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## Progressive Realisation for Travellers of Budget 2023

### Recommendations

1. **Investment for Traveller inclusion and Community Development:** Ensure adequate investment in Traveller inclusion strategies, hasten the review, and implement a new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy in partnership with Travellers with a robust implementation and monitoring plan, and corresponding budgets across all actions.
2. **Accommodation:** Expedite the Expert Group Report on Traveller Accommodation and establish as priority, the Traveller Accommodation Authority and oversee national delivery with full staffing requirement, to redress supply, chronic overcrowding and inadequate accommodation
3. **Unemployment:** Given 83% Traveller Unemployment, implement the National Traveller Enterprise and Employment Plan promised in the Programme for Government.
4. **Education:** Expedite the long-promised Traveller Education Strategy with dedicated staff and resources to coordinate implementation in full consultation with Traveller organisations.
5. **Health and Mental Health:** Publish and resource the Traveller Health Action Plan and deliver on the Programme for Government commitment towards a Traveller Mental Health strategy.
6. **Equality Budgeting:** Expedite the National Equality Data Strategy and engage Traveller NGOs in its oversight and align it to an annual Equality Budgeting Plan, and to the actions committed to in the next NTRIS.
7. **Traveller Social Equivalence**
  - Incorporate equality proofing for Travellers in National Government Planning Strategies and in broader public research and consultative cohorts
  - Establish an ethnic and culture safeguarding strategy and engage the community and Traveller organisations on its development, and with ring-fenced and ensure Traveller culture and history is resourced to be reflected in the curriculum.

**Make this a Budget for Traveller Children**

## Recommendations

### 1. Redress inadequate living conditions

- Demote HAP as the chief exit pathway from homelessness, increase delivery of Traveller specific accommodation and ensure housing assistance systems, including HAP and the CBL are equality proofed.
- Ensure Traveller homelessness informs all mainstream national and local policy discussions, as well as inclusion in Traveller specific accommodation policy areas.

### 2. Redress of child poverty: Undertake a national action plan to reduce Traveller child poverty, including associated timelines.

### 3. Educational disadvantage

- Redress discriminatory barriers in the early years, ECCE scheme and amend criteria to allow for a percentage of places offset for Traveller children to safeguard learning from the early school pipeline to primary school.
- Advance supports for Traveller pupils based on identity rather than school DEIS status and review the operation of the capitation grant.
- Make the Susi Grant available for Travellers as part time students, to improve educational outcomes and enhance employment opportunities.

### 4. Young Traveller Well Being and Identity:

- Adequately resource the National Action Plan Against Racism NAPAR with robust monitoring and ring fence supports for Travellers under actions with a time lined implementation plan
- Resource the Yellow Flag School Programme under the *National Action Plan Against Racism* (NAPAR)
- Include Travellers within the protected grounds in the *Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill*.
- Prioritise funding to examine the distinct needs of young Travellers who are vulnerable to suicide and activate and resource a priority intervention programme.

### 5. Energy Credit and Fuel Poverty to ensure an adequate standard of living for Traveller children

- Redress the discriminatory loop hole of an energy credit for Travellers with “non-domestic” accounts.
- Include and prioritise all Traveller accommodation in the National retrofit scheme, given increasing energy costs.
- Increase fuel allowance payments for Travellers living in mobile homes by a minimum of €15 (based on 2022 MESL standards)
- Provide access to energy efficient residential standard mobile homes through a caravan loan/rental scheme and ensure a rating system (similar to BER) as a guide for those purchasing mobiles
- Ensure equivalence of fuel allowance payments to families officially sharing a bay (and liable for local authority rent). And amend criteria for families living adjacent to the main home and using that home address to claim fuel allowance

**Investment for Traveller inclusion and Community Development:** In 2022 €5.659 was allocated to support Traveller and Roma inclusion nationally, from €5 million in 2021 and 3.8 million in 2020. A further €880,000 was secured in 2022 through Dormant Account Funds but has yet to be advanced. **No specific resources to deliver the 149 actions attached to the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy have been identified since it's initiation with many stagnant, evaluation is a year overdue and central oversight has been weak with progress slow and unsanctioned, and showing little outcomes for Travellers.**

**Accommodation:** Over 2,800 families (approx. 12,000 men, women and including 3,000 children born into a family where their home has no permanent electricity or heating and overcrowded.

Of 10,809 families nationally, 933 Traveller families were sharing housing with others in overcrowded and unsafe accommodation designed for single family usage. The extent of the problem has been seriously neglected and underestimated. There is a need for 3,060 units / for Traveller families recorded nationally in current Traveller Accommodation Programmes yet only 15% of all units outlined in Programmes will be provided by use of Traveller Specific accommodation, over 50% will be provided using Standard Social Housing, Private Rented, using housing assistance payments such as HAP/RAS and through Approved Social Housing Bodies. Travellers are 22 times more likely to experience discrimination in accessing Private Rented.

As of May 2022, 13 local authorities have not spent any capital budgets, in 2021, 3 local authorities didn't draw from the capital fund of €15.5 million and 3 others spent less than €50,000, and only 16 units of New builds were developed nationally. In 2020, 5 didn't draw from the capital fund of €14.5 million despite a need of 301 units in those areas. Refurbishments accounted for 54.1% overall of output between 2006 and 2018.

**Traveller Accommodation Programmes are operating without central oversight or synergy with delivery targets set out Plans, there is no intervention where no budget has been requested despite evidence of need in those areas, and there is almost no accordance to statutory powers for requirement in the planning framework.**

**Employment:** The comprehensive Traveller and Roma Training, Employment and Enterprise Plan outlined in the Programme for Government 2020, is not evident yet. Traveller unemployment in 2016 was 83% nationally, and found to be at **15%**, among lowest rates in all countries surveyed in Europe by the Fundamental Rights Agency in 2019. Only 17% of Traveller women and 13% of Traveller men have paid jobs compared to 68% of Irish women and 80% of men generally. Of the 30% in the community employed, 5 in 10 are in part-time jobs and only 3 in 10 full-time.

In 2020 and '21, obstacles were encountered in the public employment system as the focus was on the short term unemployed nationally, and Travellers were not prioritised.

Traveller participation in the labour market is marked by perceived stigma associated with being a Traveller and discrimination in recruitment both direct (i.e. refusal to hire or provide services) and indirect (i.e. poor education). Nationally only 17% of the public said they would employ a Traveller and Travellers are ten times more likely than White Irish to experience discrimination in seeking work.

**Education** Only 13% of Travellers versus 92% non-Travellers completed senior cycle at second level. 55% left by the age of 15. **A cross departmental Traveller Education Strategy promised in the Programme for Government, has not materialised to date and no ring-fenced monies now or at any time, allocated specifically to Traveller primary and post primary education.** Additional monies have been advanced towards higher education and to support local projects tackling education disadvantage and Traveller retention in post primary, which are welcome, but not enough. (See Education section Traveller Children).

**Health and Mental Health** Travellers were recorded in only 11% of government data sets, following a pilot review of 107 data sets in 31 public bodies in 2020, and found most in health, drug and prison areas. **However, an evidence-based, need-led and intersectional approach for Traveller health, via the long awaited Traveller Health Action Plan and mental health strategies have not been addressed, despite commitments in the Programme for Government.** Traveller health had no new core development monies since 2008, until a welcome advance of €270,000 to expand Traveller Health Units in 2021.

**The further commitment in the Programme for Government towards a Traveller Mental Health strategy, has been rowed back** and no strategic approach or investment to redress the crisis in Traveller Mental health.

**Equality Budgeting:** According to Department of Housing figures there was 10,809 (last available 2019) Traveller families nationally, approx. 45,397 to 57,287 people, depending on how data has been collected by Councils, which is not standardised and ranges from family to house size.

Since Government policy to progress Traveller inclusion, the Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community 1995 through to the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021, there has been no comprehensive or strategic approach to a national data set for Travellers. The option to self-identify was included in the last two censuses 2006 and 2011. Currently only 12 departments report Equality Budgeting metrics, and most do not include ethnic data.

**Travellers have not been prioritised across public service monitoring, have been underserved by mainstream approaches, and lack of data has undermined the investment needed to provide for future outcomes and redress the many fundamental issues impacting on life chances.**

The Government Traveller Plan: The NTRIS is without a Traveller identifier across its 149 actions, and so monitoring outcomes is piecemeal and weak.

The adoption by Government of The National Equality Data Strategy April 2022 is a significant but a plan is unclear, and engagement beyond Department structures has not culminated or intention to align with Budget 2023 or synergy with cross departmental Equality Budgeting.

#### **Traveller Social Equivalence**

**National Government Planning Strategies** are not currently comprehensively inclusive in design and **Travellers are not factored into Ireland's broader plans such as national development framing, across cultural, social, community and environmental strategies, as a matter of fact.** Government consultation on those matters assume Travellers are included in broader public research cohorts and in other national engagement strategies, which is not the case.

**No legal safeguarding or specific affirmative strategy was advanced or consultation with Travellers or NGOs since 2017 when the State formally acknowledged Travellers as an ethnic minority group.**

Travellers independently advocated for educational recognition to include **Traveller Culture and Heritage in the curriculum**, but Government refused to amend education legislation, at the Bills' initial stages, (currently at Committee Stage.) The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment commissioned by the Minister for Education in 2018 to review current curriculum content and develop an informing paper, was welcome, but a clear plan for progression is not in place, and confidence is lagging.

**Travellers are not represented in State-sponsored national and mainstream intercultural initiatives and there is very limited progress on actions related to culture, visibility and public participation within the NTRIS.** Other than investment to support an annual Traveller Pride programme of events held over two-weeks, and little collaboration between the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to date. The Government investment strategy and plan "Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage 2018–2027" does not include targeted actions or ring-fenced budget for Traveller culture and heritage despite the commitment to a €1.2 billion nationally.

## Traveller Children

The likely estimate of Travellers **under the age of 19 years in Ireland is somewhere between 22,000 – 28,000.**

In 2021, a focused equality data audit was conducted, covering all national data sources held by Tusla (the Child and Family Agency), four organisations co-operated in this: CSO, DCEDIY, DPER and Tusla and Traveller data is captured in only six<sup>(13)</sup>, of the total of 22 data source

It is noted in Government replies to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; *'no specific budget line exists within budgetary programmes in light of the small number of children in those groups'*, yet Traveller children are mostly excluded from data sets and monitoring, therefore national policy decisions erroneously underserve the need due to a lack of metrics, and therefore resources required to address those needs.

### Homelessness

104 homeless Traveller families were recorded in Dublin City council's Traveller Accommodation Programme and **25% of homeless children** living in emergency accommodation outside of Dublin were Travellers (RTE in 2019). The Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS) however does not include an ethnic identifier, a cause of ongoing concern and advocacy by the Irish Traveller Movement.

### Inadequate living conditions

**Household size:** Only a very small proportion of social housing and private rental stock consists of dwellings suitable to accommodate larger Traveller families. This means when a tenancy is due to end, families cannot access another rental property, and many are rendered homeless, and face eviction.

**Thresholds** Some larger Traveller families are still over the threshold to avail of social housing support in the lowest income threshold band areas, despite an increase by 2.5% (2021) for every child under 18 in a family to counter the discriminatory barrier for larger Traveller families. However, due to a lack of equivalence across councils, many must move away from local schools and supports and are stuck indefinitely in emergency accommodation.

**HAP** Most post homeless provision is into the private rental sector, rather than local authority or AHB social housing and 82% of exits from homelessness were via the HAP (Homelessness Performance Reports 2021) For those who can access HAP, the **allocation is often well below the average rental value** of most properties. A national audit of the last TAPs shows 21% (579 families) of Traveller delivery was by use of HAP, and 16% planned for (507 families) in the current one

### Redress of child poverty

According to the *First 5 strategy* 1.3% of 0-5-year olds in Ireland are Travellers, 36% of whom lived in jobless households and as many as 28 % grow up in severe material deprivation. Over 77% of group housing or halting sites had no play areas and 29% of Traveller families living in caravans or mobiles homes had no sewage facilities.

The Survey on Income and Living Conditions the monitor for the Dept Social Protection has stated it will not disaggregate information for Travellers, yet Travellers are widely accepted to be historically one of the most socially disadvantaged groups in Ireland, with 83% unemployment cross the community.

### Educational disadvantage

#### DEIS

The DEIS Programme tackling educational disadvantage, has indirectly benefited some Traveller children, in 2020/21, €16.2 million was allocated to schools, but only half of all Traveller pupils are in DEIS schools. Data collection by the Department of Education critical to assessing and remedying obstacles has been withheld by the Department of Education since 2018.

#### The Capitation Grant

The Enhanced capitation grant for Travellers is available to schools where Traveller students (self-identify), however as the grant is autonomous and the Department of Education does not collect any data on how it is spent, it is unclear how Traveller students benefit from it. The impact of the lack of monitoring of a Reduced Timetable for Travellers, subject to guidelines since Jan 2022, has resulted in many Travellers leaving primary school unable to read or write.

#### The Early Childcare and Education Scheme

In Early Years. The transition from preschool to primary school and preparatory learning access is critical for Traveller children, however the strict inflexibility of Pobal funding which links funding to attendance, is a cause of concerns for Traveller parents, with 96% uptake of the ECCE scheme nationally versus 47% of Traveller children, 2% less attended in 2018/19 than the previous year, and no redress of concerns since.

Traveller parents report that children are disproportionately disadvantaged where operators of the scheme give preference to children attending a full week, as the system more likely favours working parents and Traveller unemployment is at 83%. Denial of early school place disadvantages pupils who already face considerable impediments in the system, and where educational disadvantage is prevalent among parents.

### Employment and Training

70% of 16-24yr olds are not in employment, education or training, the highest of all groups across six European countries and seven times more than young Irish people generally (11%).

### **Susi Grant (part time students)**

Only 39 Travellers entered HE in 2020 (last available). Reducing the cost of higher education for Traveller students and families is essential and recent mainstream strategies announced, are welcome, however Travellers are a focus of the National Equity Plan which has not been published.

There are concerns that supports favour full time students in higher education, yet Travellers are more likely to be mature students, many young parents, and undertaking part time courses.

**Traveller Identity:** Many young Travellers experiences intersectional prejudice and discrimination due to their identity i.e. being a young person, being Traveller and perhaps living with a disability or being LGBT+. 67% said of Travellers said the community had to change or modify behaviours to “fit in more”. 4 in 10 said “at school or college” and “accessing goods and services” and 3 in 10 for “where they live”.

In 2020, the *EU Fundamental Rights Agency* (FRA) found that among all surveyed Traveller and Roma groups, Irish Travellers (52%) had the third highest rate of hate-motivated harassment (such as offensive comments on the street or online). In 2020 11% of racism reports to the INAR were related to Travellers. However, the *Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill* in its advanced draft does not provide enough protection for groups most vulnerable to harm in media spaces, especially Travellers.

### **Suicide**

Suicide was the cause of 11% of all Traveller deaths in 2010 six times the national average (the only and last specific national data) and most common in males aged 15-25. In the last five years deaths by suicide have included young children between 11 – 14yrs and reports suggest an increase among those in their late teens and early twenties. In 2017, 4 in 10 Travellers were concerned for their own mental health, and 82% had been affected by suicide, 4 in 10 in their wider family

### **Energy Credit and Fuel Poverty**

According to National Traveller MABS (2019) Travellers living in mobile homes or trailers are nine times more likely to go without heat than the general population and spend on average 26.1% of their income on energy compared to 4.6% of the overall population

**Energy Credit** The scheme was a welcome initiative for many families, however some of the most vulnerable to energy poverty were excluded in the scheme. These residents, who pay for their electricity through the local authority rather than having individual accounts, were categorized as “non-domestic” accounts and thus were found not to qualify for the credit

**Fuel Poverty** Arising from poor quality accommodation, Traveller families also have huge additional expenditure, for example paying €80-100 a week on launderette services where their homes do not have access to these basic facilities, and the expense of running inefficient generators where stable electricity supplies have not been provided.