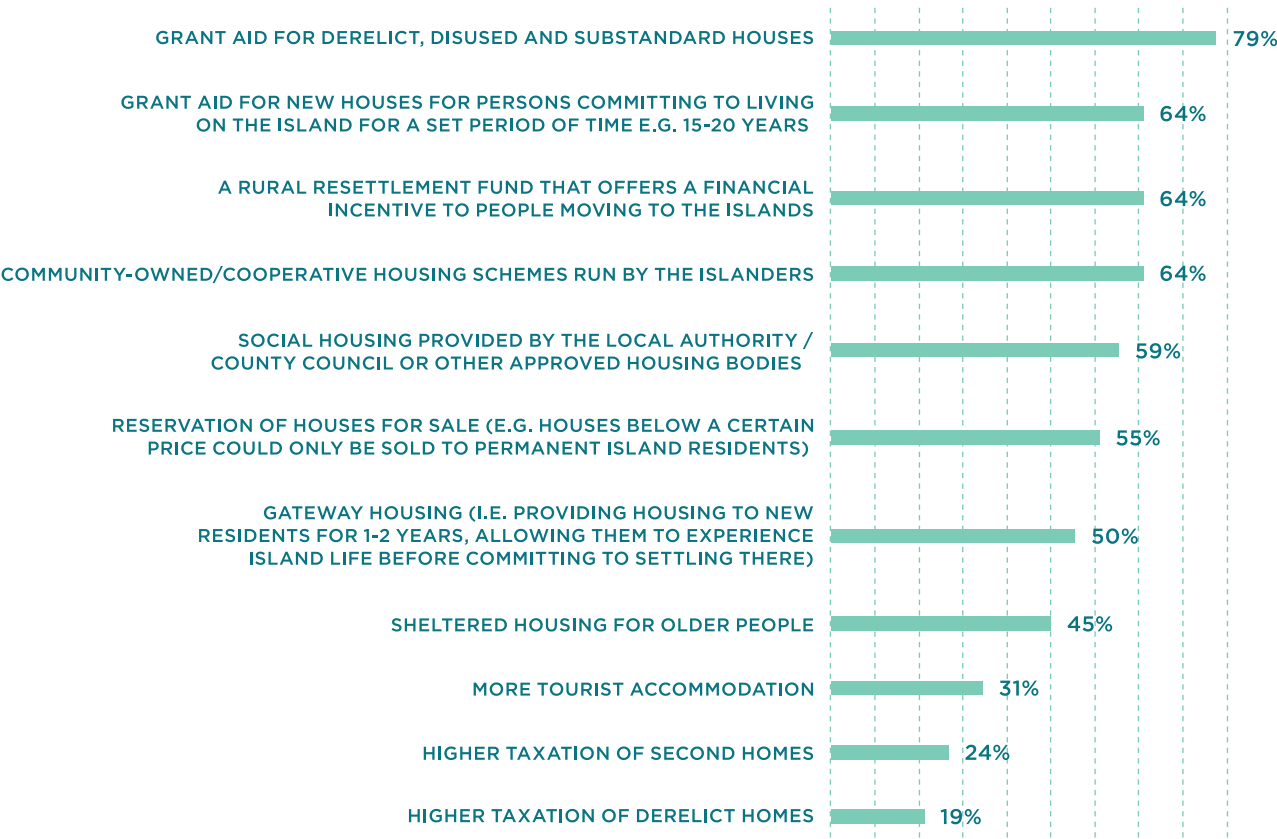
- 83% (n=30 of 36) of full-time residents indicated that their current home was suitable for their needs.
- 25% (n=9) of full-time residents stated that they were likely/very likely to move from their current home in the next 5 years.
- 50% (n=4 of 8 recorded responses) of full-time residents that are likely/very likely to move from their current home in the next 5 years would like to remain on the island/s. Lack of available houses/property for sale, lack of available sites to build on, lack of available rental accommodation, and security of tenure issues were noted as key housing issues on the Mayo islands that would prevent these respondents from remaining.
- 36% of second homeowners would consider moving to the island/s (now or in the future). 36% stated that they were 'not sure'.
- Of the respondents (across all categories) who answered the question regarding difficulties with the planning permission process, 19% (n=12 of 63 recorded responses) indicated that they **have** experienced difficulties (including refusal of planning for new build, renovation, extension).
- The majority of respondents (61%) stated that derelict houses were somewhat of a problem/a major problem (Figure M3).

FIGURE M3: DERELICT HOUSES (RESPONDENTS: FULL-TIME RESIDENTS, SECOND HOMEOWNERS, PREVIOUSLY LIVED ON ISLANDS)



In relation to housing initiatives, as illustrated in Figure M4, grant aid for derelict and substandard houses (79%), grant aid for new houses for persons committing to living on the island for a set period of time (64%), a rural resettlement fund that offers financial incentives to people moving to the islands (64%), and community-owned/cooperative housing schemes run by the islanders (64%) were the top options supported by respondents in the Mayo island region.

FIGURE M4: PERCENTAGE SUPPORT (ALL RESPONDENTS) HOUSING OPTIONS



Information Sheet: Galway

The Galway island region accounted for 44% of responses to the survey, totalling 270 respondents. The survey involved categories that included people currently living on the islands as well as those wishing to return to/move to islands. The list of islands included Inishbofin, Árainn, Inis Oírr, Inis Meáin and respondents could also select ‘Prefer not to say’ or specify another island name in open text (‘Other, Please Specify’) where relevant.

FIGURE G1: NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS ACROSS CATEGORY TYPES (GALWAY ISLAND REGION)

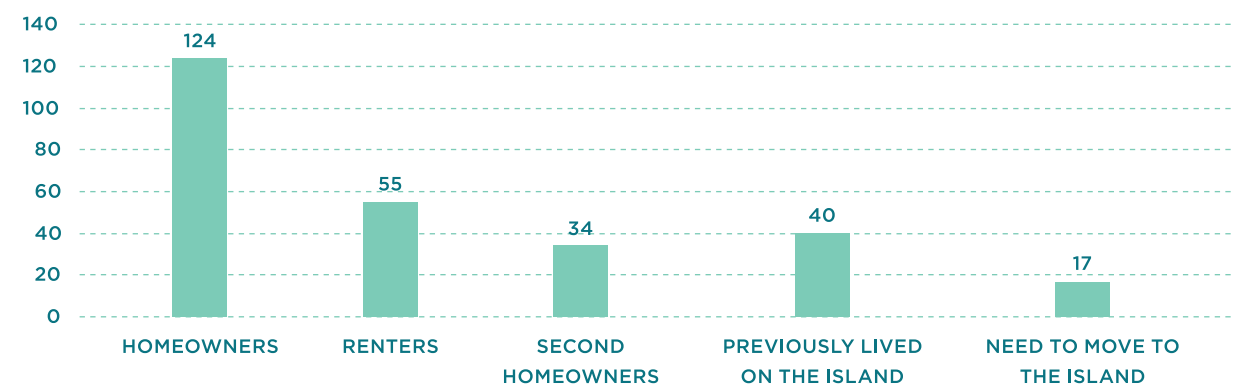
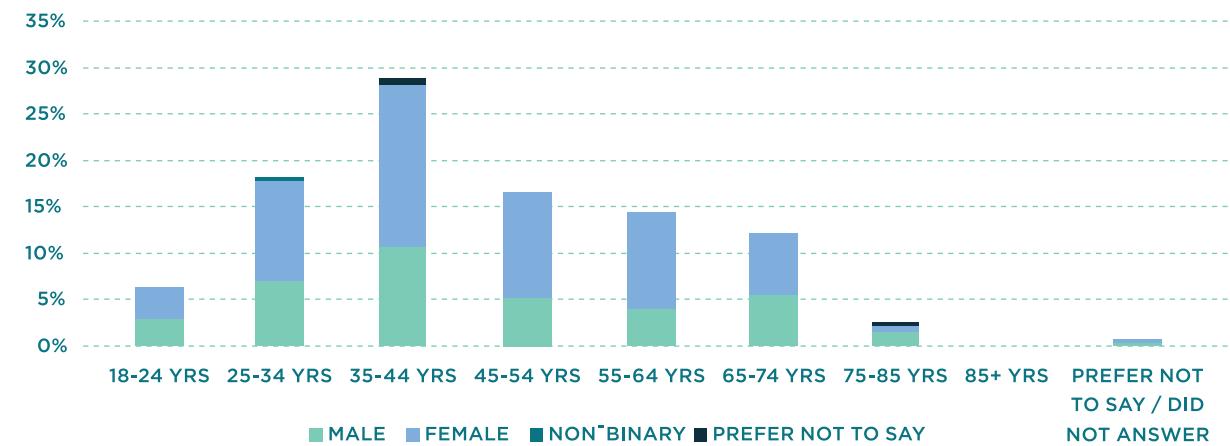


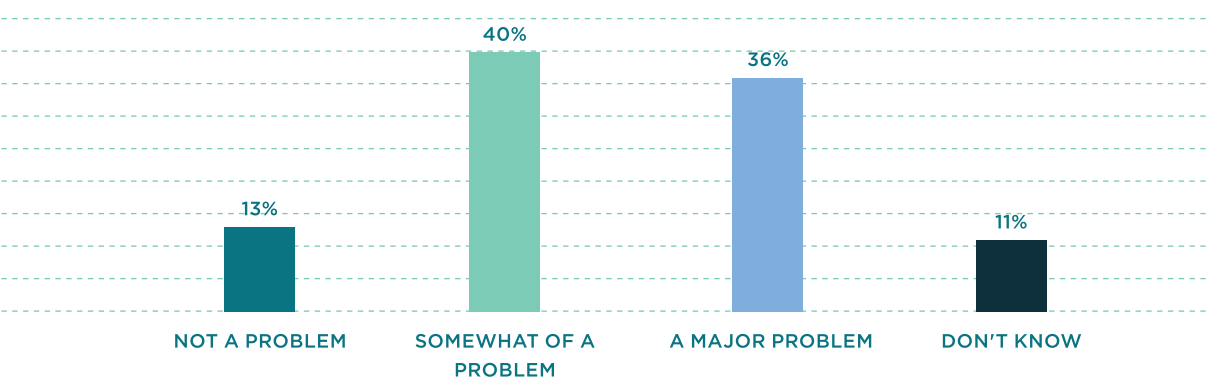
FIGURE G2: AGE AND GENDER OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS



Key Points:

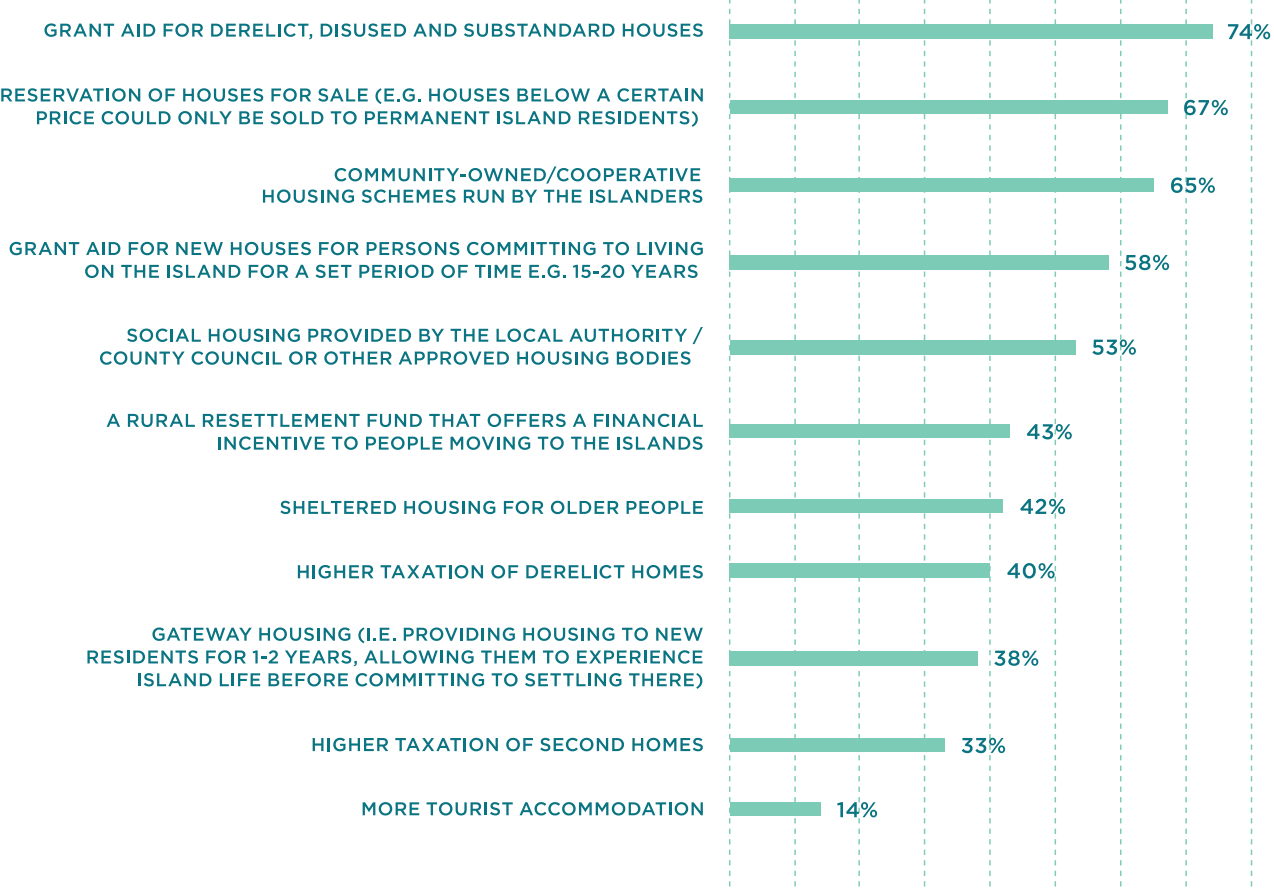
- 76% (n=136 of 179) of full-time residents stated that their current home was suitable for their needs.
- It is of note that 35% (n=19) of renters in the Galway island region stated that their current home was not suitable for their needs.
- 46% (n=82) of full-time residents stated that they were likely/very likely to move from their current home in the next 5 years (28% of homeowners and 85% of renters). Of those respondents likely/very likely to move, reasons relating to the property were noted as a reason for likelihood to move by 40% of homeowners and 77% of renters. Security of tenure/landlord selling the property is a frequent point noted by renters on the Galway island region.
- 72% (n=59) of full-time residents that are likely/very likely to move from their current home in the next 5 years would like to remain on the island/s. Lack of available houses/property for sale, cost of houses/property for sale, and unable to obtain planning permission were identified as key housing issues on the Galway islands that would prevent these respondents from remaining.
- 62% of second homeowners would consider moving to the island/s (now or in the future). 26% stated that they were ‘not sure’.
- Of the respondents (across all categories) who answered the question regarding difficulties with the planning permission process, 30% (n=74 of 250 recorded responses) indicated that they **have** experienced difficulties (including refusal of planning for new build, renovation, extension).
- The majority of respondents (76%) stated that derelict houses were somewhat of a problem/a major problem (Figure G3).

FIGURE G3: DERELICT HOUSES (RESPONDENTS: FULL-TIME RESIDENTS, SECOND HOMEOWNERS, PREVIOUSLY LIVED ON ISLANDS)



In relation to housing initiatives, as illustrated in Figure G4, grant aid for derelict and substandard houses (74%), reservation of houses for sale (e.g. houses below a certain price could only be sold to permanent island residents) (67%), and community-owned/cooperative housing schemes run by the islanders (65%) were the top options supported by respondents in the Galway island region.

FIGURE G4: PERCENTAGE SUPPORT (ALL RESPONDENTS) HOUSING OPTIONS



Information Sheet: Cork

The Cork island region accounted for 31% of responses to the survey, totalling 192 respondents. The survey involved categories that included people currently living on the islands as well as those wishing to return to/ move to islands. The list of islands included Bere, Cléire, Dursey, Heir, Long, Sherkin, Whiddy and respondents could also select 'Prefer not to say' or specify another island name in open text ('Other, Please Specify') where relevant.

FIGURE C1: NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS ACROSS CATEGORY TYPES (CORK ISLAND REGION)

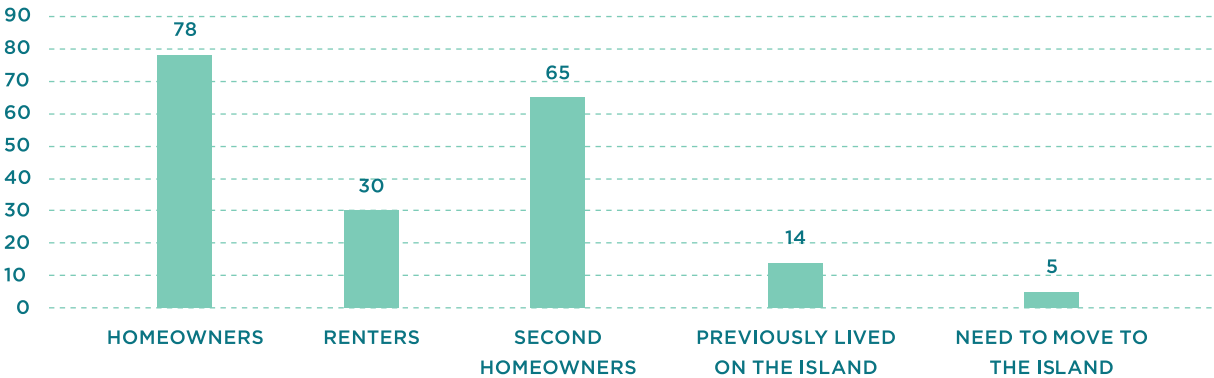
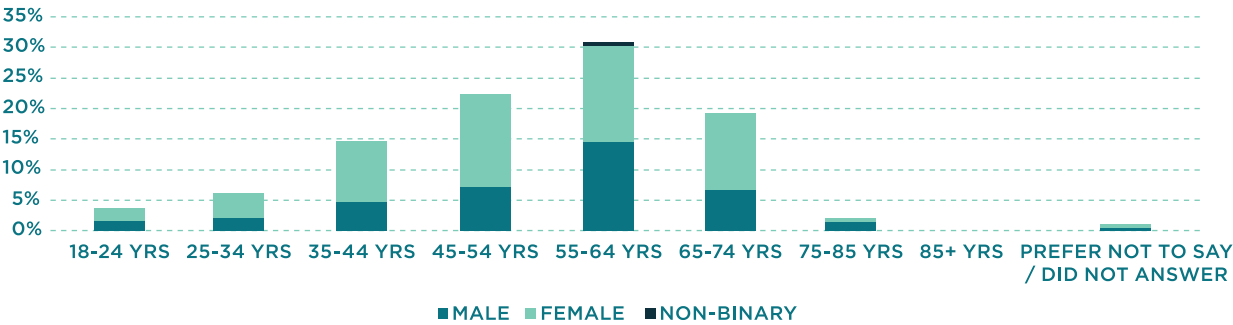


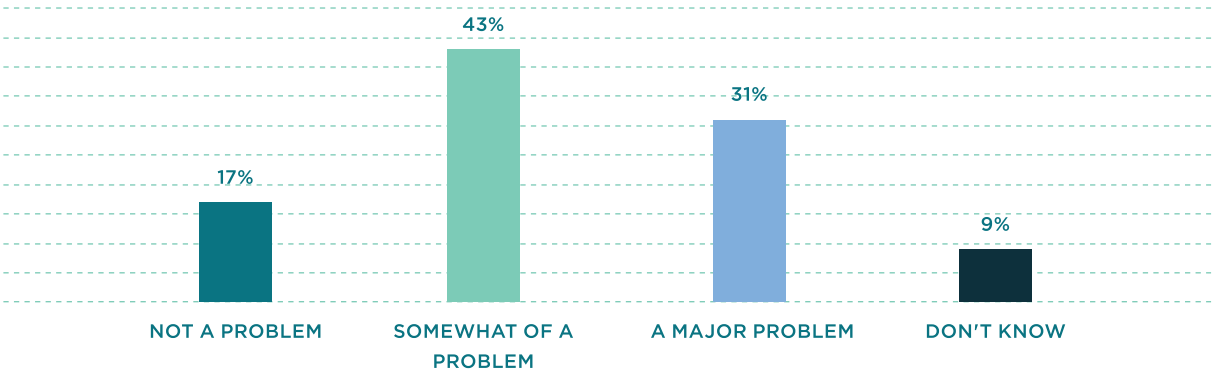
FIGURE C2: AGE AND GENDER OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS



Key Points:

- 70% (n=76 of 108) of full-time residents stated that their current home was suitable for their needs. This is the lowest percent of home suitability noted across the four island regions.
- It is of note that 40% (n=12) renters stated that their current home was not suitable for the needs.
- 36% (n=38 of 107 recorded responses) of full-time residents stated that they were likely/very likely to move from their current home in the next 5 years (21% of homeowners and 76% of renters). Of those respondents likely/very likely to move, reasons relating to the property were noted as a reason for likelihood to move by 50% of homeowners and 86% of renters. Security of tenure/ landlord selling the property is a frequent point noted by renters in the Cork island region.
- 79% (n=30) of full-time residents that are likely/very likely to move from their current home in the next 5 years would like to remain on the island/s. Lack of available houses/property for sale, cost of houses/property for sale, lack of available rental accommodation, and unable to obtain planning permission were identified as key housing issues on the Cork islands that would prevent these respondents from remaining.
- 51% of second homeowners would consider moving to the island/s (now or in the future). 32% stated that they were 'not sure'.
- Of the respondents (across all categories) who answered the question regarding difficulties with the planning permission process, 36% (n=64 of 179 recorded responses) indicated that they **have** experienced difficulties (including refusal of planning for new build, renovation, extension).
- The majority of respondents (74%) stated that derelict houses were somewhat of a problem/a major problem (Figure C3).

FIGURE C3: DERELICT HOUSES (RESPONDENTS: FULL-TIME RESIDENTS, SECOND HOMEOWNERS, PREVIOUSLY LIVED ON ISLANDS)



In relation to housing initiatives, as illustrated in Figure C4, grant aid for derelict and substandard houses (82%), social housing (59%), and a rural resettlement fund that offers a financial incentive to people moving to the islands (58%) were the top options supported by respondents in the Cork island region.

FIGURE C4: PERCENTAGE SUPPORT (ALL RESPONDENTS) HOUSING OPTIONS

