

## **Housing statistics published by the Department**

The Department collects and disseminates data in respect of three different points in the house construction process but these are preceded by another useful source of information. The Central Statistics Office collates and disseminates information from Planning Authorities on a quarterly basis and this data can be found on their website.

The latest statistics, which extend to the end of September 2016, suggest that on a rolling annual basis there were applications for in excess of 16,000 residential units, representing an increase of 45% on the previous year. This data set is collected by way of a quarterly survey of all Local Authorities. The Department plans to augment this information during 2017 by publishing more up to date data across all local authorities for a discrete list of relevant variables.

The next interaction between builders of residential units and planning authorities, after planning is granted, occurs when the builder lodges a commencement notice. A Commencement Notice is a notification to a Building Control Authority that a person intends to carry out works to which the Building Regulations apply and is normally lodged via an online system known as the Building Control Management System (BCMS). The Department downloads a copy of the relevant database and summarises its contents on a monthly basis.

There are two common misunderstandings in respect of this dataset. Firstly, the figures captured from multi-unit developments will reflect on the current phase of development being initiated rather than the total number of units to be completed over all phases. Secondly, the opt-out provisions of once-off houses which came into effect in September 2015, does not remove the requirement to submit a Commencement Notice, although it does remove the requirement to submit a Certificate of Compliance on Completion. The BCMS was implemented in early 2014 and as the system is relatively new, the data is subject to ongoing monitoring and review. Some revisions to this dataset arising from this review are made in the current release. Commencement Notices for residential units totalled 13,234 in the year to December 2016, representing an increase of the order of 51% over the previous year.

The second set of data which the Department publishes relates specifically to registrations with HomeBond. This is a subset of total residential construction, reflecting only multi-unit developments, and so is not normally used in terms assessing overall levels of construction. Data for the year to December 2016 totalled 5,626, representing an increase of 31% on the previous year. Registrations represent a fluctuating proportion of total completions. The most recent rolling annual figures represent about 38% of the equivalent figure for total completions, a ratio which is in line with the long run average.

The third dataset disseminated by the Department is that of completions based on a list of all residential connections to the ESB. ESB connections are used a proxy for house completions as it is the best available indicator that a house has been completed and is now ready for habitation. This data set is available on the Department's website dating back to 1970 thus providing a longitudinal comparator. ESB Networks has recently confirmed to the Department that the data does not include what it calls "service alterations" where for example an extension is carried out on a dwelling and alterations are therefore required. It does however include re-connections where a dwelling has been vacant for a period of at least two years, and as such all connections represent a residential unit which is now available for occupation.

In the year to end December 2016 an overall total of 14,932 connections have taken place. This represents an increase of 18% on 2015. About 42% of these connections relate to once-off units and these do not tend to show up on the Central Statistics Office Residential Property Price Index volumetric statistics as there is no transaction attracting stamp duty associated with these connections.

It is not possible to tell from the ESB connections dataset at this time which dwellings were never before occupied, and it should be acknowledged that residential units are also permanently disconnected from the grid at a rate of about 0.2-0.5% of the housing stock per annum.

Rebuilding Ireland contains many important actions in respect of the utilisation of existing vacant stock, such as the Vacant Housing Repair and Leasing Initiative as described in Pillar 5 of the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, Utilise Existing Housing. Concerted actions over a number of years has also led to ensure that unfinished housing estates were completed, also contributing to this aim. Between Census 2011 and Census 2016 the number of occupied units increased by 49,285, even while total units only increased by 18,981. As such the target for completions contained in Rebuilding Ireland is just one element of addressing the overall housing issue currently facing us.

One final point should also be made in terms of data already released by the Department. At the end of each year, and once the completions figures have been produced it is common practice for the Department to produce an end of year housing stock estimate. In the year after a Census this also includes a revision to the data between the Census years if necessary. The estimate for the housing stock published last January for end 2015 amounted to 2.022m units. The outturn for April 2016 was 2.023m units. The Department's Statistics and Data Analytics Unit is working closely with the Central Statistics Office to develop further insights into the stock and flows of housing units and will be in a position to share this information with researchers and other interested stakeholders later this year. It should also be noted that a more detailed breakdown of data pertaining to the existing housing stock, as collected in Census 2016, will be made available by the Central Statistics Office on April 20th of this year and this will form a vital source of information in this collaboration.

In summary, the connections data provided by the Department is one of a number of insights into the various stages in housing supply and is being continually improved. Moreover, all of the indicators point to the fact that after a long period of very low levels of supply, there are very positive signs of increased supply, not just from new build but from bringing vacant housing back into beneficial use as well.

All of these indicators illustrate that finally, the concerted efforts of the Government and many other stakeholders in the housing area are beginning to bear fruit and the prospect of a more normal set of conditions in the housing sector are within grasp.

**Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government**

14 February 2017