



Homeless levels soar to five times those seen during depression of 80s

By **Geraldine Gittens**

HOMELESSNESS in Ireland has soared to levels five times worse than in the depression of the 1980s, an Irish charity has warned.

Around 1,000 people were homeless in 1985, according to Focus Ireland, but there are now up to 5,000 people without homes at any one time.

As the economy descends into a recession and the numbers of those sleeping rough increase, non-governmental organisations (NGO) such as Focus Ireland and the Simon Community are calling on the Government to seriously consider the urgent need for social housing in the forthcoming Budget.

FAILED

"We've failed to tackle some of the most precious social issues such as homelessness and social housing in the boom years, and this is unfair on the marginalised," said Roughan McNamara of Focus Ireland.

"There was an increase in the demand for social housing in previous years but the



demand wasn't met." While the Government plans to eradicate long term homelessness by 2010, Mr McNamara says the goal won't be achieved unless social housing is substantially increased.

He said: "We believe that the target won't be reached without significant investments.

"People are left languishing in long-term accommodation for years and months. They are ready to move into permanent homes but there are none avail-

able, so it's curtailing the effectiveness of the work we do.

"The problem is bad and it needs resources."

A spokesman for St Vincent de Paul said: "The statistics indicate that there's in excess of 120,000 people on the waiting lists for social housing. There are around 43,000 applicants altogether.

"The chances of people ever getting their homes are [becoming] further and further removed. The Government

MISSED CHANCE: Charity Focus Ireland says the State failed to tackle some of the most pressing social issues during the boom years

needs to tackle the problem seriously. They haven't made serious inroads into the 43,000 units that are required."

Lorna Cronnelly, from the Dublin Simon Community, added: "In the past six months there's been a 48pc increase in the number of people looking for the rough sleeper services.

COLD FACE

"The cold face of homelessness is getting increasingly worse. While they may come off the street to a hostel, there's a problem with the next phase.

"There's a lack of adequate moves on accommodation."

The spokesman for the St Vincent de Paul added: "They're [the Government] going to have to go back and have a look at how they can rescue it."

He added the Government should get builders laid off from the construction industry working on social housing projects.

"Instead of seeing all these people unemployed and losing the skills, get them back to work. That way the Government saves on the social welfare and it's a win-win situation."