



The National Roma Needs Assessment:

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS 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.

These Roma respondents from urban and rural areas throughout Ireland provided information on their gender, age, nationality, length of time in Ireland and citizenship status. Respondents were also asked to provide information on all household members, and where data references the household, it refers to the 491 other household members, 210 of which are adults and 281 children.

The birthplace of children in the household was recorded in 259 cases. Of these 63.3% of children were born in Ireland. 25.9% were born in Romania, 6.6% in the Czech Republic, 2.7% in Slovakia and 1.6% stated 'other'. All of the respondents (who were over 18) were born outside Ireland, yet over half of the children in households had been born in Ireland. This indicates a significant generational change in the Roma communities living in Ireland. As one respondent said: *'This is my home. I would not consider anywhere else home, I grew up here'*.

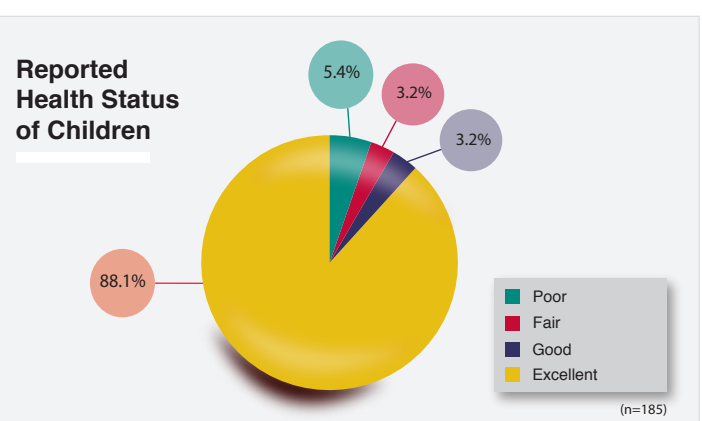
KEY ISSUES

HEALTH

When describing the health of children in the household

- 88.1% of respondents described the health of children in the household as excellent.
- 5.4% reported poor health of children in the household.
- 81.1% of children in households were reported to have medical cards.
- In 61.7% of households children were immunised.

However, when respondents were probed further about children's health in relation to children who have been born in Ireland, 25.8% (n=78) of respondents reported that these children have health problems. Service providers reported multiple cases of children up to the age of thirteen who had never been seen by a GP in Ireland.



LIVING CONDITIONS

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.

MATERNAL HEALTH

24% of women had not accessed health services while pregnant and their first point of access was to give birth. This was explored in focus groups and interviews and it was reported that there is a fear of being charged for maternity services.

The other issue that was highlighted by service providers are cases of young Roma girls giving birth under the age of 16.ⁱ This raised serious issues of children's rights and of medical consent, particularly where girls had no guardian in attendance with them or there was no known guardian in the country.

In interviews with midwives, public health nurses, social workers, family support workers and teen parent support workers it was recognised that many Roma women attending for maternity care did not have access to the supplies generally required for childbirth. Service providers reported the unacceptable levels of deprivation they encountered in homes with new born babies, including lack of all basic essentials such as sanitation and heating.

EDUCATION

Throughout the research respondents viewed education as a positive opportunity for Roma children in Ireland and parents repeatedly stressed the value they placed on their children receiving an education. The research also highlights significant challenges to the participation, attendance and results of Roma children in the Irish education system. These included a lack of financial resources; living in sub-standard accommodation; parents own experiences of discrimination in school or lack of access to education and lack of English language and literacy.

- 40% of households with children under the age of five reported that children were attending pre-school.
- In 78% of households primary aged children were attending school.
- Post primary aged children were attending school in 72% of households.

It was acknowledged that schools need to recognise cultural diversity and implement inclusive practices in order to ensure the inclusion of Roma children and combat identity based bullying. More in-depth research is required to get a full picture of young Roma people's experiences attending school in Ireland given the relatively low numbers of participants having had their education or training in Ireland.

Poverty impacts Roma children and their education, and a percentage of respondents reported facing some or all of the following issues:

- Children gone to school hungry (25%)
- Children gone to school without adequate lunches (35%)
- Not enough money for books and uniforms (57.5%)

POVERTY

As noted previously, this research emanated from an inquiry concerned with the rights of Roma children. The research reveals child welfare situations that are unacceptable. Respondents reported children going to school hungry and a lack of basic supplies for new born babies. Service providers also reported cases of malnutrition in



young Roma children. Living in unsafe and overcrowded accommodation presents a serious concern for child welfare.

- In 50% of the households with children, the respondents reported that they did not always have enough food, and 46.2% reported not having enough fuel.
- 49.2% of respondents in households with children were not successful in their application for social protection payments, which means they were not receiving child benefit.

Lack of employment and a lack of social protection were identified as key issues causing poverty. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016) has recommended that the State makes child benefit a universal payment that is not contingent of the fulfilment of habitual residence condition. ⁱⁱ

CASE STUDIES



In many cases the respondents were concerned for their families, more than for themselves. One man described how his neighbours would not allow their children to play with his children. Another respondent reported high anxiety levels as a result of her children being called 'gypsy' and being told 'to go home'.

A 32 year old man described his situation: 'I live with my parents. I have three children. We don't have work, only occasionally. I applied for child benefit. No chance, I am not habitually resident'.

Another respondent said: 'I applied for single parent [payment] and I did not receive any money since I applied 7 months ago. It is very hard with two children and no income'.

The experience of poverty gives rise to mistrust in service providers due to fears of children being taken into care. As one woman stated: 'We live at the moment in a house with no electricity, no gas and no facilities. I am afraid to go to authority. They can do bad things to my family. I have three children. I live from what we beg.'

'Me and my two children live with my sister. She has five members living with her. My Dad is old and ill. We all live in a house where there is no electricity, no hot water. Nobody cares about us. I don't have social welfare. My two children were taken out of school because they had nothing to eat at school. I am not able to pay for their books or uniforms. They went for a while when I was able to sell Big Issue but I couldn't anymore because I became ill. I live on my Dad's money from social welfare. I am very poor. I have a very hard life. I came to Ireland to have a better life, but instead I am worse'.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enhance existing humanitarian responses for Roma families living in extreme poverty to ensure that adults and children are not living without food and basic accommodation facilities.
- Child Benefit to be a universal payment that is not dependent on the fulfilment of habitual residence condition, as recommended to the State by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016).
- Promote immunisation uptake among members of the Roma community, with a particular emphasis on early childhood vaccinations.
- Ensure that supports to address the costs associated with attending school are available to all Roma children experiencing poverty.
- Support and encourage Roma families to avail of free pre-school education.
- Continue to provide targeted interventions to provide increased family support to address child welfare concerns in a preventative manner.
- Train and resource a network of community workers to work with Roma in Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

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

ⁱ Figures were not available to the researcher to indicate how widespread or not that this issue may be. This issue is related to early marriage; for more information on early marriage see N Bitu and C Morteau, Are the rights of the child negotiable? The Case of early marriages within Roma communities in Romania (Romani Criss and UNICEF 2010).

ⁱⁱ See United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 'Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Ireland' (2016) CRC/C/IRL/CO/3-4.