

**Presentation to the Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning,
Community and Local Government**

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I want to thank the Committee for the opportunity to present today, and as representative of the Irish Traveller Movement the national Traveller membership platform, our analysis is informed and shaped by our grassroots structure.

With my colleagues here, I want to give an overview of the provision of Traveller accommodation within the state and suggest solutions which I will refer to further on to accelerate the delivery of accommodation and address the current and ongoing crisis in delivering a home to Travellers.

We welcome the report commissioned by Minister English into *Funding for Traveller Specific Accommodation and the Implementation of Traveller Accommodation Programmes* and his decision to review the Housing (Traveller) Accommodation Act 1998. In 2004 a review of Policy and Practice in Traveller Accommodation was also carried out and still we continue to invest time and resources advocating for those recommendations to be enacted, highlighting the crisis in accommodation for Travellers within the State and which has led to a call for legislative review.

Despite the requirements within the Traveller Accommodation Act 1998 to address our cultural accommodation needs we have experienced long term insufficient accommodation provision within the state. In May 2016 the European Committee of Social Rights found Ireland was in breach of its obligations regarding provision of accommodation, living conditions and eviction rights, and in the resolution adopted in October 2016, the Committee concluded: Ireland violated Article 16 of the Charter under 5 grounds. To date no directive or amendment to

policy or practice has been put in place by the State in order to redress those violations.

The European Committee of Social Rights also found there was a *not insubstantial shortfall of transient sites across the country* and of the 1,000 transient bays identified as needed in the 1995 Task Force Report only 54 are in existence and not all functioning as proper transient sites.

In the 20 years since the Act came into effect, the delivery expected under the overseeing monitoring body, the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (NTACC) governed by Ministers' for Housing and Planning, has not happened. In fact, it has overseen consistent under delivery and underspends.

Figures are not available to us for 2016 & 2017, but I want to outline some of the trends since the development of the Traveller Accommodation Programmes which came into place in the year 2000. Although I will focus on the statistics, it is important to note behind those are a community suffering, many of whom living in third world conditions, with our right to culturally appropriate accommodation denied. My colleagues will focus further on examples of some of those living conditions in their input.

In that time;

- The number of Traveller families counted in the State in need of accommodation has more than doubled
- However, the number of Traveller families living on Unauthorised halting sites has halved

That would look promising if it were not for the fact that the number of people sharing in overcrowded housing rose from approximately 1,000 people in the year 2000 to approx. 4,724 in 2016.

Since the year 2002

- There has been an almost three times increase of Traveller families sharing housing alone
- almost sixteen times the number families are now living in private rented accommodation.
- the number of families in specific group housing schemes has only doubled.

On the issue of private rented, the recent review report found that these options “*are extremely difficult for Traveller families to access*” yet we know that some local authorities use private rented as the alternative to staying on a waiting list for Travellers wanting culturally specific homes. However, this has rendered increasing numbers of families homeless, unnecessarily.

There has been a critical elevation of homelessness with 517 Travellers affected ⁽¹⁾, a figure 11 times higher than the general population and in the last five years’ homelessness is 3 times higher for Travellers while doubled for the majority population ^(1a)

The figures clearly indicate in the sixteen-year period up to 2015, that the widespread policy adopted has been

- low targets set for developing Traveller specific accommodation which are halting sites, group housing and transient sites.
- high targets and over delivery on Standard Housing
- lack of adequate planning for population growth.
- inaction on overcrowding and homelessness and
- no reference to delivery of Transient Accommodation to facilitate Nomadism

Overall there has been under delivery of targets for Traveller accommodation by Local Authorities coupled with underspending of allocated budgets.

I can refer in our discussion to areas of consistent under -delivery, use of Temporary accommodation and lack of Traveller specific provision which is widespread, but of the 963 families which accounts for approximately 4,700, men, women and children sharing or living in overcrowded accommodation: the highest recorded numbers in 2016 were in Carlow County Council, Kerry, Limerick, Meath, Wexford and Cork City Council. In the review report local authorities agreed overcrowding was an issue leading to “health and safety concerns” and all stakeholder groups agreed “*that the future assessment of need for Traveller families was unfit for purpose*”.

Only 26 out of 31 local authorities responded to the survey under the Ministerial Review and only 22 submitted with sufficient detail across all questions, which could point towards Local Authority apathy. This is evidenced since the Act where only 68% of units were provided and 55 million of allocated budgets went unspent. 24 were underspent in 2017 and 21 in 2016

Over the last two decades increasingly regressive evictions legislation have been introduced, whereby speedier and harsher forced evictions are permitted against Travellers living by the roadside or transient families. These eviction laws have been passed and used even though the Government has failed to implement housing legislation to provide permanent and transient halting sites and other accommodation to Travellers. Therefore, criminalising Nomadism.

Solutions

Most Traveller specific and social housing in general is provided by Local Authorities (LAs) using the Part 8 planning process, but the report further found “*The most significant obstacle to the delivery of Traveller accommodation is the planning process, particularly objections from settled residents and elected representatives.*”.

A recent amendment to the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 (facilitating developments of more than 100 accommodation units being dealt with directly by *An Bord Pleanála* without going through local planning processes) could also include Traveller accommodation and legislation should be amended to introduce this change.

- Overall decisions to approve Traveller specific accommodation should be taken away from the local political system and invested in *An Bord Pleanála*.
- A timely review is needed of use of Emergency Powers where Traveller accommodation could and should be accelerated, with a view to Ministerial intervention
- Provide for population growth specifically as deemed by earlier marriage,
- A revision of Eviction legislation
- Adequate planning for land allocation via county development plans
- Amendment of the Planning Act to fast track land zoning for Traveller Specific Accommodation and or a directive to Local Authorities which would pre-identify sites suitable for new builds to speed up the Part 8 process and avoid failure to identify lands in the advanced pre-development stages.
- The establishment of an independent Agency to oversee the implementation of Traveller Accommodation.
- A mid-term review (with a view to amendment/ inclusion) in County Development Plans of land availability for Traveller accommodation.
- Refurbishment and upgrade of unused Traveller accommodation stock nationwide.
- Create a statutory provision whereby Approved Social Housing Bodies allow a percentage of existing stock be made available for Traveller rental supply, to address some discriminatory practice in the private rental market.

⁽¹⁾ (Census 2016), ^(1a) (Census 2011 compared with 2016)

Figures from the last complete Traveller Accommodation Programme adopted by Local Authorities (2009-2013) showed at the end of that period **25** city or county councils under delivered targets and in **2104 (13)** did not meet theirs and in 2015 that was **(15)**

- In that 6-year period there was consistent under delivery and the the biggest gaps occurred over in: Sligo, Fingal, Limerick City, Kerry, Wexford, Kildare, Dublin City Council, Galway City ⁽¹⁾
- In all but 6 Local Authority areas this was a consistent use of Temporary accommodation and lack of Traveller specific provision – the highest numbers recorded in 2016 were in Dublin City Council, Limerick City Council, Wexford, Offaly, Cork County Council, Kildare and in Mayo. ⁽¹⁾
- Overall the consistent and biggest gaps of under delivery when compared with highest population growth during the 18-year period, this occurred in Dublin City Council, Galway City, Wexford and Limerick in particular.
- Draconian budgetary cuts for accommodation provision to Travellers went from 70million in 2008 to 9.3 million in 2017.

Comparisons over TAP 2009-2013 and TAP Progress Report 2014/2015 DOE and AC 2016).

In the last Annual Count 2016 of Traveller families there were 10,364 or approx. 41,456 individuals enumerated in the Republic (using the 4 per family ratio), of these

- Almost 7,000 Travellers are either sharing housing or bays or living on Unauthorised halting sites. In percentages
- 10% Sharing halting site bays and basic serviced/transient bays
- 10% Sharing Housing
- 4.8% Unauthorised sites
- 19% of Families are living in Private rented.
- The balance of families are living in LA Assisted Housing, G Housing and Own Resources