



**PAVEE POINT**  
**TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE**

## **Pre-Budget 2015 Report**

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<sup>1</sup> Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre is a non-government organisation, which is committed to human rights for Travellers and Roma. The organisation comprises Travellers, Roma and members of the majority population working in partnership to address the needs of Travellers and Roma, who as minority ethnic groups experience exclusion and marginalisation.

## Summary of Recommendations

### Income levels

- Increase adult social welfare rates in line with rising cost of living.
- Maintain Child Benefit rate at current level.
- Support and invest in community sector initiatives that support Traveller and Roma inclusion.

### Habitual Residence Condition

- As a matter of urgency, provide a humanitarian response and ensure that Roma are not living without basic food and shelter in Ireland.
- Invest in and conduct an equality and poverty impact assessment of the habitual residence condition, taking into account factors of ethnicity and gender.
- Proof and amend the guidelines on the habitual residence condition from an equality and human rights perspective and provide resources to train deciding officers in relation to these changes.
- Amend the guidelines to take into account Traveller nomadism.
- Ensure that women experiencing violence are not subject to the habitual residence condition.
- Remove child benefit from habitual residence condition requirements.
- Ensure that people awaiting decisions on habitual residence are provided with adequate income supports.
- Provide human resources to support people in making their applications, in particular the availability of suitable translators.
- Collect and make public disaggregated data in relation to applications, refusals, appeals and appeal outcomes with regard to the habitual residence condition.

### Supporting Employment

- Given the high unemployment rates for Travellers and Roma, resource the development of a national employment strategy for Travellers and Roma.
- Support the Special Initiative for Traveller Employment.
- Resource employment projects for Roma, including an employment project in Pavee Point to replace the local training initiative which was cut.
- Resource a needs analysis in relation to Roma training and employment.

### Ensure a Human Rights Based Approach

- In budgetary decisions, Departments should systematically analyse the potential impact of such decisions on marginalised groups and ensure that their human rights are prioritised and safeguarded. This should be done in a transparent manner.
- Invest in systems to record and analyse disaggregated data, by ethnicity and gender, across state institutions.

## Introduction

Travellers and Roma are among the most marginalised groups in Irish society and along with other marginalised groups have been disproportionately impacted by austerity measures. The 2013 independent report by Brian Harvey 'Travelling with Austerity' unveiled the scale of the cuts experienced by Travellers. As the author has noted 'One can think of no other section of the community which has suffered such a high level of withdrawal of funding and human resources, compounded by the failure of the state to spend even the limited resources that it has made available.' Using Government figures, the report documents cuts in spending on Traveller infrastructure between the period 2008-2013. The table below shows a summary of cuts, in comparison to an overall cut of 4.3%.

• Interagency activities	-100%
• Education	-86.6%
• Accommodation	-85%
• Equality	-76.3%
• National Traveller organizations	-63.6%
• FAS SIT	-50%
• National Traveller Partnership	-32.1%
• SPY youth projects	-29.8%
• Health	-5.4%
<i>Reminder: overall government cut</i>	<i>-4.3%</i>

## Impact of cuts in social protection

Cuts in social protection and changes in benefits have impacted hugely on Travellers as a marginalised group. The Travelling with Austerity report has documented the outcomes of welfare changes.

"All the cuts in social welfare have detrimental effects on Traveller families. Three meals a day is not always possible for some families. Paying for heating is seen as a luxury that most people try and do without. Travellers on their own have little money to live on, while those living in families are under great stress."

"Less money means that people can't afford fuel, so they go to bed early just to keep warm."

"Setting unemployment assistance at €100 for a young person is all very well, but Travellers have children at a young age and you can't rear a family on €100 a week."

"Parents have greater difficulty feeding their children and there are even reports of stealing for food."

"All these cuts have a considerable cumulative effect. You may be able to manage your children's allowance if you have a job, but not if you don't. How do you manage seven

children's packed school lunches on so much less?"

Families who are relying on social welfare are living below a minimum acceptable standard of living and facing food poverty, fuel poverty, poor housing conditions and greater ill health. In this context, Pavee Point's priority for the next budget is ensuring adequate incomes of the poorest individuals and families, along with the availability of high quality, intercultural public services. This entails the application of equality, anti-racist and human rights principles to budget decision-making. Given the role that the community sector plays in supporting marginalised groups, this budget should also support and invest in community sector initiatives that support Traveller and Roma inclusion.

### **Recommendations:**

- Increase adult social welfare rates in line with rising cost of living.
- Maintain Child Benefit rate at current level.
- Support and invest in community sector initiatives that support Traveller and Roma inclusion.

### **Habitual Residence Condition**

Another major issue of concern is the impact of the habitual residence condition on Travellers and Roma in Ireland. In particular, many Roma in Ireland continue to struggle to survive due to not meeting the habitual residence condition. This is causing child poverty and serious health problems. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

In a series of seminars held by Pavee Point and the Health Service Executive (HSE) in 2011/2012 on the experiences of Roma children in Ireland, HSE staff noted that the habitual residence condition is resulting in extreme child poverty for Roma children. A recurring issue at the seminars and in the interviews with professionals working with Roma was the extent of the deprivation some Roma families are experiencing as a result of not qualifying for social welfare assistance. Many practitioners expressed shock and concern at the living conditions of some Roma families, including substandard housing and no food, saying they have never seen such conditions before.

"I've been working my whole life and never seen poverty like this before. We need to do something about it."

This is resulting in extreme poverty, poor health and raising serious child protection issues. Social workers have raised concerns about child poverty, saying they have never seen anything like this before, and that they have to consider taking a child into care in order to access basic services. The knock-on effect of not meeting the habitual residence condition can also mean a lack of access to a medical card, as a person is unable to prove their means.

The Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, has called on Ireland to review the impact of the condition as a matter of priority. In light of this Pavee Point calls on the Department of Social Protection to invest in and

conduct a review and impact assessment of the habitual residence condition, in particular in relation to ethnicity and gender. Ireland has a responsibility to ensure policies are in line with human rights commitments. This means ensuring policy is not discriminatory.

In 2014 Minister Fitzgerald addressed a conference on 'Realising Roma Children's Rights' held by Pavee Point. Recommendations for this conference included addressing the habitual residence condition due to its disproportionate impact on Roma children. From a children's rights perspective, the Special Rapporteur for Children, Geoffrey Shannon has called for child benefit not to be subject to the habitual residence condition.

As a matter of urgency we are also calling on the Department of Social Protection to provide a humanitarian response and ensure that Roma are not living without basic food and shelter in Ireland.

### **Recommendations:**

- Provide a humanitarian response and ensure that Roma are not living without basic food and shelter in Ireland.
- Invest in and conduct an equality and poverty impact assessment of the habitual residence condition, taking into account factors of ethnicity and gender.
- Proof and amend the guidelines on the habitual residence condition from an equality and human rights perspective and provide resources to train deciding officers in relation to these changes.
- Amend the guidelines to take into account Traveller nomadism.
- Ensure that women experiencing violence are not subject to the habitual residence condition.
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- Collect and make public disaggregated data in relation to applications, refusals, appeals and appeal outcomes with regard to the habitual residence condition.

### **Supporting Employment**

Travellers and Roma face huge barriers to accessing employment in Ireland. Census 2011 revealed a Traveller unemployment figure of 84.3%.

In the field of employment, the national training authority, FAS initiated in 2005 the Special Initiative for the employment of Travellers, sometimes called FAS SIT. This was mainstreamed in 2011. The "Travelling Austerity" report notes that eight projects were still reportedly running in 2012, but we have no information on Traveller participation after this point.

The report also notes that the Department of Social Protection also had an Activation and family support line, €510,067 in 2008, a small grant fund enabling work with unemployed Travellers. “No figures are available of allocations or spending since then, nor of the outcomes. The internship scheme in government departments, which was popular and over-subscribed, was discontinued.”

This reports notes a disillusionment in terms of employment prospects.

“We are always fighting for children to go right through the education system - but what is the point if there is nothing at the other end?”

“Projects report that discrimination against Travellers in employment is as great as ever. Most training, they said, seemed geared to the newly unemployed, not most Travellers who have been out of work for some time, the Long Term Unemployed.”

“if you get work, you are terrified of losing the medical card and then you can’t get medical care for the children.”

There are no available figures on Roma unemployment in Ireland, however, from working with the Roma community it is clear to Pavee Point that many Roma in Ireland face high levels of unemployment. Many Roma find it difficult to gain employment due to factors including racism, discrimination and lack of training and formal education. There is a lack of vocational training options for Roma in Ireland. There is no clear strategy to facilitate Roma participation in mainstream training programmes. Many Roma may have very poor experiences of education and may also have an added difficulty of not speaking and writing English. Therefore, extra support is needed to facilitate completion of employment training programmes. Pavee Point recommends that targeted initiatives for Roma are provided as part of a strategy to facilitate engagement in mainstream employment. The removal of funding for a local training initiative working with Roma in Pavee Point has removed an initiative that was linking in with Roma to provide support to access further training and employment. We recommend that employment opportunities for Travellers and Roma are supported.

### **Recommendations:**

- Given the high unemployment rates for Travellers and Roma, resource the development of a national employment strategy for Travellers and Roma.
- Support the Special Initiative for Traveller Employment.
- Resource employment projects for Roma, including an employment project in Pavee Point to replace the local training initiative which was cut.
- Resource a needs analysis in relation to Roma training and employment.

### **Human Rights**

We also want to note Ireland’s human rights obligations and duties to ensure people have access to rights such as education, health and accommodation in a non-discriminatory manner. Likewise, as outlined in General Comment No 19 on the Right to Social Security, the State must ensure sufficient access to a social security scheme to provide a minimum

level of payment as to enable people 'to acquire essential health care, basic shelter and housing, water and sanitation, foodstuffs, and the most basic forms of education.' While the human rights framework and treaty documents clarify that State actions can only take place within the context of available resources, it is important to ensure that decisions made in relation to the use of these available resources are based on human rights principles, including non-discrimination.

In short the State is obligated to ensure that human rights principles underpin budget decisions and to ensure that the most vulnerable do not bear the brunt of austerity measures. In this context, it is vital that there are no further cuts to social welfare income, which reduce the real income of the poorest in society and in which Travellers and Roma are over-represented. All budgetary decisions should be assessed in advance in terms of their potential human rights impact and such assessments should be conducted in a transparent manner.

**Recommendations:**

- In budgetary decisions, Departments should systematically analyse the potential impact of such decisions on marginalised groups and ensure that their human rights are prioritised and safeguarded. This should be done in a transparent manner.
- Invest in systems to record and analyse disaggregated data, by ethnicity and gender, across state institutions.

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