

The National Roma Needs Assessment:
**ACCOMMODATION
BRIEFING**



PAVEE POINT
TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE

OVERVIEW

The National Roma Needs Assessment was undertaken by Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre in partnership with the Department of Justice and Equality, and published in 2018. It was commissioned by the Department of Justice and Equality in line with recommendation 4.2.3 of the Logan Report, following the removal of two Roma children from their families in 2013. The Roma Needs Assessment aims to provide a better understanding of the experiences of the Roma community in Ireland, and to identify areas requiring further consideration. This is the first participatory research project of its kind with Roma in Ireland, and the research was undertaken with 14 Roma peer researchers. The study adopts a mixed-methods, rights-based approach, including:

- Quantitative analysis in 108 Roma households; (information on 609 household members)
- Collection of qualitative data (30 interviews and 8 focus groups) with service providers and Roma;
- Consultations with other relevant 'experts' in the field.

The Needs Assessment found that Roma in Ireland are facing discrimination in accessing accommodation, severe overcrowding; poor quality accommodation; a lack of security of tenure; homelessness; and a lack of access to social housing and rent supplement.

- The majority of respondents reported living in private rented accommodation (76.9%);
- 36.6% of respondents reported that they do not have a tenancy agreement.
- The average length of time in Ireland for those without tenancy agreements is six years.

Focus group discussions revealed reports of Roma living in severely overcrowded conditions and in unsafe abandoned buildings. This needs to be viewed as a crisis issue facing the Roma community and addressed as part of wider measures to address the housing crisis.

KEY ISSUES

DISCRIMINATION

- The highest rates of perceived discrimination are in accessing accommodation (93.3%).
- When in accommodation 66.3% of respondents reported feeling discriminated against by a landlord or local authority.

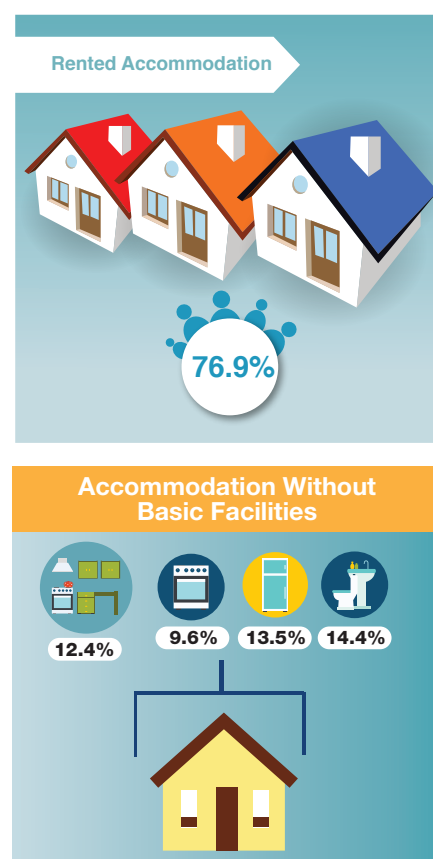
In some cases this was reported as direct discrimination where landlords said they do not accept Roma; in other cases it was more indirect where a person would be told the accommodation was now taken. Service providers reported witnessing direct discrimination with landlords refusing to accept Roma as tenants.

LIVING CONDITIONS

- No kitchen (12.4%)
- No cooker (9.6%)
- No fridge (13.5%)
- Household with 10+ people (7.3%)
- Cannot keep the house warm (66.3%)

Service providers reported:

- Families living with no utilities, gas, water and electricity.
- Rat infestation, damp and mould.



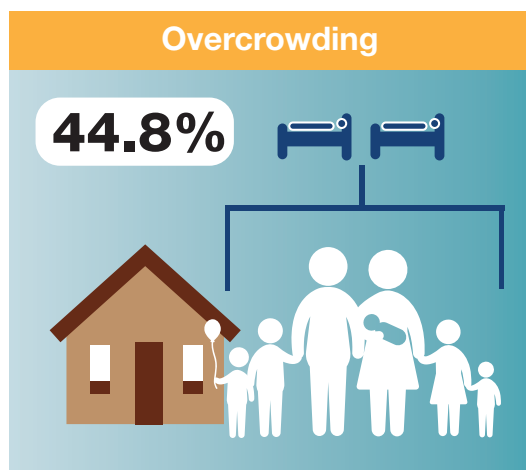
- Families with children are living in shocking, overcrowded and unsafe conditions.
- Living in unsafe warehouses.

On several occasions in interviews and focus groups, participants described families living in rooms with young children where open electric plates were placed on the floor and used for both cooking and heating.

Overcrowding was identified as a major concern by service providers, which is often accompanied by poor quality accommodation with a lack of facilities. Even though the demographic data showed a diversity in household size with the majority of households comprising five people or less, nonetheless:

- 24% of respondents lived in households of 8 or more people.
- 44.8% of respondents said they did not have enough beds in their accommodation.

Public health nurses and family support workers as well as workers from homeless organisations had witnessed rat infestation and expressed concerns about food safety and general health and well-being of adults and children. Service providers noted a fear of contacting the services responsible for environmental health as there was fear that the family would then be evicted with no alternative accommodation provided. The issues highlighted in relation to accommodation which are detrimental to health were damp, rats, broken windows, leaking toilets, sewerage, mould, mildew, and for many children, no light to do homework, as well as unsafe use of electrical equipment.



ACCESSING HOMELESSNESS SUPPORTS

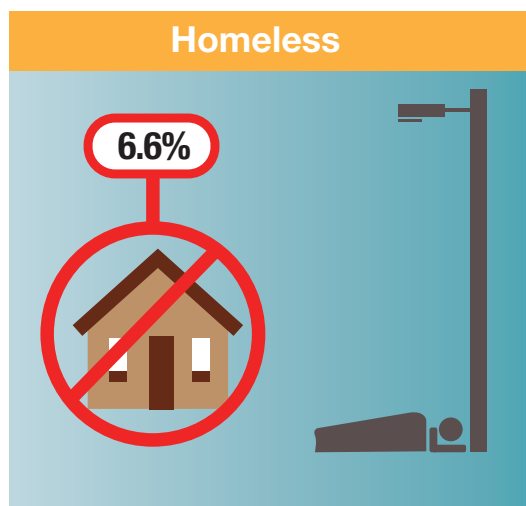
- 6.6% of respondents reported that they are homeless.
- 45.7% of respondents reported having been homeless at some stage of their lives.

A consistent issue as reported in interviews and focus groups is the inability of Roma to prove their residency in an area and upon becoming homeless, having no access to homeless services. Additionally, a lack of employment and/or record of employment, are barriers to accessing homeless and housing supports.

To access homeless services a household must present to the relevant Housing Authority within whose functional area they reside. There is a requirement to prove that you have become homeless in the local authority area in which you are presenting as homeless. This is a barrier for many Roma even though they may have been living in an area for some time. The assistance that will be provided also depends on a person's initially perceived right to reside.

A household, in order to qualify for social housing support needs to meet the requirements stated in the Housing Circular 41/2012. However, homelessness services and supports are specified in primary legislation and the Circular should not apply to the provision of emergency accommodation.ⁱ

The low number of respondents in local authority accommodation is notable. The Department Circular referred to above indicates that as an EU citizen living in Ireland, you must be in employment in order to be assessed for social housing support. If not, you must be unemployed due to illness, accident or involuntarily unemployed after being in employment for over a year and registered as a jobseeker with the Department of Social Protection. For Roma who do not meet these criteria a housing assessment cannot be completed.



The Housing Assistance Payment cannot be accessed unless a housing needs assessment has been completed by the relevant Housing Authority (i.e. the household is accepted onto the Local Authority housing list) and as a result support under the Dublin Homeless Housing Assistance Payment Pilot cannot be accessed by many households, including marginalised Roma households.

Also, to access rent supplement you must have passed the habitual residence test. These criteria were identified as barriers for Roma respondents in accessing housing supports.

Service providers noted that sometimes the only option of support is to give homeless people the free phone emergency number to get a hostel for the night. For people with very little English, several children, and in need of a range of supports, this is inadequate.

CASE STUDIES



*I interviewed a pregnant mother of two children. She is living with a disability. She lost her home and lives with another couple. They have no gas or water in the house. The kitchen was empty except for a small table and there was no cooker or fridge. They have no food. **Reported by a peer researcher.***

*A family came to me with a very sick baby. They are sharing a flat with someone else and when I visited the flat I saw that they have no cooker, kettle or microwave. They have a small fridge and they go into another flat to cook. The only furniture they have is a small table, a chair and one bed with a single mattress. There is no water in the bathroom. They have no money. **Reported by a health care provider.***

A 42 year old woman who has lived in Ireland for nineteen years described her situation in a household of ten people: My husband and I live with my son, his wife and five kids and my youngest child in a two bed apartment. We have been living here for six years. I sleep on the living room on the floor, in the same room is the kitchen, the dining room, sitting room and bedroom. It is very hard for me to get rent for myself.

A 20 year old man who has been in Ireland for six years, one of 14 in a four bedroom house with seven children aged under eight years explained: 'I am hopeless, homeless, and workless, I have no support.'

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A Ministerial commitment to address Roma homelessness and poor accommodation as part of 'Rebuilding Ireland – Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness'.
- Include actions to address Roma accommodation in the National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy.
- Provide clear and consistent information on where households at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness should seek support.
- Give support to Roma in providing documentation for homelessness and housing support and investigate alternative/complimentary models of evidencing eligibility, rights and entitlements.
- Conduct further research to ascertain the exact numbers of Roma who are homeless and at risk of homelessness.
- Fund regional staff to assist and support Roma with accommodation issues – to inform the development of evidence based policy and address discrimination.
- Enhance existing humanitarian responses for Roma families living in extreme poverty to ensure adults and children are not living without food and basic accommodation facilities.

These briefings were made possible with the support of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. To read the full report, please visit <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RNA-PDF.pdf>



Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta
an Duine agus Comhionannas
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission