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## **PPR Response to the DOJ's Consultation on Repeal of the Vagrancy Act 1824 and the Vagrancy (Ireland) Act 1847**

Currently in NI, people accused of rough sleeping can be prosecuted under section 4 of the 1824 Vagrancy Act, and those accused of begging under section 3 of the 1847 Vagrancy (Ireland) Act.

These provisions are still in use: the Department of Justice's consultation [document](#) indicates that between 2018 and 2023, NI saw 44 rough sleeping prosecutions and 24 convictions under the 1824 Act (para. 6.25); over the same period there were 286 begging prosecutions and 269 convictions under the 1847 Act (para. 6.24).

Similar 19<sup>th</sup> century legal provisions have already been repealed in Scotland (in 1982 – see para. 5.6) and in England and Wales (in 2022 – see para. 5.2). The DOJ consultation seeks views on its proposal to repeal the provisions of these two Acts as they apply to Northern Ireland, effectively decriminalising both rough sleeping and begging.

PPR agrees with the Minister of Justice's view, expressed in the consultation document, that rough sleeping and begging are

often linked to underlying issues such as homelessness, poverty, alcohol and drug addiction, poor mental health, sexual and domestic abuse and family breakdown. These are complex and cross cutting issues which require a multi-agency response of support rather than criminalising people simply because of their personal circumstances (para. 2.2)

The consultation document outlines existing policy in this area, including the NI Housing Executive's [Ending Homelessness Together 2022-27](#) strategy. In PPR's view, any perceived 'gaps' in officials' capacity to respond to street behaviours left by repeal of these two 19<sup>th</sup> century Acts should be addressed through updating the above and related policies and improving inter-agency working, rather than through replacement legislation.