

The National Roma Needs Assessment:
**WOMEN'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.

This paper outlines some of the key issues impacting Roma women in Ireland, focusing on health, education, and discrimination. It was noted throughout the research that unemployment and poverty is particularly exacerbated for Roma women, and they are disproportionately impacted by discrimination.

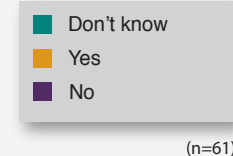
KEY ISSUES

HEALTH

Maternal Health

- In 36% of households women had difficulty accessing maternity services.
- Women in 65% of households attended a doctor or hospital before birth.
- In 24.6% of households it was reported that women did not attend a doctor or hospital while pregnant and first accessed a hospital to give birth.
- When maternity services were accessed, there was quite a high level of satisfaction with these services. 61.9% of respondents reported that women were satisfied with their maternity care, with 9.5% reporting women not being happy with their maternity experience.

Women Attended a Doctor or Hospital before Birth

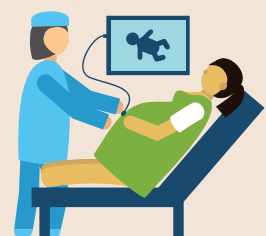


In interviews with midwives, public health nurses, social workers, family support workers and teen parent support workers it was recognised that many Roma women attending for maternity care did not have access to the supplies generally required for childbirth.

- In 39.3% of households, respondents reported that women did not have supplies such as baby clothes for the hospital.
- 37.1% of respondents reported that they did not have adequate supplies for the baby after birth.

Maternity Service

 61.9%



Domestic Violence

Domestic violence was identified by service providers as a health issue. It was stated that: 'women have no protection from domestic violence'. Another service provider said: 'There can be massive control of young women by the mother in law and husbands. Women are never alone.'

Others pointed to barriers that would prevent a woman leaving such a situation such as lack of economic independence, networks and the lack of access to refuge accommodation where a person does not satisfy the habitual residence condition – in certain cases short-term access is provided for people who do not meet the habitual residence condition. An understanding of the barriers Roma women may face in leaving a situation of violence is needed.ⁱ In particular, economic factors and anti-Roma racism in the wider community are key factors.ⁱⁱ

A lack of access to social protection was also identified as a barrier to accessing women's refuges for women experiencing domestic violence.



EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

- 41.1% of adult Roma women born outside of Ireland have never been to school.
- 3.5% of Roma women have completed more than 12 years of education.
- 8.2% of Roma women are in employment.

Interviewees noted cases of teenage Roma girls being taken out of school earlier than Roma boys, due to pregnancy, preparation for marriage or childminding. In some areas it was considered a serious barrier to school completion for Roma girls; whilst in other areas the practice was not prevalent. One respondent noted that moving to Ireland gave her the opportunity to get an education and avoid early marriage: 'If I stayed I would not have got an education, I would have been married early with kids.' Service providers reported that some Roma women who had been taken out of school early expressed a strong desire to return to education once their own children were attending school.



Early marriage was raised as preventing some Roma girls from completing and succeeding in education. The diversity on this issue demonstrates the need to avoid simplistic equations between culture and child marriage.ⁱⁱⁱ Early marriage is not unique to Roma communities and is not necessarily motivated by culture or group. It is important that early marriage is addressed as it undermines the human rights of Roma girls and in this context their right to education. Communities need to be made aware of the legislative and policy provisions in Ireland in relation to the age of marriage. Addressing such issues requires creating future opportunities and alternatives for Roma women. Funding and supports that empower community leaders are also needed.

DISCRIMINATION

- 74% of respondents reported feeling discriminated against in shops, restaurants, pubs and other social venues.
- 81.1% of respondents reported having felt discriminated against in the street or a public setting.
- 84.1% of female respondents said they had experienced discrimination in health care services.

The Roma Needs Assessment identified Roma women as particularly vulnerable to racist abuse. The association of a particular type of so-called 'traditional' dress with Roma also emerged as a strong theme

in the study. In this context, Roma women are particularly vulnerable to on-street racism. This reflects a limited understanding of Roma identity in Irish society, which is narrowly linked to dress code. This suggests a need for increased spaces for more diverse and positive representations of Roma identity and Roma women.

CASE STUDIES



A young woman explained her conflicting experiences, noting that she has had great experiences in Ireland and appreciated the opportunity to receive an education. However, she reported experiencing discrimination when wearing clothes that identify her as Roma: 'I would not dress in Roma [now] because we get treated badly, followed, and discriminated against'.

*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 had no food. Her children are going to school. The woman is afraid to admit to being homeless in case she loses her one-parent family payment. It was very upsetting and shocking to see this situation. **Reported by a peer researcher.***

I interviewed a woman who has been in Ireland about a year. She lives outdoors with her husband and teenage son. They sleep in a warehouse or outdoors every night. They are begging in the street but she said it's better here than in Romania. They were staying with her brother in a small flat, but they left as they were afraid when the landlord was asking questions and the brother was living in fear of eviction.

Reported by a peer researcher.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Train and resource a network of Roma women community workers; working in the areas of health, education, employment, accommodation, justice, human rights and equality.
- Support women to access maternal health services (including through provision of health information and support from Roma Primary Health Care workers to increase trust in services)
- Develop and implement a public health information programme targeted at Roma in collaboration with Roma Primary Health Care workers.
- Ensure Roma women experiencing violence are provided with appropriate supports, including access to women's refuges.
- Initiate a humanitarian response for families living in extreme poverty that ensures that adults and children are not living without food and basic accommodation facilities.
- Make Child Benefit payment a truly universal payment that is not contingent on the fulfilment of Habitual Residence Condition – as recommended to Ireland by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2016.^{iv}
- Ensure data collection and analysis is disaggregated by ethnicity and gender across all administrative systems and mainstream services and is in line with human rights-based standards of data collection.
- Take effective measures to tackle anti-Roma discrimination and racism with a priority focus on Roma women.

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 For a discussion on intersection of ethnicity and gender inequality and how this affects experiences of violence in relation to the Traveller community, see: Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, 'Position Paper on Violence against Women' (2011)

ⁱⁱ '[I]n the area of violence against women ... issues of race and gender intersect... Therefore women are often in an ambivalent position. They want to fight for justice and equality within their community, while ensuring that their community as a whole is respected among the peoples of the world. Their struggle is often made worse by the arrogant gaze, where outsiders...fight their cause with what is seen as contempt for their culture and their community.' Former UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, 'World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance' (2001)

ⁱⁱⁱ Romani customs and values surrounding marriage and partnership are often misunderstood, and sometimes misrepresented. It is important to ensure that interventions serve to protect the right of the child and also support community cohesion. See A Oprea, 'Child Marriage a Cultural Problem, Educational Access a Race Issue? Deconstructing Uni-Dimensional Understanding of Romani Oppression' (Article) (2005)

^{iv} 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; United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 'Concluding observations on the third periodic report of Ireland' (2015) E/C.12/IRL/CO/3.