



**PAVEE POINT**  
TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE

## UN Human Rights Committee 111th session: Ireland (14/15 July 2014)

### Factsheet: Traveller and Roma rights in Ireland

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#### **Travellers and Roma in Ireland**

There are approximately 36,000 Travellers living in the Republic of Ireland. Travellers are one of the most marginalised and excluded groups in Irish society. Traveller unemployment is at 84%, life expectancy is over 10 years less than the national population and suicide rates are over 6 times the national average.

There is an estimated 5,000 Roma living in Ireland. There is no official Government data in relation to the population of Roma in Ireland. Many Roma in Ireland are living in poverty due to a lack of access to work and restrictive social welfare measures. Some Roma have to beg to survive. For those who are unable to find employment or access supports, options include reliance on charities and family or 'voluntary repatriation' to country of origin.

The Irish Government was required by the European Commission to develop a Roma and Traveller integration strategy. However, Ireland's strategy is inadequate and was developed with no involvement of Roma or Travellers. It contains no goals, targets, indicators, timeframes or funding mechanisms and has no reference to human rights.

#### **Recommendation:**

**Develop a progressive National Traveller and Roma Integration Strategy, in line with human rights commitments.**

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#### **Traveller Ethnicity**

Despite the recommendation of many UN treaty monitoring bodies and European human rights bodies, the Irish Government still does not acknowledge Travellers as a minority ethnic group. This reflects the persistence of a mindset that legitimatises flawed policies and practice, which seek to assimilate Travellers and undermine human rights.

In April 2014 the Government Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality produced a report on the recognition of Traveller ethnicity. The report is endorsed by the Committee, which has representation across political parties. The report recommends that "the Taoiseach or the Minister for Justice and Equality should make a statement to Dáil Éireann confirming that this State recognises the ethnicity of the Travelling community". Such a statement would be a significant development in showing respect for Traveller human rights in Ireland.

#### **Recommendation:**

**Take immediate steps to acknowledge Travellers as an ethnic minority group**

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## Violence against Traveller and Roma women

There remains a lack of systematic data collection, disaggregated by ethnicity, in relation to violence against women. Organisations providing services and advocacy for and with women experiencing violence have also experienced cuts in resources in recent years under austerity measures.

All applicants applying for social protection in Ireland are required to meet the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC - a set of criteria established to prove connection with the Irish state). This can be particularly difficult for migrants, Travellers (who move across jurisdictions, generally from the UK to Ireland) and Roma to meet. HRC has a particular negative impact upon women experiencing violence. If a woman does not meet the habitual residence condition, she will be unable to access a refuge beyond an emergency period, as a person has to be in receipt of social protection payments to access a refuge. This means that women who want to leave a situation of violence may be forced to remain with a violent partner due to a lack of other options.

### Recommendations:

- **Amend the Habitual Residence Condition to ensure women experiencing violence can have ease of access to refuge and other support services.**
- **Prioritise the collection of disaggregated data on violence against women, within a human rights framework.**

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## National Action Plan Against Racism

The National Action Plan Against Racism (2005-2008) has not been renewed. The Irish Government has noted that it does not intend to develop a new National Action Plan and will instead incorporate anti-racism measures into a new Migrant Integration Strategy. However, an explicit National Action Plan Against Racism is needed, in recognition that there is a wider group in Irish society that experience racism, including Irish Travellers and other non-migrants.

Since the Third Periodic Report under the ICCPR, anti-Traveller and Roma sentiment has been expressed by political representatives, high ranking public officials, including judges, and in the media - where Roma have been referred to as a 'parasitic underclass' and Travellers as having 'a lifestyle that facilitates criminality and irresponsibility'. Travellers and Roma experience racism at individual and institutional levels and increasingly online through social media, pointing to the need for an explicit National Action Plan Against Racism.

### Recommendation:

**Renew/introduce a new National Action Plan against Racism with strong civil society involvement at all stages in the development and implementation of the plan.**

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