



Pavee Point – Roma and Traveller women in Ireland: Recommendations

Pavee Point – Ireland.

Pavee Point is a non-government organisation committed to the attainment of human rights for Irish Travellers and Roma. The group is comprised of Travellers and Roma and members of the majority settled population working together in partnership to address the needs of Travellers and Roma as minority ethnic groups, experiencing exclusion and marginalisation. The aim of Pavee Point is to contribute to improvement in the quality of life and living circumstances of Irish Travellers and Roma through working for social justice, solidarity, socio-economic development and human rights.

Pavee Point welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Fourth International Conference of Roma Women. We emphasise the importance of recognising Roma's women's experiences of multiple discrimination and the importance of action in this regard.

We urge that Travellers are also given visibility in the language being used and that reference is explicitly made to Traveller women. The backdrop to our discussion today is the reality that the Irish Government has not recognised Travellers as a minority ethnic group. **We use this opportunity to urge the Irish Government to officially recognise Irish Travellers as a minority ethnic group as recommended by human rights bodies.**

We would like to use this opportunity to raise some important issues and recommendations in relation to the empowerment of Traveller and Roma women, based on experiences in Ireland.

Travellers and Roma are among the most marginalised groups in Ireland. Traveller women in Ireland live 11 years less than the majority population. Seminars held by Pavee Point with Roma women and service providers have highlighted that many Roma women in Ireland have no access to work or social protection and are living in extreme poverty. Travellers and Roma women face multiple discrimination in Ireland. This discrimination is experienced at the intersection of multiple factors including as minority ethnic groups, as women, and as migrants in the case of Roma. The intersections of racism and discrimination and other factors need to be acknowledged in relation to experiences of Traveller and Roma women.

Barriers to Roma and Traveller Inclusion

The policies of States are placing Traveller and Roma women in insecure positions and placing them at risk of poverty.

If we are going to speak about Roma and Traveller women as agents of change – policies that exclude and marginalise need to be changed. The barriers faced by Roma women as agents of change are very often as a result of State policy – examples across European states include forced evictions,

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collective expulsions, segregated education, restrictive social welfare entitlements, restricted access to labour markets – alongside broader racism, vigilante attacks and a lack of accountability for such attacks.

Access to employment and social welfare supports

In Ireland, current social welfare restrictions provide an example of a policy that impacts on Roma as migrants, a minority ethnic group and as women. These restrictions also impact upon Irish nomadic Travellers who move across jurisdictions. What is called the habitual residence condition necessitates that potential welfare claimants prove an established link with Ireland. One of the areas for consideration is pattern of work. Many Traveller and Roma women face huge discrimination in accessing the formal labour market and have also faced discrimination in accessing education and training. Many Traveller and Roma women are primary caregivers for children and this also affects their work record. Effectively a woman could have been working in the home for years, but this is not counted or valued as 'work.' This is an example of how Traveller and Roma women face huge difficulties in the face of policies that are presented as 'neutral' but have not been equality proofed.

The Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) has impacted upon women experiencing violence also. Where a woman may be leaving a situation of violence and applies for social protection she has to meet the HRC. Essentially a woman who is deemed not to be habitually resident may have to face destitution in order to escape violence as she will have no social protection. We have come across cases (along with other migrant organisations) of women who have returned to violent situations after taking the steps to leave – as they have not been entitled to any State support.

National Traveller Roma Integration Strategy

The National Traveller Roma Integration Strategy, which Ireland has developed on foot of the European Framework Document for Roma Integration is another example of a situation where women have been excluded. Despite the EU's explicit instruction that Roma and Travellers should actively participate at all stages in the development and implementation of such a strategy – and the European Commission's instruction that the strategy should be developed on the common basic principles on Roma inclusion, which include awareness of the gender dimension – the Irish plan contains no actions to ensure Roma women's participation in Irish society. Instead, the strategy contains no actions, no funding streams and effectively excludes Roma. Roma and Travellers were excluded from the development of this strategy. So when we ask the question of how Roma women can be agents of change, we can see part of the picture is changing existing practice in policy-development. In the most recent assessment of Ireland's National Traveller Roma Integration Strategy by the European Commission, Ireland met just 4 out of 22 criteria. The plan does not incorporate a gender perspective.

Recognition of Ethnicity

Ethnic Identifier

Tackling Violence Against Women

Funding for Roma and Traveller organisations to promote leadership

A change in the political and social systems that have institutionalised racism is needed. We need an honest and frank analysis of this – we need to be clear that social and political decision-

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makers could make significant changes to the lives of Roma and Travellers and need to ensure that States facilitate change rather than placing obstacles in front of Roma and Traveller women.

For example, as noted previously the Government of Ireland has still not recognised Travellers as a minority ethnic group, despite recommendations for various human rights bodies, including CERD.

Recommendations:

We urge Member States to:

- Uphold their human rights obligations under international frameworks – this includes applying a human rights and gender perspective to all policies and practice in relation to Travellers and Roma women.
- Ensure State policies do not serve to marginalise Travellers and Roma women.
- Equality proof policy and practice to ensure the inclusion of Roma and Traveller women and to address institutional discrimination.
- Ensure austerity measures do not impact disproportionately on Traveller and Roma women. Ensure that human rights principles underpin budget decisions and ensure that the most vulnerable do not bear the brunt of austerity measures.
- Include gender budgeting in all programmes.
- Ensure that disaggregated data, according to gender and ethnicity, is collected across all administrative systems and used to inform policy development. Such data collection must be undertaken in line with human rights principles.
- Adopt and targeting and mainstreaming approach – while including Travellers and Roma in mainstream policies, also target groups that are particularly marginalised.
- Acknowledge and support the role of Traveller, Roma and Sinti organisations working to promote womens' empowerment, by ring-fencing funding to support such initiatives.
- Provide spaces for Traveller and Roma women to actively engage in policy and decision-making in relation to policies that impact on their lives.
- Develop Roma integration strategies that will have a meaningful impact on Traveller, Roma and Sinti womens' lives:
 - o Explicitly address racism as part of these strategies
 - o Ensure a gender perspective as highlighted in the Common Basic Principles on Roma inclusion
 - o As per the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, strategies should set achievable national goals with targets for Roma integration and should include time frames, funding mechanisms and strong inclusive monitoring and evaluation methods.
 - o Roma and Travellers should be actively involved in all stages in the development and implementation of the strategy.
- These recommendations are not new and we implore States to take civil society recommendations on board and take action. Such action also needs to be monitored and evaluated for impact.

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