

Hello Everyone, My name is Nora Corcoran, Accommodation Coordinator with the Galway Traveller Movement

In the words of the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, we must recognize homelessness as more than a lack of shelter. It is an affront to human dignity, a barrier to social integration, and a direct challenge to the right to life itself. Such a condition starkly contravenes the essential right to housing and precipitates a cascade of human rights violations, encompassing the rights to non-discrimination, health, clean water, sanitation, personal security, and protection from cruel and inhumane treatment.

Currently in Ireland, local authorities have the responsibility of compiling homelessness statistics through the Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS), a framework that achieved nationwide implementation in 2013. Yet, it is crucial to acknowledge that these figures fail to account for the ‘hidden homeless’—those resorting to couch surfing, overcrowding or living in trailers.

A national audit or assessment of the needs of Traveller homelessness is *non-existent*.

Homeless services and agencies do not collect data on Travellers, which is a significant oversight. Local authorities have the responsibility to develop Homelessness Action Plans that encompass the needs of all homeless populations, including Travellers. However, an audit of local authority Traveller Accommodation Programmes (2014-2019) indicated that only a select few local authorities gather data for those in emergency or homeless situations, and alarmingly, 12 out of 31 did not record any data, often shifting this duty onto homeless services. The lack of accurate data collection is a critical barrier in understanding the full scale of the issue and in formulating effective solutions.

With this in mind, under Recommendation 83 of the final report of Joint Oireachtas Committee, the implementation of the European Typology of Homelessness and housing exclusion, ETHOS, in Ireland is crucial for a detailed understanding of homelessness. It will ensure that the living conditions of the Traveller community, are fully recognized and addressed. This framework can guide the development of policies that acknowledge and tackle all aspects of homelessness, providing a more inclusive and effective approach to this pressing issue.

The plight of the Traveller community in Ireland on a local, regional and national level is particularly acute, as they are disproportionately affected by

homelessness, and from a local level Travellers in Galway represent up to 50 % if not more as homeless. It is important to highlight the lived experiences of our community who have to endure sustained and inhumane living conditions, A recent testimony from Mary Delaney in the Carrobrowne Temporary halting site, in Galway, which is situated beside the local waste facility and enclosed dump... stated how:

**“Living here in the site has affected not only the adults physical and mental health, but also our children’s physical and mental health. Watching them growing up here is terrible that this site is all my children know. Christmas day last year was ruined for a few families due to a power cut, we had no Christmas dinner and it was absolutely freezing in our mobile homes. Young boys and girls having to deal with the lack of privacy growing up is impacting them in so many ways.”**

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the hardships of all families in halting sites and overcrowded conditions, with many facing severe challenges due to overcrowding, insufficient isolation space, and the absence of basic amenities such as hot water—a fundamental necessity for maintaining hygiene and health during such a crisis.

With the advent of COVID-19, the government empowered local authorities to provide necessary support to vulnerable Traveller families requiring suitable accommodation to shield them from the virus.

In County Galway, roadside families received only porta-loos and a water source from local authorities. The Galway Traveller Movement, and other local projects in robust collaboration with the Health Service Executive, orchestrated comprehensive services, including food and personal protective equipment for families who contracted the virus. These families, crammed into trailers, mobile homes, and overcrowded housing, were unable to adhere to HSE guidelines due to the lack of space for social distancing, handwashing, or isolation.

During the pandemic’s peak, over a thousand families from the Traveller community in Galway city and county were affected, with a significant portion—nearly one-third—requiring intensive care. This highlighted the severe impact of overcrowding and poor living conditions during a health emergency. These figures sadly reflected the plight of many Travellers all over Ireland.

The spread of COVID-19 among the Traveller community in Galway underscored the dire health consequences and the deep-seated systemic issues related to housing, social welfare, and healthcare access. Yet, the pandemic did not create the dire circumstances that the Traveller community faces in their quest

for safety. Rather, it cast a glaring light on the existing humanitarian crisis, the stark living conditions, and deep-seated inequalities our community endures, which highlight a distressing reality: there is no secure place to call home. This unacceptable situation has reached a critical point where makeshift solutions are no longer viable. The mere provision of a water tank or a portable toilet falls woefully short of what is adequate. Compounding this issue, pilots like the Caravan Loan Scheme are critically failing to meet their objectives, with significant practical barriers drastically undermining their effectiveness. Families in Galway encounter substantial difficulties in accessing the scheme. Those who do manage to obtain a mobile home are compelled to place them in halting sites that are grossly inadequate, lacking essential utilities like plumbing and electricity. This not only impedes their quality of life but also presents serious safety risks, including the peril of improper electrical connections that could potentially lead to catastrophic fires.

In light of these challenges, the Genio-funded pilot program aims to address the healthcare needs of Traveller women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This program, however, should not be viewed as a temporary fix but rather as the beginning of a sustained effort. It is essential for the Department of Housing to follow on with this program and such initiatives. The creation of local Traveller Homelessness Task Forces and a central Traveller Strategy is imperative. These entities must tackle immediate needs while also strategizing for long-term solutions, especially considering intersectional issues prevalent within the community. A comprehensive and ongoing approach is the only way to ensure a meaningful and lasting impact on the lives of Traveller women and their families, moving beyond the cycle of temporary fixes to a future where dignity and safety are a given.