

Dublin's Rent Pressure Zones: Effectiveness & Policy Alternatives

Trinity College Dublin

Julian Lukas Bach

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Contents

- 1 Summary** **1**

- 2 Dublin’s Housing Crisis** **2**

- 3 Overview Literature** **3**

- 4 Outline of the Rent Pressure Zone Policy** **4**

- 5 Effectiveness of Rent Pressure Zones** **6**
 - 5.1 Econometric Model 6
 - 5.2 Size and Investment in the Private Rental Sector 7

- 6 Policy Recommendation** **11**

- A Appendix** **14**

- References** **17**

1 Summary

This policy analysis provides an overview of the Rent Pressure Zone (RPZ) policy in Dublin and examines potential modifications. In the recent presidential debate, the housing crisis was highlighted as a key national challenge. Dublin, in particular, is one of the most expensive cities in Europe in terms of rental costs. The rent inflation began to rise sharply after the Global Financial Crisis of 2007–2009. In response, the government introduced RPZs in December 2016 as an amendment to the Residential Tenancies Act 2004. The RPZ policy places limits on initial rents, rent increases and rent reviews. At the same time, several exemptions exist to prevent rents from falling below market levels and to maintain investment incentives. An overview of the policy is provided in Section 4. The current literature highlights two main findings, as summarized in Section 3. First, RPZs helped reduce rent inflation. Second, as a result of the tightening of rent controls in 2021, researchers observed negative effects on housing supply. This policy analysis evaluates the effectiveness of the RPZ policy in Dublin. It considers the development of the Residential Property Price Index (RPPI), trends in housing supply and investment patterns in the private rental sector (PRS). Our results show a significant decline in the RPPI in Dublin after the introduction of RPZs. Over the long term, the PRS continued to grow. While some small landlords exited the market, this was largely offset by increased institutional investment most concentrated in Dublin. However, recent data show a decline in dwelling completions across Ireland and investors are becoming more hesitant to commit capital to the PRS.

To address these emerging challenges, we propose modifications to the current policy in Section 6. First, we recommend adjusting permitted rent increases in line with inflation as measured by the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices. This would help prevent the depreciation of residential assets. Investors report that operational costs and required reinvestments often exceed the current rental cap. A more adaptive system could reduce market exits and support more stable rents for households over time. Second, we suggest a review of the exemption criteria within the RPZ framework. The aim is to maintain investment incentives and support new housing supply.

2 Dublin’s Housing Crisis

Dublin’s rents are one of the highest in Europe (Brennan, 2025). The city is placed fourth right after London, Zurich and Geneva. Therefore, it is no wonder that the housing crisis is often addressed in the public debate. The new elected president Catherine Connolly is a strong advocate for a new housing policy. Connolly often criticized the previous government for its handling of the situation: ”The cost-of-living crisis is not over just because the headlines have moved on. It is biting hard in every town, village, and city. The Government’s response must be to protect households, not to pretend that the problem has gone away” (Connolly, 2025). Furthermore, she promised to raise her voice for the fairness and equality in the economic life of families, workers and pensioners.

To grasp the importance of the dealing with the housing crisis, we consider the evolution of the Residential Property Price Index (RPPI) in Dublin between 2006 and 2025 in Figure 1. After decreasing during the global financial crisis (GFC) in 2007-2009 (see the red shaped area), the rent inflation began to increase. The sector has been affected by a lack of affordability or misalignment between supply and demand. According to Government of Ireland (2024), the rent inflation was especially high in areas such as Dublin and Cork.

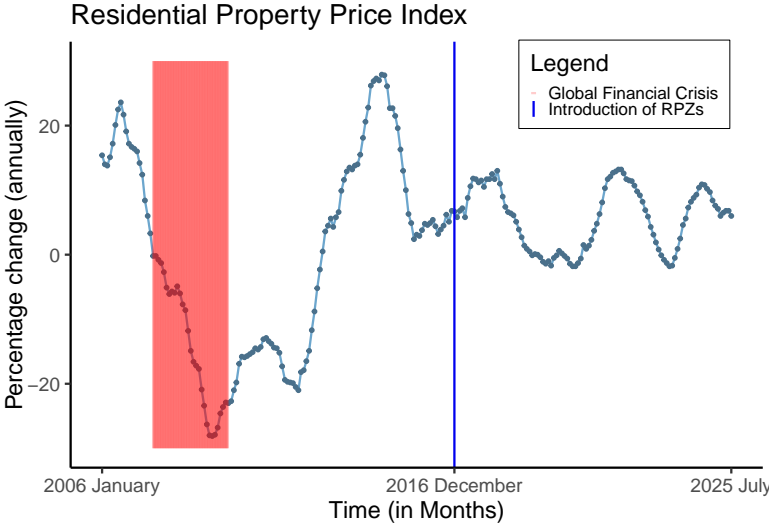


Figure 1: Residential Property Price Index in Dublin (own illustration based on Central Statistics Office (2025d))

Considering that the rent inflation has been high for a long period, the Government decided to take action in December 2016 and introduced the Rent Pressure Zone (RPZ) policy, as marked by the blue line in Figure 1. The RPZ policy defines both the initial rent price and the potential rent increase with the aim to protect tenants from high rents. Since 2016, the rent inflation has been relatively stable within cycles but not decreasing. Can we therefore conclude that the policy has been effective in Dublin? Is the private rental sector (PRS) sustainable in terms of its long-term trends in rent inflation and housing supply, or should the RPZ policy be modified?

3 Overview Literature

In demand of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), The Housing Agency (2025b) has recently published a review of the current RPZ policy. The Agency identifies two key findings in the Irish literature: there is evidence for a decrease in rent inflation due to RPZs and research has observed a negative impact on supply since the tightening of rent controls in 2021. However, there is a certain degree of non-compliance, as well as gaps in the research concerning maintenance, tenant mobility, and macroeconomic factors. To further investigate the impact of RPZs, the department conducted qualitative surveys and performed quantitative analysis. The evidence suggests, that the PRS has been growing between 2016 and 2022. Most of the growth has been concentrated in Dublin and fostered by institutional investment. However, since 2024 there has been a decline in apartment completions and investments in the PRS. Moreover, investors hold reservations to commit capital to the PRS. Our analysis builds in part on the key findings of the Housing Agency.

4 Outline of the Rent Pressure Zone Policy

This section is based on The Housing Agency (2025b), unless otherwise cited. The RPZ policy was introduced as amendment to the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 in December 2016. It constitutes a major transformation in the approach to price regulation within the PRS. Before, the regulation of rent prices was limited to the prohibition of increasing rents higher than market rates and rules regarding the frequency of rent reviews. The RPZs were originally intended to schedule until December 2019. However, they were extended three times by the Residential Tenancies Act 2004: The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act 2019, The Residential Tenancies (No. 2) Act 2021 and the Planning and Development Act 2024, which is expected to end on 28 February 2026 (Citizens Information, 2025). Each amendment has proposed changes to the existing policy. Since June 2025, the whole of Ireland is a RPZ (The Housing Agency, 2025a). Therefore, the policy applies to all local authorities (LAs) and local electoral authorities (LEAs). Before June 2025, LAs or LEAs must have met certain criteria in a rent zone report to be designated as RPZ (see A.1). In the following, we will outline the current rules of the RPZ policy according to the Planning and Development Act 2024.

Rent Increase

The RPZ rules for rent setting apply to existing and new tenancies. Before The Residential Tenancies (No. 2) Act in 2021, the possible rent increase was capped in line with the rate of inflation measured by the Harmonized Index of Consumer Prices (HICP). Since 2021, the rent can only be increased by the HICP or 2% depending on which is lower. The HICP is based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI). It serves as a measure of price stability by determining the average change in prices of all goods and services bought by households for consumption purposes. To allow for a comparison within the euro area, the HICP is harmonized throughout concepts and methods (Deutsche Bundesbank, n.d.).

Rent Review

The rent can only be increased once every twelve months. However, an exemption may apply if a “substantial change in the nature of the accommodation” has occurred.¹ This condition applies if the rent of the property remains below the market rate of comparable properties following the “substantial change”. As mentioned above, the whole of Ireland is a RPZ and therefore the rules apply to all tenancies. For existing tenancies in new RPZs, the first rent review is permitted 24 months whereas for new tenancies 12 months after the last rent review. If landlords want to increase the rent, they must follow certain guidelines. A landlord must provide the renter with a valid notice of rent review at a minimum of 90 day in advance including the new rent amount, the calculation of the new rent and a printout of the RPZ calculator results (Residential Tenancies Board, [n.d.](#)). In Addition, the landlord must inform the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) about the rent review within one month of taking into affect.

Exemptions

There are two types of tenancies excluded from the RPZs: cost rental tenancies and tenancies through approved housing bodies. Both provide housing for moderate income households and follow their own rental rules.

There are three cases in which a property is not affected by RPZ rules:

1. The property has not been rented for two years prior to the tenancy commencement date.
2. The property is determined as a protected or proposed protected structure by the LA and has not been rented for 1 year prior to the tenancy commencement date.
3. The property has undergone a substantial change in nature as defined within The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act in 2019.

The first two exemptions ensure that a property cannot be rented below the market rate. At the same time, the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 prevents properties from being

¹This is further addressed in Figure 2.

rented above the market rate. The third exemption provides incentives for landlords to modernize properties. If at least one of the three criteria presented in Figure 2 is met, the property has undergone a "substantial change in nature".

| | |
|--|--|
| Criterion 1 | Criterion 3 |
| The works consist of a permanent extension to the dwelling that increases the floor area of the dwelling by the amount equal to not less than 25% of the floor area of the dwelling as it stood immediately before the commencement of those works | The works result in any 3 or more of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the internal layout of the dwelling being permanently altered; • the dwelling being adapted to provide for access and use by a person with a disability, within the meaning of the <i>Disability Act 2005</i>; • a permanent increase in the number of rooms in the dwelling; • in the case of a dwelling that has BER of D1 or lower, the BER being improved by not less than 3 building energy ratings; or • in the case of a dwelling that has a BER of C3 or higher, the BER being improved by not less than 2 building energy ratings |
| Criterion 2 | |
| The works result in the Building Energy Rating (BER) being improved by not less than 7 building energy ratings | |

Figure 2: Criteria for a Substantial Change in Nature of the Accommodation (The Housing Agency, 2025b)

5 Effectiveness of Rent Pressure Zones

To determine the effectiveness of the RPZ policy in Dublin, we will rely on an econometric model and the results from The Housing Agency (2025b).

5.1 Econometric Model

We have created a model to investigate the effect of the RPZs on the RPPI in Dublin. In short: we have tested whether or not the implementation of RPZs led to a significant all time decrease of the RPPI. Of course, we have to control for Dublin’s dwelling completions and other macroeconomic factors such as the inflation - and unemployment rate. The layout of the model is presented in A.2. We found, that RPZs led to an all time decrease of the RPPI at every conventional level of significance.² However, it is important to note that we assessed the average effect of RPZs on the RPPI over the period from December 2016 to June 2025. As shown in Figure 1, the RPPI has remained

²We obtained that $p = 1.225476e - 08$.

relatively stable within cycles in recent years. Moreover, the econometric model can only provide a partial answer as isolating the specific effect of the policy on the RPPI is not feasible.

5.2 Size and Investment in the Private Rental Sector

The Housing Agency has provided an overview of the development of growth and investment in the PRS. Both housing supply and rental prices in Dublin are inseparable and we have to consider both. The Agency found that the Irish PRS grew between 2016 and 2022. In absolute terms, the largest increase took place in Dublin with a percentage change of 12 %. This can be observed by examining the evolution of dwelling completions (all residential properties) in Dublin, as shown in Figure 3. We detect a positive trend over a time period of 2011-2025.

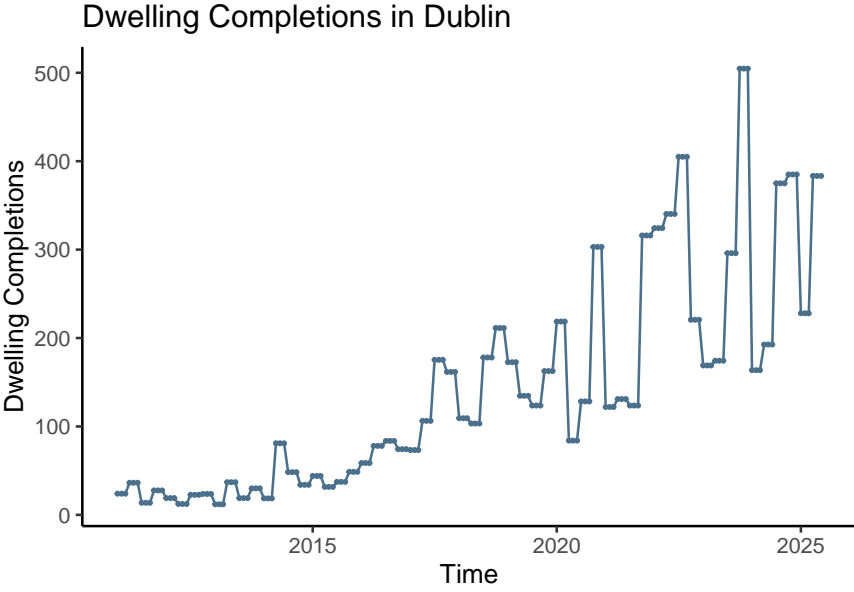


Figure 3: Dwelling Completions in Dublin (own illustration based on Central Statistics Office (2025d))

However, noticeable evidence suggests that small landlords have left the market to some extent. Gillespie et al. (2024) show, that the supply of homes for sale increased whereas the rental listings decreased - an indicator for the exit of small landlords. Before the

GFC in 2007/2009, there has been a predominance of small landlords. Private rental ownership was incentive due to solid credit conditions and a favorable fiscal policy. But since the PRS has been growing overall, the departure of small landlords appears to have been offset by other actors - most notably institutional investors in Dublin. To assess the role of institutional investments in the PRS, we will consider its development over recent years.

5.2.1 Institutional Investments (2011-2023)

Before the GFC, most investments in the PRS were funded by banks through developers and "buy to let" investors. During the GFC, market participants withdrew and demand vanished, leading to a decrease in the value of residential properties. As a result, developers and workers were unable to pay their loans due to a loss in rental (and non-rental) income. The Irish state intervened by funding the The National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) in 2009. The organization purchased property related loans from Irish banks in agreement of a repayment plan. Subsequently, the Irish government established the Real Estate Investments Trust (REIT) system in 2013. REITs are listed companies owning and managing real estate. Therefore, investors could hold property through share rather direct investments and benefit from tax advantages. NAMA aimed to create portfolios which were attractive for large institutional buyers including REITs (Nama, 2013).

The stock of residential properties for sell decreased and investors decided to finance new stock in 2018 (McCarthy, 2024). The "Built to rent" (BTR) apartments in urban areas (such as Dublin) were in alignment with the preferences of institutional investors who prefer to invest at a larger scale. Despite the introduced rental caps through the RPZs, the apartments promised profitable returns. This was favored by the RPZ exemptions as mentioned within Section 4. The BTR apartments were the driver of the growth in housing supply until 2023. Considering Figure 4, the share of apartments increased from 12.4% in 2018 to 35.5% in 2023. Most of the institutional investments were concentrated in Dublin. The share of total apartment completions in Dublin or the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) is represented in Figure 5. We note that, aside from two low cycles in 2012 and 2016, the share has consistently been around 80%.

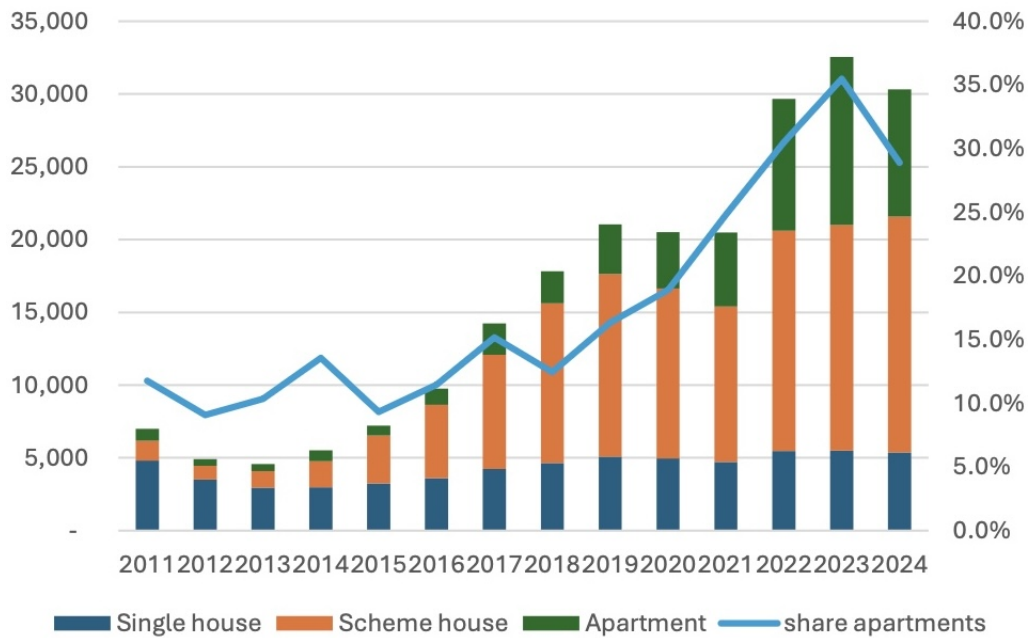


Figure 4: Dwelling Completions in Ireland by House Type (The Housing Agency, 2025b)

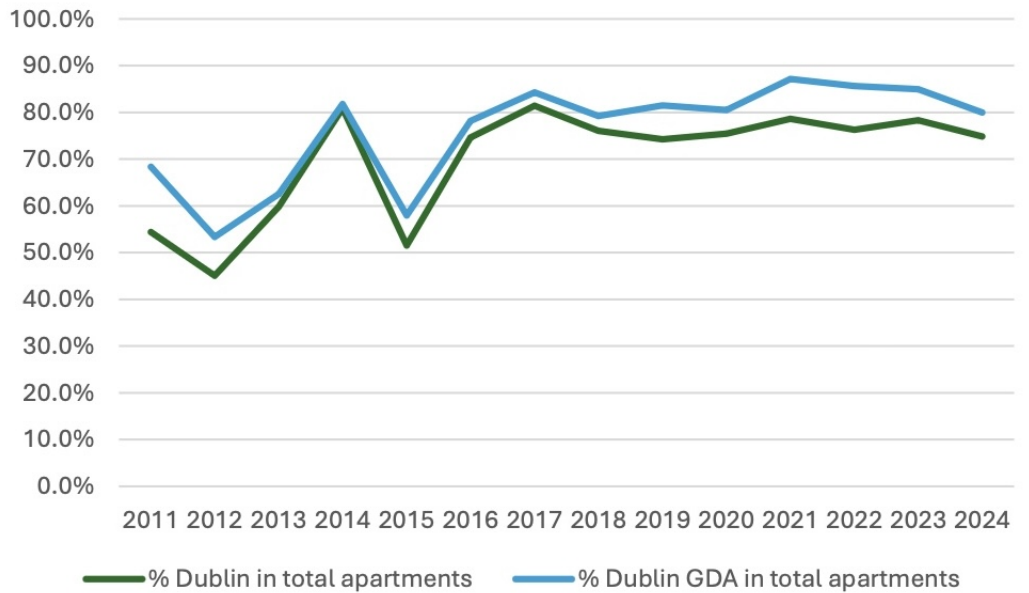


Figure 5: Dwelling Completions in Dublin (The Housing Agency, 2025b)

5.2.2 Institutional Investments (2023-Present)

The CRBE (2025) detected that dwelling completions decreased by 32 % between 2023 and 2024. At the same time, the forward transaction purchases were low in both 2023 and 2024 (Department of Finance, 2024). There are two main reasons explaining the decrease in dwelling completions and forward transaction purchases. First, the interest rate turned positive in 2022 for the first time since 2013 and increased thereafter (European Central Bank, n.d.). Therefore, investors demanded higher compensation for the risks associated with investing in the PRS compared to government bonds. Secondly, between 2022 and 2024 the net yields rose across Europe making higher net yields more difficult to achieve. As a result, investments in the PRS shrunk. Figure 6 shows a comparison of the net yields for prime multifamily homes across European cities. The net yields for Dublin increased by more than one percent. However, we note that this is a challenge across many European cities.

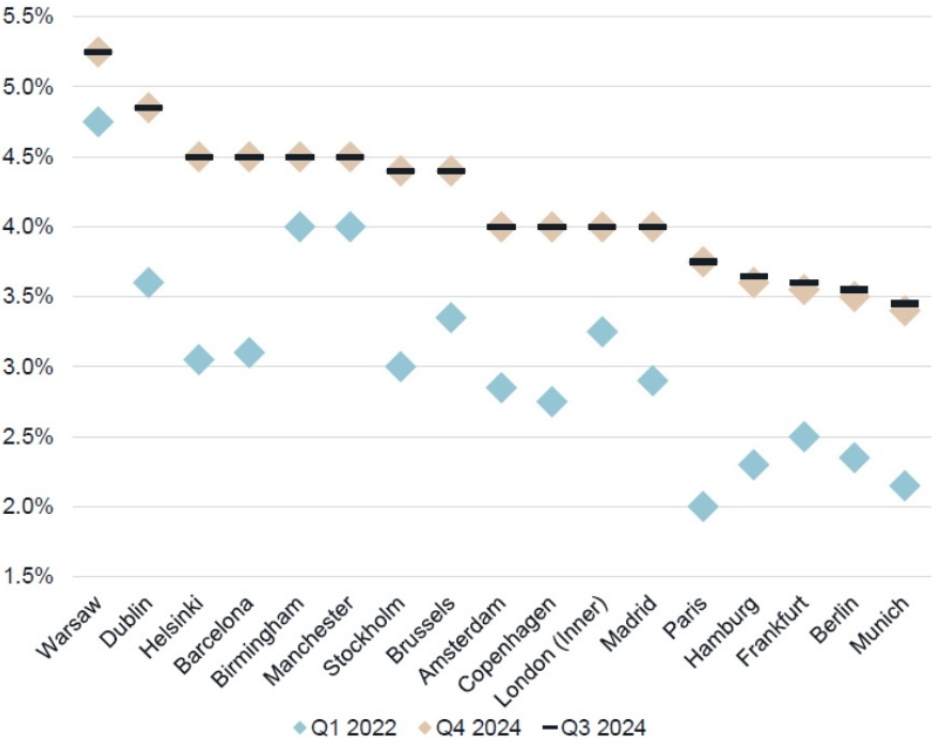


Figure 6: Comparison of Net Yields in European Cities (based on The Housing Agency (2025b))

Lastly we consider the perspective of investors. The Housing Agency (2025b) has provided a qualitative survey in which investors were asked about their reservations to invest in the PRS. They identified the following three aspects as most important: the high frequency of regulatory changes, the current RPZ rules and the social function of the institutional investment in housing. With regards to the RPZ rules, the 2 % cap was criticized. According to investors, operational payments and necessary re-investments for maintenance are above the rent cap. Concerning the social function of institutional investment in housing, investors argue that the residential stock is skewed towards more expensive properties. Therefore, it is "not their responsibility to provide affordable housing".

In conclusion, the RPZ policy has shown to be effective in Dublin. The econometric model revealed that the RPPI significantly decreased after the implementation of RPZs. Even though the PRS grew over a long time horizon, recent trends indicate a decline in dwelling completions and investments across Ireland. According to a qualitative survey of The Housing Agency, investors have reservations to continue their investments.

6 Policy Recommendation

We recommend continuing the RPZ system while implementing reforms to enhance its effectiveness. In our analysis, we focused on the evolution of the PRS in Dublin. Therefore, our suggestions will mostly rely on Dublin but can serve as a guideline for a policy change on a national level. Since Ireland is a RPZ, the policy change would affect all LAs and LEAs.

First, we define a set of objectives intended to accomplish through the policy reform:

1. Protect economically vulnerable households.
2. Provide investment incentives and prevent exits from the sector.
3. Ensure the maintenance and upkeep of rental properties.

We have two components within the system to reform the RPZs: the rent increase and the initial rent price. First, we consider a reform of the rent increase within a tenancy.

In the current system, rental properties lose their value if the rate of inflation (here measured by the CPI) exceeds 2%. Considering Figure 7, we note that the value of rental properties in Dublin depreciated between 2022 and 2024, with this downward trend only recently coming to a halt.

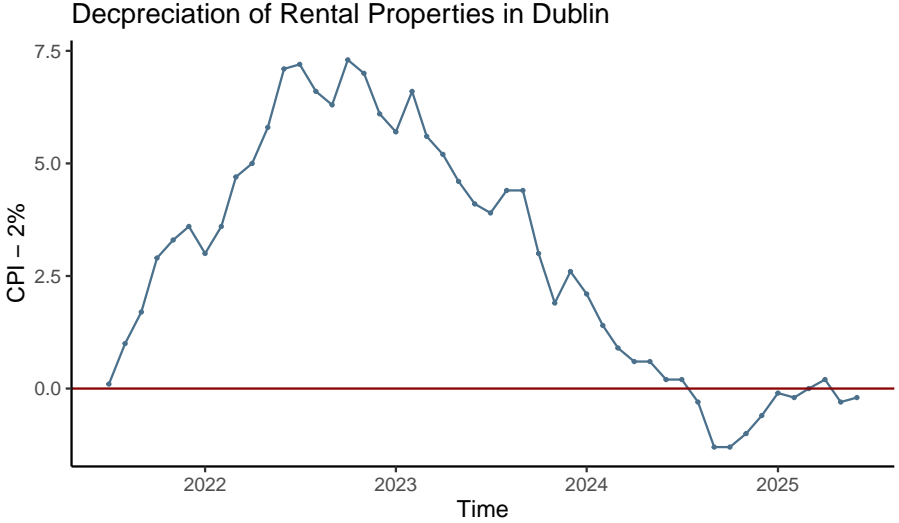


Figure 7: Depreciation of Rental Properties in Dublin (own illustration based on Central Statistics Office (2025a))

If landlords rental income falls, maintenance becomes unprofitable, resulting in landlords exiting the market. Therefore, supply falls and rents increase in the long term. In Section 5.2, we have seen that investors complain about being unable to maintain and upkeep their rental properties. The change in the economic conditions makes it unsustainable to maintain a rental cap of 2%. To encourage investment, ensure proper maintenance, and prevent further sector exits, we propose aligning the rental cap with the HICP. We suggest increasing the rental cap to 3–4% to ensure the sustainability of rental properties. As a high frequency of regulatory changes has been identified as a key concern for investors, caution is required. Nonetheless, we believe that this positive signal will foster investment. In short term, this will lead to higher rents for tenants. But according to Mense (2025), higher expected returns lead to more investments and supply. Subsequently, there will be higher tenant mobility and more units in Dublin become available benefiting economically vulnerable households in the long term.

The initial rent price is - unless the unit is new or an exemption applies - determined by the previous tenancy. Therefore, tenants are protected of arbitrary rent increases. However, if incentives and supply are weakened, this may lead to higher rents in the future. According to a survey conducted by The Housing Agency (2025b) on the four bodies involved in the RPZ administration, small landlords exited the market when they are stuck with low market rates. This is more problematic for urban areas outside Dublin, since the share of institutional investment in Dublin is higher. The Irish system provides little scope to reset the prices between tenancies. We recommend a review and possible redefinition of the "substantial change in the nature of the accommodations criterion" as represented in Figure 2. A re-examination of this criterion — conducted by the relevant regulatory bodies — could help ensure that necessary upgrades and modernization works allow for fair rent adjustments, thereby relaxing the requirements without creating excessive bureaucratic burden.

A Appendix

A.1 Designation of an area to a Rent Pressure Zone

First, the annual rate of rent inflation must have been more than 7% in at least four of the last six quarters. Secondly, the rent in the previous quarter must be above the standard average rent in the respective area. The high rents in metropolitan areas such as Dublin skew the national average rent. Consequently, the government distinguished between three types of average rents: national, Greater Dublin area and non-Dublin area.

A.2 Econometric Model

To test whether or not the RPPI decreased significantly since the Implementation of RPZs we have constructed the following model:

$$RPPI_t = \beta + \beta_{Une}Une_t + \beta_{Inf}Inf_t + \beta_{Int}Int_t + \beta_{Dwe}Dwe_{t-3} + \gamma RPZ_t + u_t. \quad (1)$$

The subscript t refers to the time of the variable. The model is based on a monthly frequency starting in April 2011 until June 2025. We will now give an overview regarding the variables included. $RPPI$ refers to the monthly percent change of the Residential Property Price Index in Dublin converted to an annual rate (Central Statistics Office, 2025d). It includes all residential properties. Une represents the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in Ireland in percent (Central Statistics Office, 2025b). It serves as an approximate value for the unemployment rate in Dublin. Inf measures the percentage change of the Consumer Price Index including all goods and services and converted to an annual rate (Central Statistics Office, 2025a). The variable Int represents the three-month yield interest rate at which banks lend to each other (Federal Reserve Bank of ST. LOUIS, n.d.). Dwe refers to the dwelling completions in Dublin and includes all residential properties (Central Statistics Office, 2025c). Originally, the variable has been observed quarterly. To maintain the monthly frequency, we constructed the average monthly dwelling completions for a quarter. Dwe has subscript $t - 3$ or is lagged by one quarter to consider the delayed effect of dwelling completions on the RPPI. The mentioned variables serve as macroeconomic control variables for the model.

RPZ is a dummy variable taking on the value one only after the implementation of the RPZs. Again, we are interested in the effect of the RPZ policy on the RPPI in Dublin. We have constructed the following test for γ :³

$$H_0 : \gamma \geq 0 \quad vs. \quad H_1 : \gamma < 0. \quad (2)$$

Under the null, the implementation of RPZs did not lead to a significant decrease of the RPPI in Dublin. For $\alpha > p$, we reject this hypothesis. We approached the problem using a modified t-test (Newey-West estimator) to control for heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation of the residuals. We obtained $p = 1.225476e - 08$ and therefore reject the null at every conventional level of significance. Table 1 summarizes the results of our regression (constructed using the Stargazer package developed by Marek (2022)). Most important: the coefficients, the respective standard errors, significance tests results⁴ and the R^2 .

³The coefficient in front of *RPZ* measures the all time effect of the policy implementation.

⁴Note, that we used a modified t-test for γ and not the result of the regression table. However, we come to the same conclusion of rejecting the null at every conventional level of significance.

Table 1: Linear Regression Results

| <i>Dependent variable:</i> | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Res |
| Infl | -0.507 (0.326) |
| Une | -2.397*** (0.375) |
| Int | -1.565*** (0.566) |
| Dwe_lag | 0.011 (0.010) |
| dummy | -16.189*** (2.903) |
| Constant | 34.663*** (4.876) |
| Observations | 171 |
| R ² | 0.278 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.257 |
| Residual Std. Error | 8.586 (df = 165) |
| F Statistic | 12.732*** (df = 5; 165) |

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

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