

Input Rose Marie Maughan Irish Traveller Movement

Thank you, chairperson and members of the committee, for the opportunity to highlight matters related to Traveller Accommodation, and considering actions to alleviate the ongoing crisis in delivering a home for Travellers.

Despite legislative protection, there are 2,000 families living in inadequate, unsafe conditions in shared and overcrowded accommodation or on roadsides.

The current Traveller Accommodation Programmes show a need nationally to supply for 2,871 families, this figure is thought to be an underestimate, either way the current programmes are not fit for purpose, as only 22 authorities plan to address the full identified need in their area.

In 2020 just 16 new units of Traveller specific accommodation were built or refurbished. 7 houses. No additional bays. 9 welfare units.

So far this year, just 1.7 million euro has been drawn down from the Traveller accommodation capital budget, a repeated pattern by local authorities since the beginning of the Programmes, for low intention.

Between the years 2008 and 2019 over €72 million was unspent by local authorities, without the necessary oversight in place to intervene, and no sanction applied.

Investment by Government also declined from € 120 million for the first TAP, 2000-2004 to just € 33 million for the last one. Annual budgets showed the allocation in 2008 was €40 million compared to just €14.5 million in 2020.

Despite the *Report of the Expert Review* in 2019, and the *2017 Review of Funding for Traveller-Specific Accommodation and the Implementation of Traveller Accommodation Programmes* by the Housing Agency, there is still no national oversight or accountability when Local Authorities;

- set low or no targets for delivery of Traveller specific Accommodation
 - do not account for future population growth in their plans, and
 - don't reach their own targets within the period.
- Travellers are more disproportionately affected than any other group in official homeless figures, accounting for as high as 50% in some counties, while comprising less than 1% of the overall population. ITM have heard testimonies of families

approaching four years in emergency accommodation, miles from their hometown, driving 80-kilometer round trips each day to keep their children in school.

- There are thousands more families trapped in hidden homelessness caused by grossly inadequate and overcrowded accommodation. Some are sharing bays, houses or dilapidated caravans often in local authority owned sites. Many wake up to leaking roofs, rats, chronic damp and mold, some forced to share one portaloo with 15 other people. This is their normal, a forced state of living.
- 2800 Travellers are living on unofficial sites, most without stable electricity, sanitation. They risk eviction, and criminalization, but without a place to go. Babies are born into situations which in any other country would be described as a disaster zone, where some with chronic health conditions, can't access a stable electricity supply to support their medical equipment.

These figures are unacceptable by any standard, and behind them families and children, like those powerfully heard in the Children's Ombudsman report last week, who feel they have been forgotten.

One child described it as "like an abandoned place that people forgot about, it's like we're forgotten, we feel like garbage".

Those children number upwards of 3,000. While the site in Cork investigated is among the worst in the country, there are many sites like it, especially in Dublin's four local authorities. An IHREC report covering all local authorities' Traveller accommodation responsibilities is still awaited, almost 2 years after its planned publication.

Children in those sites are unduly burdened by the inaction of authorities who are duty bound to provide accommodation and have failed them. We know the insecurity arising from poor accommodation has a profound effect on life opportunities and has been the cause for many of my community to experience intergenerational poverty, disadvantage and poor health.

Covid 19 highlighted the crisis further and while Ministerial intervention on risk mitigation was offered in 2020, much was left undone. So far this year, just €89,550 has been drawn down for this purpose. The outcomes of a report on the 31 local authorities' response to Covid 19 in Traveller accommodation are unclear.

- We welcome progress being made in establishing the Programme Board to oversee recommendations of the Expert Review of Traveller accommodation. These need to be expedited as soon as possible and time made up for delays in 2020.
- There is a need for an independent national Traveller accommodation authority to be advanced with independent staffing.
- A circumventing of the Part 8 of the planning process to An Bord Pleanála should feature in the future plans as recommended by the Expert Group.
- Criminalising nomadism represents a draconian and regressive legislation with Travellers its most affected group, noted by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, this legislation should be repealed, and a network of transient sites established.

We refer Senator Flynn to the recommendations made in our submission to the Committee and are happy to provide any further information here now.

Thank you.