

TRAVELLER HOMELESSNESS

A HIDDEN CRISIS

"Traveller homelessness is not created by Travellers. This problem is the result of historical, systemic and endemic discrimination against Travellers, and the failure of current housing policy. The state has a responsibility to remedy it."

— Rory Hearne, Assistant Professor Social Policy NUI Maynooth



Cork & Kerry RTAWG

Securing Accommodation Rights for Travellers

Local authorities are knowingly neglecting the accommodation needs of Traveller communities despite them legally being obliged to do so.

Travellers have been forced into an accommodation crisis by local authorities choosing to underspend and under-build Traveller-specific accommodation.

There is €69 million unspent* for improving Travellers' lives, and local authorities are refusing to spend it — despite Traveller groups repeatedly highlighting this nationally and internationally.

Traveller communities could have what they need to thrive: well built, safe,

€69 million
unspent by
local authorities

culturally-appropriate accommodation that protects and supports Traveller families.

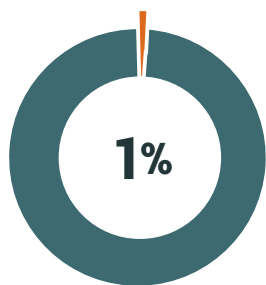
There is land and money available to make it happen. But instead, local authorities have chosen to allow Traveller communities to live on rat-infested, overcrowded sites which is breaching the human rights and damaging the health of Traveller children. Their deliberate inaction has created a new crisis of homelessness and 'Hidden Homelessness' for Travellers.

It doesn't have to be this way.

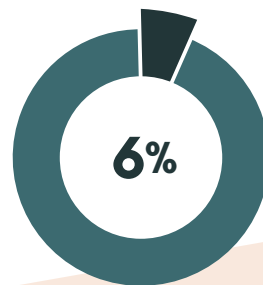
* Since 2000, €69 million earmarked for Traveller housing has gone unspent.

<https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/housing-planning/2022/08/22/only-a-third-of-traveller-housing-budget-spent/>

Travellers are
22 times
more likely
to become
homeless

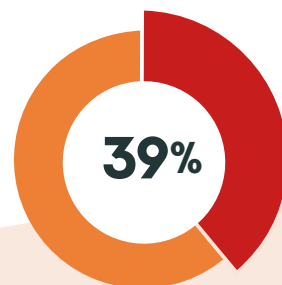


1% of the Irish population are Travellers



6% of the general population are living in overcrowded conditions

CSO Census 2016



39% of the Traveller population are living in overcrowded conditions

CSO Census 2016

What is Traveller Homelessness?

Official data shows that Travellers are dramatically over-represented in the homelessness figures.

However, these statistics are an under-count of the true picture of Traveller homelessness in Ireland.

Traveller children represent 12% of the homeless children in emergency accommodation despite Travellers only comprising 1% of the population, and Travellers are 22 times more likely to become part of Ireland's homelessness crisis.

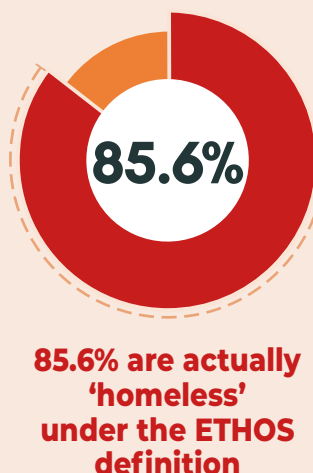
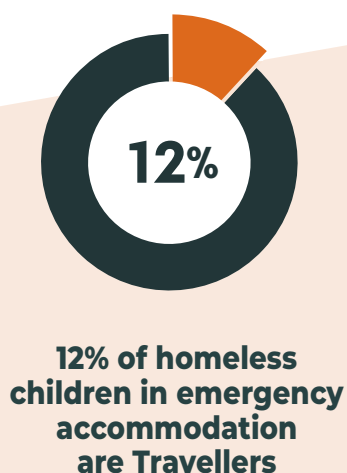
Traveller families who cannot access privately rented accommodation, or social housing — be it standard housing or Traveller-specific — are forced to 'share' overcrowded houses and halting site bays.

There are multitudes of reports on Travellers and Traveller Accommodation. No further research is required. What is needed is action and implementation of the recommendations in those key reports.

“Traveller families with no other options of accommodation are trapped couch surfing, living in box rooms, living in campervans and caravans at the back of relatives' homes, sharing facilities and keeping quiet in case of eviction.

Families are doubled and quadrupled up on chronically overcrowded sites without basic facilities. Families are living on unauthorized sites on roadsides. These people are not being counted in homeless figures and sometimes not even on the housing list.”

— Breda O'Donoghue, Director of Advocacy, Cork Traveller Visibility Group



The Travellers not counted under current definitions are the Hidden Homeless

UCC study in 2019 surveyed Travellers in Cork and Kerry.

CAUSES OF THE CRISIS

- **Many homeless Traveller families are invisible to the state.**

Data is skewed. Under the current Irish definition of homelessness, a UCC study showed that 22% of Travellers surveyed in the south west could be categorised as 'homeless'. However, using the ETHOS definition, a shocking 85.6% of those surveyed qualified as 'homeless'.

- **There are no targeted supports for homeless Travellers.**

Official data shows that Travellers are dramatically over-represented in the homelessness figures. The national HAP Homeless Placefinder Service has not operated effectively to deliver housing for Travellers in the region.

- **Government policy deals with Traveller accommodation and homelessness as separate and unrelated issues.**

There are no targeted supports for homeless Travellers. Many homeless Traveller families are invisible to the state.

- **Racism is experienced with HAP and other privately rented accommodation.**

Local authorities rely heavily on the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) to provide social housing in privately rented properties. This has contributed to a national shortage of housing and soaring rents.

HAP is the main state support out of emergency accommodation. However, Travellers cannot access

Irish homeless figures do not count the number of people...

- › Living in overcrowded accommodation
- › Families staying in relatives' yards
- › Couch surfing in others' homes
- › Living on unauthorised sites on roadsides

These Traveller families are the 'Hidden Homeless'.

this private rented accommodation due to experiences of racism from landlords. A Residential Tenancies Board survey found that 82% of landlords were unwilling to rent to Travellers. Therefore, Travellers spend extended time in emergency accommodation.

- **Local authorities have failed to build adequate accommodation.**

Despite being well funded to build proper accommodation for Traveller communities, national budgets are severely under-spent. The government, the Department of Housing and its minister have failed to intervene in this inaction for the last 20 years.

Most local authorities have failed to build and have also been negligent in providing maintenance for existing sites. Traveller sites across the country remain severely overcrowded and most pose a risk to the health of the people living there.

- **Local authority practices disadvantage Travellers.**

Choice-based letting (CBL)

The use of an on-line system (as the only route for accessing local authority housing) excludes the most vulnerable Travellers who do not have literacy, computer skills or internet access. The system prioritises ‘years on the list’ rather than a family’s urgent accommodation needs. The Workplace Relations Commission ruled that the CBL system discriminates against Travellers in Cork.

‘List Culling’

Local authorities have a standard practice of culling housing lists. There are many well-documented case studies where Travellers were removed from the housing list without their knowledge, linked to difficulty in accessing paperwork.

Internal bias of local authority staff

Lack of Traveller cultural awareness training and anti-racism training for housing and homelessness staff creates an environment where Traveller accommodation needs are not prioritised and go unmet. Some local authority staff harbour internal biases towards Travellers which goes unchecked and disadvantages Travellers.

- **Local authorities are evicting people into homelessness.**

Travellers living on the roadside are evicted by the same local authorities who have failed in their responsibility to provide accommodation. In 2016, Ireland was found to be in breach of Article 16 of the Revised European Social Charter in relation to its eviction procedures. This has not yet been addressed.

“If you operate housing administrative services in such a way that outcomes are poorer for some groups than others, that is discrimination under European law.”

— Brian Harvey, independent social researcher

SOLUTIONS AND ACTIONS

1 'Un-hide' the Hidden Homeless.

Using an ethnic identifier when compiling information about homelessness is essential. Travellers in insecure and overcrowded situations will be included and more accurate information on Traveller housing and homelessness needs will be available.

The state must also implement the adopted definition of homelessness from ETHOS (European Typology on Homelessness). ETHOS identifies four main categories of living situations. It goes much further than the current Irish definition and largely covers all living situations which amount to forms of homelessness across Ireland and Europe.

“Definitions of homelessness are important so that we know who is homeless and why. This is the first step in planning effective supports and solutions.”

— Dr Samantha Williams, Traveller Equality and Justice Project, University College Cork

2 Add the 'right to housing' to the constitution.

Traveller groups, homeless advocacy groups, the general public and many politicians support a constitutional change for a 'right to housing'. This is a key building block to providing homes for all. This includes all types of Traveller accommodation in addition to traditional housing (i.e. culturally appropriate and adequate homes for Travellers).

3 Establish a new, National Traveller Accommodation Agency.

The local authority model of Traveller accommodation delivery has failed. A new National Traveller Accommodation Agency is needed to assess and monitor Traveller accommodation needs and to urgently build accommodation for Travellers.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive provides a useful model on how to overcome discrimination and systemic failures.

There is a multitude of reports on Travellers and Traveller Accommodation. No further research is required. What is needed is action and implementation of the recommendations in those key reports.

“Implementation is key. Travellers have seen report after report written about our conditions but with no action. The recommendations of the Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community (final report 2021) must be implemented so we can have real change for the community.”

— Senator Eileen Flynn

4 Establish a national action plan to address Traveller homelessness.

Traveller homelessness must be prioritised in joint planning groups dealing with Traveller accommodation AND homelessness. Also, a new national action plan on Traveller homelessness must be established and resourced. For this to happen, Traveller representatives need to be on the appropriate committees and structures.

5 Repeal the Trespass Act and extend protections to assure no evictions into homelessness.

The 2002 Criminal Trespass Legislation has been used by local authorities to evict Traveller families; however, the local authorities also have a statutory duty to provide accommodation for these families, and they are failing to do just that. Therefore, these evictions greatly contribute to Traveller homelessness.

Also, during the Covid-19 lock-downs, tenants in privately rented accommodation were protected from evictions into homelessness. During the first lock-down, these protections were extended to Traveller families in sites. These essential protections against homelessness are still needed.

The state is legally obliged to remedy their failures. To have real change for the community, to end the Hidden Homeless crisis, these recommendations must be implemented without delay.

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The state has a responsibility to remedy it.”

— Rory Hearne Assistant Professor
Social Policy, NUI Maynooth

The Ethos definition of homelessness recognises that ...

Rooflessness

without a shelter of any kind, sleeping rough

Houselessness

with a place to sleep, but temporarily living in an institution or a shelter

Living in insecure housing

threatened with severe exclusion due to insecure tenancies, under an eviction notice, experiencing domestic violence, etc.

Living in inadequate housing

in caravans on unauthorised campsites, or in unfit housing in extremely overcrowded home



Cork & Kerry RTAWG

Securing Accommodation Rights for Travellers

Prepared by the Regional Traveller Accommodation Working Group (RTAWG)

We are a collaborative group of six Traveller-led community development organisations in Southwest Ireland: Cork Traveller Visibility Group, Cork Traveller Women's Network, East Cork Traveller Project, Kerry Travellers Health and Community Development Project, Travellers of North Cork, and West Cork Travellers.

The working group focuses on building new co-ordinated strategic regional responses to the Traveller accommodation crisis by giving visibility to Traveller experiences around accommodation and homelessness, and proposing solutions to influence policy and practice.

For more information, including the research that supports this document, please see the Cork and Kerry RTAWG report "Traveller Homelessness in the Southwest" (2020), report (referenced below), or contact any of the Traveller groups listed for additional information.



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