

March 26th 2020

Dear Deputy

National and local Traveller organisations have been working hard to make sure Travellers are supported in every way to reduce the spread and impact of the Coronavirus .

More than 2,000 Traveller families are living in inadequate, unsafe and impermanent conditions .

Of 591 families on unauthorised sites: 892 people have no access to running water, a toilet or electricity and the other 1,483 people, have access to at best, an outside tap and temporary toilet. The odds are stacked against their health outcomes in particular at this time.

We are looking for your support on the following amendment to the Emergency Measures In The Public Interest (Covid-19) Bill 2020

Amendment : That all Travellers who are currently resident in any location should not, during the Coronavirus epidemic, be evicted from that location, except where movement is required to ameliorate hardship and provide additional protection during the crisis, and subject to consultation with the Travellers involved.

For example just two ago weeks a young pregnant couple were served with a 24hr eviction notice and where left with no option but to render themselves as homeless, we are asking now for consideration of Travellers as a group vulnerable to eviction and given the Covid19 crisis who are particularly vulnerable to infection based on chronic health status and outcomes in the community. The current situation has the potential for extreme effect within the community .

The Irish Traveller Movement and other national groups raised matters with Minister Damien English that no special measures were in place for Travellers living in overcrowded conditions and the importance of site sanitation facilities. In immediate response he issued a circular to all Local Authorities on March 18th on measures designed to reduce the spread of COVID19 and lessen the risk of infection, particularly for those living on sites with limited facilities and outlined extra measures needed , including:

1. Extra toilets;
2. Running water;
3. Additional mobile accommodation / space where there is overcrowding;
4. Extra refuse collection;

5. Access and egress on sites; and
6. Additional units (either mobiles on site or houses elsewhere that will allow for self-isolation/ quarantine).

The Minister also committed that local authorities would be requested to be mindful of Travellers in the context of evictions and asked Traveller NGO's to inform his department should they arise .

Status since then

The Irish Traveller Movement monitored implementation of the supports and report now there is no compliance across some local authorities and there may be a risk of evictions.

- Feedback from local settings have also established that some Traveller families are reluctant to ask the local authority for additional Covid19 supports as they fear they will be evicted , as they may be “unofficially “ on a site adjacent to family etc.
- We have received confirmation that local authorities are in fact distinguishing support needs determined by whether Travellers are living in official or unofficial sites. It is vitally important that Travellers, regardless of being located on official or unofficial sites get access to basic support and adequate protection from Coronavirus infection.
- It's clear that the current response to what is being seen as an accommodation issue is not adequate enough and needs to be prioritized as a public health response using an inter agency approach.

We call for a moratorium on evictions of Travellers, particularly Section 10 evictions, for the duration of the crisis via an amendment to the **Emergency Measures In The Public Interest (Covid-19) Bill 2020**

We ask for the Minister of Housing Planning and Local Government to issue a mandatory circular to the County Chief Executives/Heads of Housing giving clear directive on enforcement measures on the additional support issues and that every effort should be made to find prompt and practical solutions on existing sites. Where these additional measures prove not possible, it may be necessary for local authorities to work with the families involved, to move residents to alternative accommodation on a temporary basis.

For further information please contact Jacinta Brack or Bernard Joyce The Irish Traveller Movement 087 27 44791 jacinta@itmtrav.ie or Bernard on director@itmtrav.ie

Overview of Travellers in accommodation currently

An analysis of Department figures show the presiding picture of poor delivery of accommodation for Travellers and accentuates the extreme vulnerability for families and the need to accelerate the 32 actions contained in the Report of the Expert Group on Traveller Accommodation.

Current Data

Figures for 2018, the latest available, indicate the population to be 11,020 families, or approx. 44,300 individuals. Given other Travellers may have no engagement with a local authority, or who do not self identify for the purposes of data collection, the true population is likely larger.

Of the 11,020 families currently under the statutory duty of Local Authorities (Table 1) (3) the following indicates their status:

3,726 people are in overcrowded housing and 2,387 on roadsides - 5 times the rate since yr.2000.

Of the 591 families on unauthorised sites: 892 people have no access to running water, a toilet or electricity and the other 1,483 people, have access to at best, an outside tap and temporary toilet.

Of the 1,045 families on official Local Authority Halting Sites, 257 of those families, (or 1,033 men, women and children) have no separate or standalone accommodation, but are sharing in overcrowded basic site facilities, with extended family.

Under this official provision, 174 families are corralled on Basic Service Bays/Transient HS Bays, which at most have a portable water supply, toilet and washing facilities, waste collection service and a hard stand for caravans.

Additionally, 927 families or a further 3,726 people are Sharing Housing in overcrowded conditions, with grandparents, parents, siblings and grandchildren.

In effect, more than 2,000 families are living in inadequate, unsafe and impermanent conditions stacked against their health outcomes in particular.