



EXCHANGE HOUSE  
Travellers Service

The Traveller  
Community

INFORMATION PACK



## IRISH TRAVELLERS FACTSHEET

### GENERAL INFORMATION

- There are 30,000 Travellers in Ireland
- Irish Travellers have been documented as far back as the 12<sup>th</sup> century. There is no definitive answer as to where Travellers came from but there is general agreement that they are indigenous to Ireland
- There are differences in the demographic make up of the Traveller community and the general population:

Age Groups	General Population	Travellers
Over 65	11%	1%
15-64	65%	49%
Under 14	24%	50%

- Travellers are nomadic. This means more than travelling from A to B but rather affects every aspect of Traveller life
- Traditionally Travellers generate income rather than live on a fixed income. Home is the base for income generation with the whole family having a role. Today, some Travellers work in mainstream, fixed income jobs
- Extended Family is a key element in Traveller culture with people identifying themselves by who their family are
- Marriage is ingrained in the cultural way of life
- The vast majority of Travellers are Roman Catholics and faith is tremendously important to most Travellers
- In a report carried out by the ERSI, on an indicator used to measure social disadvantage, Traveller people fare poorly on every point:
  - Poverty
  - Social exclusion
  - Health Status
  - Infant Mortality
  - Life expectancy
  - Literacy, Education
  - Training levels
  - Access to decision making
  - Political Representation
  - Gender equality
  - Access to credit
  - Accommodation and Living conditions.
- Many Travellers report having experienced racism and discrimination on a daily basis



## TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION

### FACTSHEET

Irish Travellers live in all types of accommodation. For example:

#### **Official Halting Sites:**

Labre Park in Ballyfermot and St Margaret's Park in Ballymun are examples of these. Official Halting Sites are organised in 'bays' which are areas that are designated for accommodating mobile homes or 'trailers'. There may be more than one trailer on a bay and electricity is the only utility that is automatically provided on some sites. Running water is only provided in the outside bathrooms and outside kitchens. Travellers who live on official sites pay rent to the relevant councils. In addition to the bays there may be houses on an official halting site.

#### **Unofficial Halting Sites:**

Some parts of Dunsink Lane are unofficial, for example. Some sites have an outside tap provided for the entire site and some have portable toilets provided by the relevant councils. The living conditions for both types of site are generally quite harsh.

#### **Group Housing Schemes:**

Avilla Park in Finglas is an example of a group housing scheme.

#### **Local Authority Housing:**

Many Travellers are living in Local Authority flats or housing estates alongside the general population.

#### **Private Rented Accommodation:**

Some Travellers are living in privately owned apartments or houses owned by private landlords.

#### **Their own property:**

Some Traveller families buy and live in their own homes

1000 Traveller families still live on the side of the road without basic utilities such as water, electricity and sanitation. One in four Travellers have no piped water supply or electricity.

In 2002, the Government enacted the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act which made trespass, previously a civil offence, a criminal offence. Currently, camping on private or public land is punishable by one month in jail, a €3,000 fine and the confiscation of people's homes.

The 1998 Traveller Accommodation Act obliged Local Authorities to provide five year plans for Traveller accommodation. This has not happened and the local authorities don't face sanctions for their failures.

#### **Aspects of Traveller culture that affect accommodation:**

- The extended family lives in the same place
- People generate income from the home.
- Travellers are nomadic



## TRAVELLER HEALTH

### FACTSHEET

Health levels among Travellers are low in comparison to the general population. This means that Travellers would be engaging with healthcare professionals a lot.

The most up to date comprehensive statistics are from 1987 the show:

- Travellers have the same life expectancy now as the general population did in the 1940's.
- The infant mortality rate for Travellers was 2.5 times higher than national rate.
- Newer statistics continue to show health inequality.
- Travellers twice as likely as settled people to have diabetes and related conditions (2009).
- Traveller suicide rates are three times the national average (2000 – 2006).
- Travellers of all ages have much higher mortality rates than people in the general population.
- Traveller women live on average 12 years less than women in the general population with an average lifespan of 65years.
- Traveller men live on average 10 years less than men in the general population with an average lifespan of 62 years.

The rates for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome/Cot Death for Traveller babies are three and a half times the national figure. In 2002 the figure was 2.2 versus 0.6 per 1000 births.

The All Ireland Traveller Health survey was undertaken in 2008. The research has yet to be published.

Access to services is not equal: e.g. 17% of Travellers found it difficult to register with a GP (2002)

The urgency of the need to provide effective health care for these citizens – men, women and children cannot be over stated.

*“The circumstances of the Irish Travelling people are intolerable. No humane and decent society, once made aware of such circumstances, would permit them to persist.” (ESRI, 1986).*



## LEGISLATION HISTORY

### FACTSHEET

- 1963**     **Commission on Itinerancy**  
*Recommended assimilation of Travellers into the settled community*
- 1983**     **Report of the Travelling People Review Body**  
*Promoted the integration of Travellers into mainstream society without adequately supporting and promoting their cultural identity*
- 1988**     **Housing Act**  
*Provides the first statutory recognition of Traveller specific accommodation*
- 1991**     **Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act**  
*Prohibits incitement to hatred on the ground of race, colour, religion, ethnic or national origin, membership of the Traveller community and sexual orientation*
- 1992**     **Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act**  
*Section 10 of this act empowers local authorities to remove Travellers, who are camped unofficially, to an unofficial site anywhere within a five mile radius of where they are*
- 1993**     **Roads Act**  
*Relevant to Traveller accommodation but makes very little direct mention to the special needs of the Traveller Community. The Act empowers Local Authorities and Gardaí to remove temporary dwellings in certain circumstances*
- 1995**     **White Paper on Education: ‘Charting our Education Future’**  
*Call for full participation in school life by Traveller Children by means of integration while at the same time respecting Traveller culture*
- 1995**     **Casual Trading Act**  
*This Act requires market traders to apply to each local authority for a casual license for any market in their area*
- 1995**     **Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community**  
*This makes a lot of recommendations covering all aspects of Traveller life and acknowledges the distinct culture and identity of the Traveller community*

- 1997**      **Control of Horses Act**  
*Places restriction on the ownership of horses*
- 1998**      **Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act**  
*Obliges local authorities to meet the current and projected needs of the Traveller Community. Sections of the Act gives increased powers of eviction to Local Authorities*
- 1999**      **Employment Equality Act**  
*This Act outlaws discrimination in the employment field on several grounds including membership of the Traveller community*
- 1999**      **Equality Authority Established**  
*The body established with responsibility for the implementation of the Employment Equality Act and the forth coming Equal Status Legislation*
- 2000**      **Equal Status Legislation**  
*This covers the discrimination in the provision of services*
- 2001**      **Youth Work Act**  
*The first regulation of Youth Work in the history of the state*
- 2002**      **The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act**  
*This Act criminalizes trespass on public and private land. Section 24 of the Public Order Act as amended by the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002, provides that:*
- This law was introduced at a time when over a 1,000 Traveller families were camped on public land due to the lack of provision of Traveller accommodation, and where they had been no real progress in relation to the provision of transient accommodation. Its introduction put vulnerable families in fear of being moved on by the Gardaí and put an end to families being able to practice their rights to be nomadic.*