



## Pavee Point Travellers' Centre

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# Accommodation and Living Conditions

**The Traveller accommodation crisis means nearly 1,000 Traveller families still live on the roadside in appalling conditions – without access to water, sanitation and electricity. Many other Travellers live in official accommodation that is poorly serviced and maintained and often situated in unhealthy or dangerous locations.**

This has a direct negative effect on Traveller quality of life and on how Travellers can access healthcare, education, social welfare and other services.

Much of the thinking behind the provision of Traveller accommodation, particularly at local level, continues to be based on assimilationist approaches. This approach wrongly identifies the existence of Travellers as the problem and sees the settlement and absorption of Travellers as the solution.

The Report of the Task Force on the Traveller Community in 1995, recommended 3,100 new units of Traveller accommodation be provided:

- 2,200 permanent and transient halting site bays
- 900 standard and group housing

To date, 251 units of halting site accommodation were provided out of 2,200 while 757 housing units have been provided out of 900. This would indicate that an assimilationist approach prevails and 'settling' Travellers in houses remains a priority for local authorities. The lack of provision is compounded by prejudiced objections to Traveller accommodation by settled residents.

### **Making Nomadism into a Crime**

In 2002, the Government enacted the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act which made trespass, previously a civil offence, a criminal offence. Currently, camping on private or public land is punishable by one month in jail, a €3,000 fine and the confiscation of property.

This means that Travellers living on the roadside – awaiting accommodation and with nowhere else to go - are criminalised. This is a direct attack on the nomadic part of Traveller culture and punishes Travellers for the Government's failure to provide Traveller permanent and transient halting sites. In answer to a Dail Question the Government said in 2002 - 2003, 88 evictions of Travellers took place under this legislation. In 2003 this law went to judicial review and may also be in contravention of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The 1998 Traveller Accommodation Act obliged local authorities to produce 5 year plans for delivering Traveller accommodation. However, the absence of sanctions for failing to implement these plans has meant there has been little progress. A review of this Act is taking place in 2004 and as part of this review Pavee Point recommends the Government set up an independent Traveller Accommodation Agency.

### **Traveller culture must be respected in Traveller accommodation:**

- The extended family lives together
- Traveller families tend to be larger in number than the national average
- Living space and work space tend to be one and the same
- Travellers practice varying degrees of nomadism – from occasional to regular journeying



***"Travellers have a right to their culture – and nomadism is an important part of that culture. It is up to our society to accommodate cultural diversity – not to try and destroy it,"***

***Martin Collins, Pavee Point.***

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