



**PAVEE POINT**  
TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE

## **Presentation to the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness**

**Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2016**

### **Delegation Members:**

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Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Pavee Point is delighted to have the opportunity to make a presentation to this Committee, and we welcome the fact that the accommodation needs of Travellers and Roma are included in the overall discussions on the housing crisis. Today we focus explicitly on Traveller accommodation. However, we encourage the Committee to examine the housing needs of the Roma community at a later stage in your deliberations.

Travellers experience marginalisation, discrimination and racism on the basis of their ethnicity at individual and institutional levels. Local Authorities have continuously failed to provide permanent, safe and adequate Traveller specific accommodation, which they are responsible for. Paradoxically, Local Authorities use health and safety issues as basis of ongoing Traveller evictions.

Subsequent to the tragic fire on a Traveller site in Carrickmines in 2015, a national fire safety audit in Traveller accommodation was rolled out. Even though we received an assurance that the audits would not result in forced evictions, a number of evictions have taken place throughout the country, leaving families homeless or forcing people to stay at homes and bays of extended family members.

The lack of prioritisation and political will are illustrated in cuts to the Traveller accommodation budget. Between 2008–2013, Traveller accommodation budget was cut from €40m to €4m, a staggering - 90%. Even more shockingly, there was an underspending of 36% of the allocated Traveller accommodation budgets by Local Authorities.<sup>1</sup>

The Government's statistics obscure the reality of homelessness and accommodation conditions within the Traveller community:

- The term 'sharing' of houses and halting bay sites is a euphemism for Travellers living in chronic overcrowding
- The term 'basic' service bays refers to sites that are often flooded, rat infested and lack sufficient facilities
- The term 'unauthorised site' refers to Travellers who are forced to live at the roadside due to lack of access to private rented accommodation, social housing and/or Traveller specific accommodation. These Travellers are in effect homeless but they are excluded from Government statistics on homelessness

This is wholly unacceptable. Travellers who are homeless need to be categorized accordingly and their housing and accommodation needs must be met in a timely manner.

According to the NTACC annual report in 2013:

- 361 Traveller families lived on 'unauthorized sites'
- 188 Traveller families lived on 'basic service bays'
- 182 Traveller families shared permanent halting sites
- 17 Traveller families shared basic service bays/transient HS sites

- 663 Traveller families shared houses.<sup>ii</sup>

This means that roughly 5,500, or 18.6%, of the Traveller population are in need of proper accommodation provision. Using Census 2011 figures, this would be the equivalent of 853,415 of the general population in need of housing. Yet, the Traveller accommodation situation has not been regarded as a housing crisis.

Recently there has been a significant decrease of Traveller families living in private rented accommodation. Between 2013-2015, 237 Traveller families left private rented accommodation. This figure correlates with an increase of 200 Traveller families sharing houses and an increase of 173 families on 'unauthorized sites'. It is clear that Traveller families are responding to the accommodation crisis by relocating to sites that are already overcrowded, unsafe and inhabitable.<sup>iii</sup>

In order address these issues, we recommend the following:

1. The establishment of a statutory Traveller Agency with powers to approve and enforce Local Authority 5 year Traveller accommodation plans
2. Introduction of a monitoring and evaluation framework with associated sanctions, ensuring full expenditure of funds allocated to Local Authorities for Traveller-specific accommodation
3. Increased provision and appropriate resourcing of accessible, suitable and culturally appropriate accommodation is available for Travellers and Roma.
4. Reinstatement of Traveller accommodation funding to 2008 levels at a minimum of €40 million
5. Moratorium on evictions and on the use of Housing (Miscellaneous) Provisions Act 2002 – Trespass Act until the accommodation needs of all Travellers on the housing list have been met
6. Abandon the use of terms 'sharing', 'basic' services, and 'unauthorized site' in order to provide an accurate reflection of the housing and accommodation crisis and include Travellers in Government statistics on homelessness

We thank you for your attention and the opportunity to discuss these issues further.

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<sup>i</sup> Harvey, B., *Travelling with Austerity: Impacts of cuts on Travellers, Traveller Projects and Services*, Dublin, Pavee Point Publications, 2013.

<sup>ii</sup> National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee, *NTACC Annual Report 2013*, [http://www.environ.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/ntacc\\_annual\\_report\\_2013.pdf](http://www.environ.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/ntacc_annual_report_2013.pdf).

<sup>iii</sup> Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, *Traveller Accommodation Statistics: 2015 Count – All Categories of Traveller Accommodation*, [http://www.environ.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/total\\_number\\_of\\_traveller\\_families\\_in\\_all\\_categories\\_of\\_accommodation-2016-02-05\\_table\\_2.pdf](http://www.environ.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/total_number_of_traveller_families_in_all_categories_of_accommodation-2016-02-05_table_2.pdf).