



Poverty and Traveller Children

Current Context

Travellers are one of the most at risk groups of poverty. However, there are no official statistics available on Traveller children living in consistent poverty or 'at risk of poverty' in Ireland due to the absence of research and data disaggregated by ethnicity.

The Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) is the only data source in Ireland which combines health status, income and other socio-economic predictors such as class, education and family origin. SILC reports on a number of national poverty indicators including the 'at risk of poverty' rate, the consistent poverty rate and rates of enforced deprivation.

Unfortunately the SILC does not collect data by ethnicity and therefore official data is not available on Travellers 'at risk of poverty' or living in consistent poverty. The exclusion of Travellers from this dataset obscures their experiences of poverty as they are effectively rendered invisible.

Traveller Child Poverty

The Traveller population is very young. According to Census 2011 there were 14, 245 Traveller children in the country which accounts for 48.2% of the Traveller population. One third of these children were under the age of five.¹

People are considered to be '**at risk of poverty**' if their income is below a particular threshold. For countries in the EU that threshold is 60% of the median income. In Ireland, in 2014 the income threshold was €10, 926 or €209.39 per week.

A person is regarded as living in **consistent poverty** if their income is below the 'at risk of poverty' threshold, as outlined above, and cannot afford at least two of the eleven deprivation indicators.

The eleven deprivation indicators are as follows:

¹ Central Statistics Office, *Census 2011 Profile 7- Religion, Ethnicity and Irish Travellers* at 32

Two pairs of strong shoes	Had to go without heating during the last year through lack of money
A warm, waterproof coat	Keep the home adequately warm
Buy new not second hand clothes	Buy presents once a year
Eat meat, chicken, fish or a vegetarian equivalent every second day	Replace worn out furniture
Have a roast joint or the equivalent once a week	Have family or friends for a drink or meal once a month
Have a morning, afternoon or evening out in the last fortnight for entertainment.	

To date no research has been conducted specifically on child poverty rates within the Traveller community.

However by examining some of the statistical data available on Travellers and comparing it to some of the factors considered significant by the CSO and SILC in determining the 'at risk of poverty rate, it is clear that further research in this area would inevitably point to significant 'at risk of poverty' rates among Traveller children.

The table below shows the percentage of Travellers living in particular situations and compares it with the associated 'at risk of poverty' rate devised by the CSO for the general population.

	% of Travellers ²	'At risk of poverty' % rate 2014 (General Population) ³
One parent household	23.5% of Traveller children living in one parent households.	31.7%: one parent households 36.7%: one parent households headed by an unemployed person
Unemployed	84% of Travellers are unemployed	35.9%: Unemployed
Highest education level attained	91% of Travellers leave school at the age of 16 or younger	21.8%: Lower secondary
Tenure Status	76.7% of Travellers in rented accommodation	18.8%: rented at market rate

Relevant information available from other research and data sets would indicate that Traveller children are likely to be experiencing high levels of poverty and disadvantage.

² Statistics relating to Travellers in this table are from Census 2011.

³ At risk of poverty rate by demographic characteristic and year, Central Statistics Office website <http://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/socialconditions/atriskofpovertyratebydemographiccharacteristicsandyear/>



- Only 13% of Traveller children complete secondary education in comparison with 92% of the general population.⁴
- 56% of Travellers are living in overcrowded⁵ accommodation.⁶
- 7 out of 10 Traveller children live in families where the mother has no formal education or primary level education only.⁷
- When compared to other children Travellers were less likely to report eating breakfast on 5 or more days per week⁸
- Play areas were unavailable for 77.5% of Traveller children.⁹

Between 2013 and 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'.¹ It is clear that Traveller families are responding to the accommodation crisis by relocating to sites that are already overcrowded, unsafe and inhabitable.

Austerity Measures

The breaking of the economic and social crisis in 2008 prompted a dramatic and devastating disinvestment by the Irish State in the Traveller community. The scale of these cuts, undertaken in the name of austerity, was completely disproportionate and was undertaken without any attempt at human rights proofing.

Programmes for Travellers	
Interagency activities	-100%
Traveller specific education supports	-86.6%
Traveller accommodation	-90%
Equality	-76.3%
National Traveller organisations	-63.6%
FÁS Special Initiative for Travellers	-50%
National Traveller Partnership	-32.1%
Traveller SPY youth projects	-29.8%
Health	-5.4%

Table 1: Harvey, B.(2013) *Travelling with Austerity: Impacts of cuts on Travellers, Traveller Projects and Services*. Dublin: Pavee Point Publications

⁴ Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), *Growing Up in Ireland Study 2012*, Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

⁵ 'Overcrowding' is defined as more than one person per room per dwelling.

⁶ Central Statistics Office, *Census 2011*.

⁷ Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2014) *State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2014*. Dublin: Government Publications. Available at: www.dcyia.ie

⁸ Kelly et al (2012) *The Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study 2010* Health Promotion Research Centre National University of Ireland, Galway www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc

⁹ Kelleher et al (2010) *Our Geels, All Ireland Traveller Health Study*, University College Dublin & Department of Health & Children.



The disinvestment in Traveller specific services must also be viewed in context of cuts to social welfare payments made during the economic crisis, including Child Benefit, Unemployment Benefit and Social Assistance payments. According to a report published by the European Commission in 2014;

*'Resources devoted to the most disadvantaged children - the ethnic minority children and those in jobless households – have been cut back and there is no particular prioritising of such children in existing measures.'*¹⁰

The impact of cutbacks has been shocking for children in particular. According to figures by the Department of Social Protection, one in nine children live in consistent poverty.¹¹ Due to lack of disaggregated data, the official child poverty rates fail to reflect the rate of child poverty in Traveller community.

Implications for Policy Making

Taken collectively, this information paints a rather bleak picture of the childhood experienced by Traveller children in Ireland today. The absence of data disaggregated by ethnicity means that the lived experience of Traveller children is invisible.

Concerns at the lack of disaggregated data to monitor and formulate policy and programming have most recently been raised by UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC).¹² Without disaggregating data by ethnicity, it is impossible to monitor the impact of budgetary and policy decisions on Travellers and other ethnic minorities. It also prevents basing budgetary decisions on sound data. Systems to collect and analyse disaggregated data by ethnicity should be developed across all administrative systems as a matter of urgency. Research to establish and assess Traveller children's experience of poverty should be prioritised and the findings used to inform policy and targeted initiatives.

The commitment in the new Programme for a Partnership Government to the creation of a 'Just and Fair Society and a More Inclusive Prosperity' with an emphasis on early intervention and prevention is to be welcomed. The Traveller population is young. Significant investment in early intervention and prevention measures which target Traveller children have the potential to radically address the inequalities experienced by the Traveller community and break the cycle of poverty. Investment in targeted public services is vital to reducing poverty in a community that has historically been marginalised and excluded in public services, including in education, employment, training, health and childcare, family supports, and accommodation. Equal access to affordable and quality public services creates is vital to ensuring that Travellers can access and maintain employment, thus lifting families and children out of poverty.

¹⁰ Daly, M. (2014) *Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage, A Study of National Policies, Country Report – Ireland*, European Commission; European Union.

¹¹ Department of Social Protection, *Social Inclusion Monitor 2014*, Dublin, April 2016.

¹² UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding Observations on the Combined Third and Fourth Periodic Reports of Ireland*, CRC/C/IRL/CO/3-4 4, 1 March 2016.

