

Travellers & Roma: Access to Housing & Social Security

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS UPR RECOMMENDATIONS

Ireland supported or partially supported a number of recommendations arising from its last UPR review in relation to the rights of the Traveller and Roma communities, including recommendations concerning those groups' access to public services such as housing:

- Rec 157.149 (Austria): Step up efforts to address homelessness and shortcomings in access to adequate housing, particularly for Travellers and Roma communities;
- Rec 157.157 (South Africa): Develop a national housing strategy to generate affordable housing and combat racial discrimination, with particular attention paid to the needs of vulnerable communities, including Travellers, Roma, migrants and refugees;
- Rec 157.227 (Bangladesh): Take further steps to ensure non-discriminatory access to social housing by all ethnic minorities and migrants.

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Despite the adoption of the new Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, there remain major barriers to Travellers and Roma accessing basic public services such as social housing, culturally appropriate accommodation and social security payments. Legal reform is necessary to address these barriers.

CHALLENGES & IMPACTS

A 'habitual residence condition' in social security law continues to have a disproportionate negative impact on members of the Roma community who often face difficulties satisfying the condition due to lack of documentation, proof of address and language and literacy skills.

Legislation was passed earlier this year which introduces similar residence conditions for access to social housing and emergency homelessness accommodation. The impact of this legislation (which was passed in July 2026) is likely to be an increase in homelessness for non-Irish nationals and minority ethnic and migrant communities, including Travellers and Roma.

A United Nations Independent Expert on Extreme Poverty described the habitual residence condition in Irish social security law as "a considerable obstacle for members of vulnerable groups, particularly people experiencing homelessness, Travellers, asylum-seekers and refugees, migrant workers and returning Irish migrants, to access services to which they are entitled." Similarly, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights have specifically recommended that Ireland "review the habitual residence condition so as to eliminate its discriminatory impact on access to social security benefits, particularly among disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups."

CHALLENGES & IMPACTS

In 2019, the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review called for an “overhaul” of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998; its failings having been evidenced by an “extremely high rate of Traveller homelessness”, failures to meet the scale of accommodation needed by Travellers and an increase in those living in “overcrowded conditions”.

No such law reform has taken place to date. The most recent official figures indicate that over 1,900 Traveller families are living on unauthorised halting sites (where they are very unlikely to have access to basic services) or living in overcrowded/shared accommodation.

RECOMMENDATIONS & QUESTIONS

Ireland should be asked to remove the ‘habitual residence condition’ as a criterion for access to emergency homelessness accommodation and to the ‘safety-net’ Supplementary Welfare Allowance payment. It should urgently review the impact of the habitual residence conditions in social security and social housing laws on minority ethnic and migrant communities.

Ireland should be asked to provide a timeline for the implementation of the law reform recommendations arising from the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review. It should implement legislative reforms to improve access to and standards in Traveller-specific accommodation, and amend eviction laws to ensure that, other than in the most exceptional of circumstances, Travellers’ homes can never be interfered with in the absence of a proportionality assessment by a court and an offer of alternative appropriate accommodation to homeless families.

SOURCES

FLAC & ICCL’s Joint UPR Submission, as well as FLAC’s statement at the UPR Pre-Session and other UPR Factsheets can be accessed at: www.flac.ie/upr

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