



Irish Traveller Movement, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre and National Traveller Women's Forum National Youth Homelessness Strategy Submission

Context: Young Travellers in Ireland

In the 2016 Census, 18.4% of the Traveller population were aged between 15-24, while just 11.7% of the overall population were in this age category¹ and approximately 60% of Travellers are under 25.² It is important to recognise in the context of youth homelessness, that 31% of Travellers aged 15-29 years old are married, compared with 5.8 percent nationally³ and are statistically more likely to have started a family within this age range than the general population. Young Travellers face multiple and intersecting disadvantages across many areas of life, rooted in a historical and contemporary context of racism and discrimination. These intersectional disadvantages, often particularly impacting on young Traveller women, both increase risk of homelessness, increase the ill effects of long periods spent in homelessness and lead to barriers exiting homelessness through the routes currently available:

- Just 13% of Traveller females were educated to upper secondary or above compared with 69.1% of the general population.⁴
- In 2017 Travellers were over 50 times more likely to leave school without a Leaving Certificate in comparison to the non-Traveller population.⁵

¹ Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8itd/>

² Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8itd/>

³ Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8itd/>

⁴ Available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/AITHS-Booklet-Sep.12.pdf>

⁵ ERSI 'A Social Portrait of Travellers' available at <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS56.pdf>

- The rate of suicide among Travellers is six times higher than the settled population, accounting for approximately 11% of all Traveller deaths, increasingly among younger Travellers.⁶
- While complete datasets are not available in every case, young Travellers also account for significant numbers within other groups recognised as being particularly vulnerable to homelessness; including one parent families, care leavers, and those leaving prison or youth detention. In 2019 Travellers accounted for 19% of children in Oberstown Children Detention Campus. By comparison, Travellers account for just over 1% of the population aged 12 to 18.⁷
- In the 2016 Census 80.2% of Travellers were found to be unemployed⁸.

While a safe and secure home represents a sure foundation for progressing and improving outcomes in all these areas, barriers in education and employment lead to socioeconomic disadvantage and subsequent higher levels of reliance on social housing supports for accommodation. Suitable accommodation has been consistently denied to a high proportion of young Travellers, which is clear to see in both the high levels of Travellers in official homelessness as well as in various forms of hidden homelessness. While there is no ethnic identifier at present to quantify the full extent of the homeless crisis in the Traveller community; available local statistics point to significant overrepresentation within **official homeless figures**:

- While Travellers make up less than 1% of the overall population in Ireland, in figures obtained by RTE in 2019, **25% of homeless children** living in emergency accommodation outside of Dublin were Travellers, **and 13% of homeless adults** were Travellers⁹.
- In **Galway City in September 2019**, Traveller families accounted for **50% of all** homeless families presenting to the Authority over a one month period¹⁰
- In **Dublin City Council's** current Traveller Accommodation Programme, **11% of all children** in homelessness were Traveller children, while 9% of all homeless adults were Travellers¹¹

⁶ Available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/AITHS-Booklet-Sep.12.pdf>

⁷ DCYA (2020) Young Travellers in Ireland. Available from: <https://assets.gov.ie/72732/824dc1d2acaf4e5a93d88e640ae1ef0f.pdf>

⁸ Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8itseh/>

⁹ Available at: <https://www.rte.ie/news/investigations-unit/2018/1217/1017612-travellers-in-local-authorities-data/>

¹⁰ See [An account of the Equality Review carried out by Galway City Council in respect of Traveller-specific accommodation](#)

¹¹ See [Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019 – 2024](#)

Case Study: The Impact of Emergency Accommodation

John and Marie are a couple in their early twenties and they have been living in hotel emergency accommodation for the past thirteen months, navigating their whole lives from one room. Marie is seven months pregnant with their first child and they do not think they will be accommodated before their child is born. They have been trying throughout this time to secure a HAP property with support from a case worker from a homeless organisation. There are very few one or two bedroom properties available in their locality and all properties available are outside of their budget. They face repeated discrimination in this process, with landlords consistently not calling them back.*

Hidden Homelessness

As well as being overrepresented within official homeless figures. Travellers are also vulnerable to many forms of hidden homelessness; most notably living in overcrowded and extremely substandard accommodation, and/or living on unofficial sites without security of tenure. These situations arise for a number of reasons:

- Discrimination in the private rental sector meaning that the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is not a meaningful solution¹²
- Available emergency accommodation being a significant distance from support networks, particularly in rural areas, making it an untenable option
- Difficulties accessing the housing list, for example where young Travellers are deemed to be accommodated with their parents and ineligible for social housing supports, even in extremely substandard or overcrowded conditions
- Non-delivery of Traveller-specific accommodation (more detail below)
- Long waits for allocation of standard social housing where required

The ESRI and IHREC found in 2021 that 39% of Traveller families nationally are living in such overcrowded accommodation.¹³ “Doubling up” in bays or in houses means no security of tenure, risk of eviction, lack of privacy, reduced access to basic sanitation services, increased energy poverty due to the use of generators and reliance on poorly insulated older mobile accommodation, and the personal stresses and pressures of living in overcrowded conditions. This is more likely to affect young Travellers than other age groups and leads to an underestimation of the extent of homelessness among Travellers.

¹² Travellers are 22 times more likely to experience discrimination in the Private Rental Sector, full report available at <https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2017/11/Who-experiences-discrimination-in-Ireland-Report.pdf>

¹³ Available at: <https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2021/09/Monitoring-Adequate-Housing-In-Ireland-Sept-2021.pdf>

Unofficial Sites and the Risk of Arbitrary Evictions into Homelessness

524 Traveller families are living in trailers/mobiles on unofficial sites, including roadside sites, often without adequate sanitation facilities or stable electricity supply and without any security of tenure. They are at risk of eviction by local authorities using the Criminal Trespass Legislation, with a 24 hour notice period to move and no alternative accommodation offered. Such evictions have continued throughout Covid 19 lockdowns and restrictions and is one means through which Travellers end up in emergency homeless accommodation.

Case Study: The Impact of Hidden Homelessness

Christine is a young Traveller woman in her early twenties. She lives with her husband and their young child in a caravan beside a family member's home. The caravan is damp and there is mold throughout. They have no sanitation facilities of their own, they go to their family member's home to shower and use the toilet.*

Christine suffers from a chronic health condition which requires a complex treatment plan and regular hospital visits. There is no space to securely store her medical devices where they are not in reach of their young child and medical professionals have noted the negative impact of her living conditions on her prognosis. Her condition means attempting to secure emergency accommodation is not an option. She has been on the housing list for three years, and has received no offers of permanent accommodation despite being on the medical priority list, and thus her situation continues, with huge risks to her health. They are currently at risk of eviction through court proceedings relating to the unofficial nature of their living situation.

Recommendations

Housing for All Pathway 2 states: *"it is recognised that Traveller and Roma communities are represented amongst the homeless population"* (p.15), but no specific actions are identified to alleviate this problem. The National Youth Homelessness Strategy should include tangible, timelined and fully resourced targets relating to ending Traveller homelessness, in both official and hidden forms. **The Strategy should name young Travellers as a priority group**, identifying the unique challenges faced by Travellers who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness and including unique solutions in the strategy, informed by the recommendations provided below.

Recommendation 1: Data Collection

- Introduce a **standardised ethnic identifier** across all statutory, voluntary housing and homeless datasets. This includes datasets for social housing and accommodation,

allocations of social housing and accommodation and on homelessness and in refuge accommodation through the PASS System.

- Available data on numbers of young Travellers experiencing homelessness should be recorded in **Traveller Accommodation Programmes** and Traveller Annual Estimates compiled by the local authorities.
- **Expand the definition of homelessness** through adoption of the ETHOS Definition of Homelessness to ensure Travellers and others who are living in forms of 'hidden homelessness' including those in overcrowded, inadequate conditions and those without security of tenure are captured in data collection, and appropriate remedies are subsequently identified.

Recommendation 2: Align the strategy with existing policy frameworks and commitments to increase and improve the delivery of Traveller-specific accommodation

- **Traveller Accommodation Expert Review:** 2.5 years after the publication of the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review, just four of the thirty two recommendations in the report have been completed in full. The DHLGH should commit during the lifespan of the strategy to ensuring all recommendation are implemented in full and prioritise the following recommendations:
 - the establishment of an independent national Traveller accommodation authority to oversee the planning and delivery of Traveller accommodation
 - repeal of Criminal Trespass legislation to remedy ongoing breaches of Article 16 of the European Social Charter and to end evictions into homelessness
 - bypass the Part 8 process for Traveller accommodation
 - commission research on homelessness among Travellers.
- **National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy:** the Youth Homelessness Strategy should align with the upcoming new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, with clear targets and a robust system of monitoring progress.
- **National Homeless Action Committee:** despite the recognised overrepresentation of Travellers within homelessness and the complex experiences of homelessness faced by Travellers, there is currently no Traveller representation on the National Homeless Action Committee. This should be remedied.

Recommendation 3: Improve Support Services for Young Travellers at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness

- **Resource local Traveller organisations** to assist young Travellers who are experiencing,

or at risk of, homelessness.

- **Mandate anti-racism and discrimination training** and Traveller cultural awareness training for all local authority staff in compliance with Section 42, Irish Human Rights and Equality Act (2014).
- **Equality proof HAP and the Choice Based Letting System** recognising the digital divide, and the educational disadvantage experienced by many young Travellers. Proactive measures should be in place to make all housing services accessible including accessible language, support with forms and clear communication strategies.
- Emergency accommodation should provide **holistic culturally appropriate supports** to young people, including mental health support, and staff should be trained to address the needs and safety of everyone who accesses these services, including LGBTQI+ Travellers, disabled Travellers and Travellers who have experienced domestic violence.
- There needs to be a strong person-centred, healthcare approach to support young **women in homelessness through pregnancy** from an early stage that follows through with postnatal care.
- **Emergency accommodation should be utilised as a measure of last resort and for the shortest period possible.** Young people who enter emergency accommodation should be guaranteed a comprehensive needs assessment and transferal from emergency accommodation within two weeks

Recommendation 4: Improve the Process for Identifying and Responding to Future Need within the Traveller Accommodation Programmes

The Traveller Accommodation Programmes are drawn up every 5 years to plan for the delivery of Traveller specific accommodation. In the guidelines issued to local authorities, they are instructed to plan for both the current accommodation need, and the future need arising over the five year programme period. This is pertinent, given that, as mentioned, Travellers statistically tend to get married and/or start a family at a much younger age than the general population. In 2020 the Irish Traveller Movement carried out a review of all 31 of the local authorities' Traveller Accommodation Programmes. Some key relevant findings were:

- 8 local authorities have set targets to delivery lower than their assessed current need
- 5 local authorities didn't provide targets for projected needs of Traveller families in the Programme
- There was inconsistent and sometimes insufficient methodologies used to ascertain future need, where future need was considered and planned for¹⁴

¹⁴ Available at: <https://itmtrav.ie/audit-of-local-authority-programmes-finds-failure-to-deliver-for-traveller-families/>

Without a strong plan to account for future population growth in each Traveller Accommodation Programme, overcrowding and homelessness perpetuates and increases year on year. Accounting for future population needs is about more than roofs over people's heads; planning for future population growth gives Travellers the meaningful option to continue in Traveller-specific accommodation, where they wish to do so, ensuring their cultural rights and identity are protected, and that rupture from strong family support networks is prevented. 75% of Travellers in a 2017 survey said it was very important to live close to immediate family.¹⁵

- The Strategy should ensure that a robust **midterm review process**¹⁶ is carried out by each local authority, using a standardised template for reporting.
- Local authorities **should amend their Traveller Accommodation Programmes** where sufficient data and targets have not been included.
- These improvements to nationally monitoring the Traveller Accommodation Programmes should then be carried through into the next Traveller Accommodation Programme period (2025-2030).

Recommendation 5: Increase Delivery of Traveller-Specific Accommodation and End Dependency on HAP

The current Traveller accommodation crisis is rooted in historic and contemporary under delivery of Traveller-specific accommodation and local authorities not spending available budgets:

- Between 2000-2018 local authorities delivered only 68% of total delivery planned and between 2008 and 2019, over €72 million of the Traveller accommodation budget went unspent.¹⁷
- Government Investment was €120 million for the first TAP (2000-2004) down to €33 million for the 2014-2018 programme and while the annual budget has risen to €18.5 million this year, it has not been restored to the levels pre-2008, where there was an annual budget of €40 million.¹⁸

¹⁵ Available at: <https://exchangehouse.ie/news.php?id=234>

¹⁶ More details available on this available here:

<https://itmtrav.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/PDF-Irish-Traveller-Movement-Submission-on-Midterm-Review-2.pdf>

¹⁷ Available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Expert-Review-Group-Traveller-Accommodation.pdf>

¹⁸ Available at:

<https://www.housingagency.ie/publications/review-funding-traveller-specific-accommodation-and-implementation-traveller>

- The Strategy should also commit to reducing dependency on HAP as the chief exit pathway from homelessness, recognising the discrimination faced by young Travellers in the private rental sector, and **instead increase delivery of both Traveller-specific accommodation and standard social housing, with specific targets included in the strategy across these categories.**
-

Note: as recent members of the Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness, we support the recommendations made in their submission to the consultation.

Note: all names have been changed to protect confidentiality.