



National Traveller Women's Forum

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Presentation on Traveller accommodation to the Meeting of the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government 8th March 2018:

The National Traveller Women's Forum welcomes the opportunity to address the Meeting of the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government. We will begin the presentation with a video of Angela Delaney speaking of her experience of a temporary site in Galway city, and will give you a small insight into what we are talking about when we speak of poor accommodation:

{Break for video}

Thanks to Angela for allowing us to use this. Angela has first-hand experience of living in substandard and dangerous conditions with rat infestation, contaminated water, no or poor sanitation facilities. Overcrowding and unsafe living conditions is also very much the daily reality for many Travellers living across the country, as well as the isolation that they experience by being placed on the outside of towns, often in completely unhealthy environments, like the dump at Carrowbrowne or near a crumbling cliff in Spring Lane. Spring Lane in Cork is home to 31 families and 12 single adults (all of whom are long term site residents). The site is seriously overcrowded with very poor sanitation facilities. 126 people must share 10 unheated concrete washrooms, 3 porta-cabin washrooms & 2 chemical portable toilets. The living nightmare of sites like this is having a detrimental impact on Traveller health and wellbeing and on the right of their children to thrive as equals. There has been a gross failure of delivery of Traveller Accommodation particularly Traveller specific accommodation with no sanctions imposed on Local Authorities not meeting their own targets.

The significantly high number of families living without permanent accommodation or inadequate accommodation has particular consequences for Traveller women and children. Women spend more time in the home and are the primary carers so they bear the brunt of having to cope with basic conditions such as lack of clean running water, lack of adequate refuse collection, poor sanitation and unsafe areas for children to play.

According to the All-Ireland Traveller Health Study almost 1 in 3 Traveller households living in mobile or temporary accommodation have no sewerage facilities and 1 in 5 have no piped water source. A significant number of families in group housing or sites report lack of footpaths, public lighting, fire hydrants and safe play areas. A review of fire safety in September 2016 found significant shortcomings in Traveller accommodation units with 76% not having a working smoke alarm; 72% having no working carbon monoxide alarm; and the condition of electrical installations being an issue in 78% of the sites.

We know that accommodation is one of the key determinates of health and the appropriate type and standard of Traveller accommodation does impact greatly on life expectancy and on all other aspects of Traveller lives such as economic, social and cultural. The National Traveller Health Strategy in 2010 states 'There is little doubt that the living conditions of Travellers are probably the single greatest influence on health status, stress and infectious disease including respiratory

According to 2016 Government statistics (Department of Housing Planning and Local Government Annual Count):

- 536 families are now living in unofficial, unrecognised and unserved accommodation.
- 1,876 families are sharing housing, sharing bays, or living on unauthorised or basic service halting sites.
- There are 2,222 families living in private rented accommodation (this is 19% of all families accounted for in the 2016 annual count)

These numbers and the way they are presented do not reflect the reality of homelessness within the Traveller community. 'Unauthorised site' denotes Travellers who are forced to live at the roadside or other unsuitable environment. We could substitute the word 'sharing' for Travellers living in chronic overcrowding. The term 'basic' service bays refers to sites that are (as Angela reflected earlier) often rat infested with poor facilities.

These Travellers are in effect homeless but they are not reflected in Government statistics on homelessness. Add to this then that according to the 2016 census nearly 7 times more overcrowded living conditions among Travellers and the numbers of Travellers who are homeless in 2016 - found to be over three times higher than in 2011 census. In addition 3,718 Travellers were found to be living in temporary accommodation this reflects a 12% increase of 158 since the 2011 Census.

One final area to note in closing is the almost complete lack of new build of Traveller Specific Accommodation, even where targets have been set. We know even when plans are agreed and funding is available, there are long and unreasonable delays in building getting underway as we see with the current situation in Labre Park in Ballyfermot.